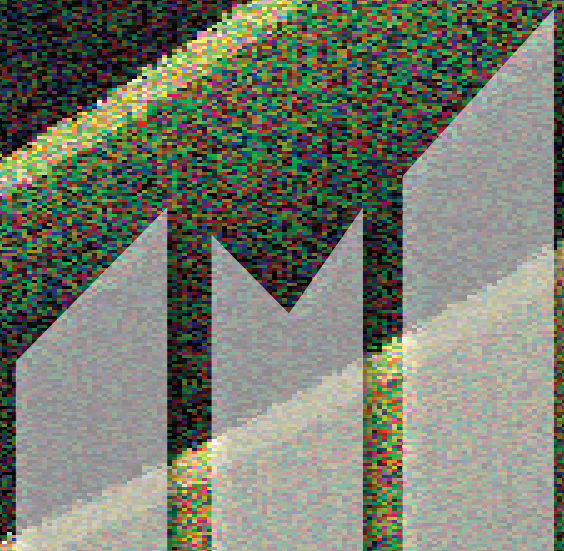




DECENT WORK PROJECT REPORT



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**Coimisiún na hÉireann
um Chearta an Duine
agus Comhionannas**
Irish Human Rights and
Equality Commission

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The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) “is a federation of unemployed people, unemployed centres, unemployed groups, community organisations and Trade Unions. The INOUE represents and defends the rights and interests of those who want decent employment and cannot obtain it. We promote and campaign for policies to achieve full employment for all. We also campaign for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents. The INOUE is an anti-sectarian, anti-racist, non-party political organisation which promotes equality of opportunity within society.” (INOUE Mission Statement)

The organisation has over 200 affiliated organisations and 600 individual members. We work at the local and national level on issues affecting unemployed people through the provision of training and welfare rights information services; analysis of Government policies and related advocacy work; and working with a wide range of other organisations on issues of common concern.

INTRODUCTION

Access to decent work / decent employment has been a key theme of the INOU's work for many years. The organisation advocates for decent work in a number of ways including through our annual Pre-Budget Submission.

Decent work regularly features at the INOU's regional Discussion Forums which involve participants from organisations working on the ground seeking to support people to gain access to a job that will ensure they can manage their own lives. A broad range of people access these supports including unemployed people, people who are parenting alone, people who have disabilities, Travellers and people from other minority ethnic groups, and others distanced from the labour market.

Increasingly, representatives from INOU member organisations and other groups have raised concerns about the changing world of work and what it will mean for many people in vulnerable employment and for people seeking employment.

At the second Future Jobs Ireland¹ summit, held in November, 2019 Saadia Zahidi from the World Economic Forum (WEF) gave the keynote address. In her address Saadia noted the arrival of the fourth industrial revolution which will be driven by cyber physical systems, networks and artificial intelligence (AI). Saadia noted a dramatic shift in the ratio of human versus machine work hours over the period 2018 to 2025. In 2018 the ratio was human 71% to machine 29%, by 2025 the WEF estimate this ratio will be 48% to 52%.

The World Economic Forum estimate that there will be a net positive outlook for jobs, but there will be significant churn² by 2022. Amongst the top ten jobs emerging are data analysts and scientists; AI and machine learning specialists; general and operations managers; software and applications developers and analysts; sales and marketing professionals. Amongst the jobs they see as declining are data entry clerks; accounting, bookkeeping and payroll clerks; administrative and executive secretaries; assembly and

factory workers; and client information and customer service workers.

This changing world of work has implications for the skills that people will be expected to have and to develop over their working life. Saadia noted that there will be a premium on soft skills and advanced cognitive skills including analytical thinking and innovation; active learning and learning strategies; creativity, originality, and initiative; technology design and programming; critical thinking and analysis.

Amongst the skills that are seen as declining are: manual dexterity, endurance and precision; memory, verbal, auditory and spatial abilities; management of financial, material resources; technology installation and maintenance; reading, writing, math and active listening.

Clearly this has implications for jobs and labour market policies, employment services, education and training provision. Saadia noted that a reskilling revolution is required and that collaboration at scale is needed to find the resources to address the skills gap: Learning 4.0 was the term used. The arrival and impact of COVID-19 adds to these challenges.

Though the workshops undertaken in this project took place before we were all aware of COVID-19 and its implications, many of the issues raised were very pertinent to the concerns this health pandemic has thrown up. Amongst other things, its impact on people's lives, learning and employment opportunities highlighted the digital divide that exists in Irish society. Many people were able to work and learn from home, but others struggled for a variety of reasons including a lack of equipment and infrastructure, unsuitable living space, and the costs involved in addressing any problems arising.

It is often said that the best route out of poverty is a job, but the INOU strongly believes that this only holds true if it is a decent job. In the uncertain world in which we live, it is absolutely essential that people experiencing social and economic exclusion are given the wherewithal to access a decent and sustainable job, one that will support them to manage their own lives.

¹ Further information on the *Future Jobs Ireland 2020* summit is available at <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/What-We-Do/Business-Sectoral-Initiatives/Future-Jobs/Future-Jobs-Ireland-Summit/>

² Aggregate headline figures that track labour market dynamism typically reveal relatively modest annual changes in job growth. However, such figures mask a more dynamic reality. Those modest gains are commonly made not by the steady growth of existing firms, but result from the changes and churns of economic output and job shifts—from less to more successful firms, from shrinking to growing economic sectors, and from declining to emerging occupation http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Jobs_of_Tomorrow_2020.pdf



DECENT WORK PROJECT

The INOU received funding under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's (IHREC) **2019 Human Rights and Equality Grants Scheme**. IHREC notes that the *"Human Rights and Equality Grants Scheme is a reflection of the Commission's commitment to strengthening its relationship with civil society and fostering an enabling environment for human rights development. The thematic priorities on the rights to housing/accommodation, health and decent work are reflective of the goals set out in the Commission's Strategy Statement 2019-2021."*

The INOU's project focused on 'decent work' and aimed to:

- Raise awareness and share learning about the right to decent work; how this is underpinned by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of decent work and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) Articles 6 & 7; and how these rights should inform the delivery of an inclusive National Employment Service.
- Hold two regional workshops to raise awareness and share experiences and learning on access to work and the right to decent work.
- Hold a national seminar in September 2020 building on and developing the outcomes of the workshops.
- Develop workshop and seminar materials to facilitate an informed discussion on the right to decent work.
- Note and write-up the workshop and seminar discussions to disseminate the awareness raising and learning arising to a wider audience.
- Feed this learning into the development and implementation of policies underpinning activation and employment services including *Pathways to Work*³ and *Future Jobs Ireland*.

The first regional workshop took place in the INOU's office, Araby House, Dublin 1 on Friday 21st February and the second in the Employment Development Information Centre (EDIC), Longford on Thursday 27th February, 2020. The INOU also organised a workshop for our individual members and participants on our Local Training Initiative programmes, Building Futures and Shaping Futures on the theme of 'decent work' on March 5th, 2020.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Seminar scheduled for September 16th, 2020 became a webinar. Given the change in Government over the lifetime of this project the learning arising from the project will feed into on-going and emerging labour market, employment, and educational developments. The clear incorporation of the concept of decent work into employment policy, supports and services is vital. Over the coming period Ireland will be seeking to address the economic challenges presented by the health pandemic, a trading environment where the United Kingdom is no longer part of the European Union, the opportunities and threats presented by increasing digitalisation and automation in society and the economy.

In preparation for the workshops a briefing paper was produced and circulated to participants. This paper complemented the PowerPoint presentation used in the workshops and was designed to give participants an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the International Labour Organisation's definition of decent work; the relevant sections of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8; and the relevant parts of the European Union's Pillar of Social Rights.

THE WORKSHOPS

As noted earlier three workshops were organised as part of the project. The first one was held in Araby House in Dublin and was attended by organisations based in Dublin, Kildare and Wicklow. The second was run in the EDI Centre in Longford and attended by organisations from Cavan, Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Monaghan and Sligo. The third was also run in Araby House for the INOU's Individual Members⁴ and participants on the

³ *Pathways to Work* is the Government's overarching policy framework for activation and employment policy.

⁴ Individual membership of the INOU is open to anyone who is unemployed, on a training course or an Active Labour Market Programme (e.g. Community Employment). Further information is available at <https://www.inou.ie/membership/join-us—individual-member/>

organisation's Local Training Initiatives, *Building Futures* and *Shaping Futures*. Across the three workshops seventy-three people participated.

In the first two workshops the agenda was similar: after the registration and welcome a presentation was made on the project, its aims and objectives, how decent work is defined and described by a range of international bodies. This was followed by a plenary discussion on people's understanding and concerns about decent work. An introduction was then made to the small group discussions and the questions to be explored. Given time constraints the feedback and key messages happened informally: through people reflecting on and writing down what decent work meant to them and having their photograph taken with their own words.

A similar structure was used in the third workshop, but given the smaller numbers involved the questions raised under the themes of precarious working; sustaining and sustainable employment; digitalisation and automation were distilled down to one set and explored in two small groups.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The questions used in the small group discussions focused on precarious working; sustaining and sustainable employment; automation and digitalisation. The most popular workshop was the sustaining and sustainable employment, which reflected the focus of the work of many participating organisations on the ground, where they strive to support people more distanced from the labour market to enter and remain in a decent job that will last.

The questions which formed the basis of the small group discussions were as follows:

Precarious Working

- What does precarious work mean to you and for your work?
- How should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond?
- What needs to happen from both a labour market and social protection viewpoint in relation to Precarious Working?

Automation and Digitalisation

- What are the challenges facing workers and people seeking work into the future?
- How should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond?
- Are there opportunities for workers and people seeking work as a result of potentially significant developments in automation and digitalisation?
- How does the State need to respond, in policy and in practice?

Sustaining / Sustainable Employment

- What are the challenges facing people, especially people who may have been long-term unemployed in sustaining work once they access it?
- How should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond?
- Do you see Green Jobs providing some answers?
- How can people exercise their right to decent work, with good conditions of employment?

THE WEBINAR

On September 16th, 2020 the INOU ran the final engagement of our Decent Work project, a webinar at which the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) were invited to speak. Ann Fergus, INOU Chairperson welcomed everyone in attendance and gave a brief overview of the event. The presenters were Tony Geoghegan, IHREC Commissioner; Nichola Harkin, IBEC; and Ger Gibbons, ICTU. After the three speakers, Bríd O'Brien, INOU presented the work of the project to date including a summary of the issues discussed across the three workshops and themes, which are presented in greater detail on pages 10 to 24 of this report. This presentation was followed by an open discussion / plenary on the issues arising for participants in the course of their work and lives, and in response to what they had heard in the presentations. Attendees were informed that a report of the project would be produced, alongside a short video explaining to people what decent work is and ought to be.

WHAT IS DECENT WORK?

The briefing paper circulated to participants in the project's workshop informed people of how decent work is defined by the International Labour Organisation; the obligations Ireland has under the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's (IHREC) Strategy Statement 2019–2021 they note on page eight that *"We believe that the adoption and application of economic, social and cultural rights play a fundamental role in the creation of a more just, inclusive and sustainable society. We commit to advancing socio-economic rights and the social protection of all families and individuals. Among the thematic areas of socio-economic rights, we will prioritise:*

- ◆ *Housing*
- ◆ *Health*
- ◆ *Decent Work"*

In a footnote to the term 'decent work' IHREC quotes the **International Labour Organisation**⁵ definition, which states: *"Decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men"*

The **International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights**⁶ (ICESCR) was adopted by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2200 A (XXI), 16th December, 1966. ICESCR is an international human rights instrument that identifies specific economic, social and cultural rights that States have a duty to protect. Ireland signed and ratified it in 1989 and has made three reports to the UN Committee on these rights on the progress Ireland has made to protect, respect and fulfil the rights

contained in this Covenant. The last report was made in 2015.

There are 31 articles in ICESCR and five are of particular interest to this project: Articles 2.2; 3; 6; 7; and 9.

- ◆ Article 2.2: The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

It is interesting to compare the grounds listed in Article 2.2 and those listed in Ireland's equality legislation. In terms of Ireland's Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015 there are nine grounds including: gender; civil status; family status; sexual orientation; religion; age; disability; race; and membership of the Traveller community. Of particular concern to the INOU is the fact that unemployed people cannot challenge the discrimination they face because of their unemployment. In July 2019, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) published data on equality and discrimination for the period Quarter 1, 2019⁷. This survey usefully captures the experiences of people who are unemployed as the CSO collects data on people's Principal Economic Status. Looking for work is included in the heading *Workplace discrimination*, and the group with the highest rate of discrimination were people who were unemployed at 24.6%. The State figure under this heading was 9.4%. The inclusion of a socio-economic status ground could help to address this issue, which would be in keeping with "social origin, property, ...or other status" in Article 2.2 above.

- ◆ Article 3: The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the present Covenant.

This article is particularly useful as the language used throughout the Covenant reflects the time it was written and so is not gender neutral.

⁵ Ref <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-en/index.htm>

⁶ Ref <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cescr.pdf>

⁷ Ref <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/ed/equalityanddiscrimination2019/>

- ◆ Article 6.1: The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right.
- ◆ Article 6.2: The steps to be taken by a State Party to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include technical and vocational guidance and training programmes, policies and techniques to achieve steady economic, social and cultural development and full and productive employment under conditions safeguarding fundamental political and economic freedoms to the individual.

The INOU would regard Article 6.1 and 6.2 to be particularly pertinent for the design and delivery of employment and related services.

- ◆ Article 7: The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work which ensure, in particular:
 - (a) Remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum, with:
 - (i) Fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work;
 - (ii) A decent living for themselves and their families in accordance with the provisions of the present Covenant;
 - (b) Safe and healthy working conditions;
 - (c) Equal opportunity for everyone to be promoted in his employment to an appropriate higher level, subject to no considerations other than those of seniority and competence;
 - (d) Rest, leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay, as well as remuneration for public holidays.

The labour market and workplace challenges thrown up by the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate the importance of Article 7. While the issue of income adequacy has been very much to the fore as new social welfare supports were introduced which in effect acknowledged the inadequacy of existing unemployment supports.

- ◆ Article 9: The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance.

The **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**⁸ are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. The 17 Goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the Goals.

The eight goal focuses on **Decent Work and Economic Growth** and aims to:

- ◆ *Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.*
- ◆ *An important part of economic growth is that people have jobs that pay enough to support themselves and their families. The good news is that the middle class is growing worldwide—almost tripling in size in developing countries in the last 25 years, to more than a third of the population. But today, job growth is not keeping pace with the growing labour force. Things don't have to be that way. We can promote policies that encourage entrepreneurship and job creation. We can eradicate forced labour, slavery and human trafficking. And in the end we can achieve the goal of decent work for all women and men by 2030.*

The European Commission notes that the **Pillar of Social Rights**⁹ is about delivering new and more effective rights for citizens and is built upon 20 key principles. The first principle of the Pillar focuses on education, training and life-long learning and says: *Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to*

⁸ Ref <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

⁹ Ref https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en

maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.

The third principle focuses on equal opportunities and states that: *“Regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, everyone has the right to equal treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public. Equal opportunities of under-represented groups shall be fostered.”*

The fourth principle of the Pillar of Social Rights is entitled ‘Active support to employment’ and states:

- (a) *“Everyone has the right to timely and tailor-made assistance to improve employment or self-employment prospects. This includes the right to receive support for job search, training and re-qualification. Everyone has the right to transfer social protection and training entitlements during professional transitions.*
- (b) *Young people have the right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.*
- (c) *People unemployed have the right to personalised, continuous and consistent support. The long-term unemployed have the right to an in-depth individual assessment at the latest at 18 months of unemployment.”*

Of particular interest to this project is the fifth principle, which is entitled ‘Secure and adaptable employment’ and states that:

- (a) *“Regardless of the type and duration of the employment relationship, workers have the right to fair and equal treatment regarding working conditions, access to social protection and training. The transition towards open-ended forms of employment shall be fostered.*
- (b) *In accordance with legislation and collective agreements, the necessary flexibility for employers to adapt swiftly to changes in the economic context shall be ensured.*
- (c) *Innovative forms of work that ensure quality working conditions shall be fostered. Entre-*



preneurship and self-employment shall be encouraged. Occupational mobility shall be facilitated.

- (d) *Employment relationships that lead to precarious working conditions shall be prevented, including by prohibiting abuse of atypical contracts. Any probation period should be of reasonable duration.”*

DECENT WORK IN AN IRISH CONTEXT

After the initial presentation based on the briefing paper, participants were asked ‘*what does decent work mean in an Irish context?*’

Good wages, terms and conditions were cited as critical. Amongst the terms and conditions were paid leave, greater flexibility, certainty of hours and acknowledgement of caring responsibilities. The importance of ensuring safeguards are in place for workers and raising minimum employment standards was also stressed.

Participants raised the right to equality and equal treatment and the importance of having policy and legislative hooks in place to realise this right. Socio-economic status as an additional ground under Ireland’s equality legislation was raised as part of this discussion. In one workshop it was said “*that the addition of a socio-economic ground as one that it was illegal to discriminate against, would be very useful.*” In another workshop the role for Trade Unions in securing decent work and conditions for people was highlighted.

Participants were clearly aware that decent work does not happen in a vacuum and the crucial role of support services, affordable housing and childcare were noted more than once. The importance of social transfers, the social welfare system, for people when they are out of work was raised; and while Community Employment and other schemes are important, they should not be seen as a replacement for decent jobs.

The question was also posed in one of the workshops: *where is there decent work – particularly for people without relevant skills to access it?* It was also noted that there is a greater requirement to recognise transferrable skills than is currently the case.

Given the nature of the work the participants at the Dublin and Longford workshops undertake, people noted that accessing decent work can be empowering and really build confidence and independence. Alongside this was an acknowledgement of the importance of choice for people in making decisions to take-up decent work. The provision of good welfare to work information supports were seen as essential to ensure people could make informed decisions.

During the discussion about the importance of informing people about back to work supports, allowing people to retain their medical card for 5 years on returning to work was raised. Participants also noted the issues for people attempting to access work when they have mental health difficulties. People in this situation need targeted supports, including staff with the skills to effectively support them. Good signposting of services was seen as an integral part of this work. Overall, mental health was seen as important, with the need for an explicit acknowledgement of people’s wellbeing.



The question was posed: *are there ideal working conditions?* During the subsequent discussion again the issue of choice and the opportunity to self-improve were highlighted. It also led back to an acknowledgement that work does not exist in a vacuum: that if the services and supports are there, the cost of living should decrease, and the focus of an ideal job may change.

In one workshop further promoting entrepreneurship was highlighted as way to encourage decent work, in particular if it is successful in creating job for others. On the issue of apprenticeships, concerns were raised about the low income for apprentices in phase 1 and participants felt that these should be addressed.

In another workshop the lack of supports for women returners was raised. In particular the difficulties if the woman's partner's earnings are above a certain level. In the discussion it was noted that there should be opportunities to access educational and training programmes. In response other participants said women returners can register with the Local Employment Service (LES) and gain access to the mediator service, including €500 grant. However, the LES is not yet a nationwide service. In one local development company a pilot course for women returners, funded through the European Social Fund, was underway and progressing well.

In the course of the conversations on 'decent work' it became clear that for many participants answering the question '*What does indecent work mean in an Irish context?*' was easier. The question was posed: *at what stage do long commutes make decent work indecent?* Transport difficulties in trying to access work, particularly in rural areas came up a number of times.

Participants noted serious challenges arising in particular sectors or for cohorts of workers from uncertainty of hours; a lack of affordable and accessible childcare; people being tied to one company. The lack of job security for people working in the community sector was also noted.

In a number of the workshops concerns were raised about employers not being responsible for some workers in the same way as other employees. There were two key issues for participants: people setting up as self-employed but who were actually employed by one firm; and agency staff or sub-contractors and directly employed staff doing similar work but with

varying terms and conditions. The question was also asked: *does the legislation apply to employment agencies?*

The issue of discrimination was brought up in all of the workshops and its impact on people's ability to access a decent job. Participants noted people were excluded because of their address; migrant status; duration of unemployment; or that they were ex-prisoners; Travellers; disabled; or parenting alone. In one workshop it was noted that employers sometimes treat people differently (and not positively) for whom English was not their first language.

Concerns were also raised that new barriers are being created through the use of computer filtering in job application processes, blocking some people from even getting to the starting line. There was a call for the social protection system to respond better to atypical working patterns. Participants felt there was a lot to be learned from other countries, such as the Nordic countries, for how the state should provide quality and affordable services that enable people to take-up work.

It was noted that there is a need for the ICESCR / EPSR / ILO definition to be integrated into policy & practice. The question was asked: *how can people not involved in this type of work access these rights?* Concerns were raised about people's knowledge of the role of Trade Unions and the implications for people working somewhere without an active union.

Workshop participants noted that the work of the Workplace Relations Commission is admirable, but the question was asked: *do they have teeth?* Concerns were raised that if a worker brought these legal instruments to their employer's attention, they could be facing unemployment. It was also noted that these dynamics can be harder to deal with in rural Ireland where everyone knows each other. And if a person gets a bad name it can be particularly difficult, and as a result people put up with poorer conditions.

Some jobs will not facilitate workers to deal with a sick child or an appointment, which can increase people's vulnerabilities. People who are lower paid are often susceptible to poorer conditions of employment. As one participant said "*The low paid are vulnerable all of the time.*" It was also noted that there is no legal entitlement to sick leave or compassionate leave, that it is at the employer's discretion.

The responsibility of NGOs / advocates / service providers in supporting people who cannot engage in workplace democracy e.g. migrant workers was discussed. There are issues about work permits including length of time, poor terms and conditions. It can be hard for migrant workers to integrate into society; often people have higher skills than the work they are doing. There are undocumented workers who sought asylum 20 years ago, whose work and contribution are not recognised. While a person must be living in Direct Provision for at least nine months before they can apply to seek paid employment in the labour market.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION: PRECARIOUS WORK

Four questions were used as the basis of the discussions on the theme of 'precarious work' in the workshops and they were as follows:

- 1 What does precarious work mean to you and for your work?
- 2 How should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond?
- 3 What needs to happen from both a labour market and social protection viewpoint in relation to precarious working?
- 4 How can people exercise their right to decent work, with good conditions of employment?

In response to the question 'what does precarious work mean to you' the participants noted:

- Uncertainty, insecurity, risk. Concerns were raised that the system is forcing people to take-up precarious employment.
- A job with few opportunities to upskill or move up. Also limits the person's opportunities to access more affordable financial options.
- Challenges facing people to meet the cost of living. It was noted that even working full-time, trying to live on the National Minimum Wage was unsustainable.
- Zero hours Contract.

- Little access to a Trade Union or good terms and conditions. Flexibility with regard family responsibilities can also be missing.
- Voiceless: no say in how things are done; fear.
- Participants also noted the impact on the person of precarious working and the uncertainty that brings – impacts for family, relationships, well-being which can have a longer term effect on the individual.
- Social welfare and income implications when people are only offered two hours work per day. And if a person leaves their job, it can be hard to get back on social welfare.
- It was also noted that it can be very difficult to exit precarious working. People dependent on the job. As one person noted "*[Precarious working is like a] Big moat around people but no bridge*".
- For some people the lack of contacts, benefits and what can often appear bleak future prospects are huge challenges. As one participant noted "*If work is precarious it leads to less dynamic outcomes.*"
- On the positive side participants noted that certain flexible working can suit some people given their lifestyle. Some employers are understanding – though there is a need to increase and deepen that understanding and awareness.
- The importance of developing 'inner' confidence was also raised. Another aspect where a person may take a job that is precarious is that it might be easier to get another job.
- Concerns were raised about preparing people for precarious work, for work that will change, that will disappear.
- It was noted that going back thirty or so years previously people received a higher wage for temporary work, in effect acknowledging the precarity, but the opposite is the norm now.
- In the course of the discussion one participant noted that workers in precarious work may have a reduced commitment and flexibility to that work. Another noted that "*precarious working is ripe for failed dreams*".



In response to the question ‘how should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond’ the participants noted:

- In one area they were using the learning from their Income Maintenance Working Group to feed into Government policy and practice.
- The income disregard for a worker with a disability is up to €120 pw which is helpful, but if the person’s income goes beyond that they lose social welfare supports, and this can make it very hard to take up employment.
- The capacity and focus of the official a person meets when seeking advice and support can be very important. Some participants were using their contacts to engage with more supportive officials to progress their work on the ground.
- Advocacy is required. A particular example was given of the recent unemployment of someone who cared for a relative and the difficulty of engaging with the system now.
- Concerns were raised about the most appropriate way of supporting vulnerable people.
- One participant noted the better focus to the *Pathways to Work* consultation and the need to act on this: a focus that will be important to maintain even though COVID-19 has since had a devastating impact on the labour market.
- At the time people were concerned that ‘full employment’ could have implications for service provision, at a time when people were engaging with people very distanced from the labour market. In the course of this conversation the Distanced Travelled Tool¹⁰ was highlighted.
- In one workshop it was noted that the feedback on people’s concerns about the focus of Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) I was listened to; there was an acknowledgement of people may not be job ready; that an activation approach is limited; and that a community development focus is key.
- Participants noted that each service is different, with different terms and conditions, including a lack of pension provision. This discussion led to a call for the better resourcing of the community based services and the community sector as a whole.
- An example was given of a young person trying to manage on their Jobseekers payment, with the expectations of their engagement in activation. Yet the lack of an accessible and regular bus service made this extremely difficult. Concerns were raised that some people had lost their Jobseekers Allowance because they could not get into their local Intreo Office.
- People with disabilities need to order taxis in advance and let the taxi know of their needs. The poor conditions of pathways was also noted. All of which makes accessing opportunities and services extremely difficult.
- Participants noted the difficulties facing people when they go through a range of services. As one person noted *‘[It’s like] going through a mincer’*. Later on in the discussion the importance of aftercare support for people taking-up work was highlighted.

¹⁰ My Journey: Distance Travelled Tool measures soft skills relevant to employment, education and personal development for service users engaging with the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme. Further information available at <https://www.pobal.ie/programmes/social-inclusion-and-community-activation-programme-sicap-2018-2022/distance-travelled-tool/>

- In the course of the discussion the activation of people aged over 65 was highlighted, and the need to address the issue of whether or not employers would employ them.
- Particular social welfare issues were raised by participants and the impact they have on people's ability to access employment. For example, the Wage Subsidy Scheme is not open to people on Invalidity Pension. Concerns were also raised about some of the changes underway; the negative implications of it going online; and the issues arising if people are not working 21 hours.
- The difficulties that arise for people who are on a Jobseekers payment: if they work for an hour, it has implications for their welfare payment. This led onto a discussion about the social welfare system changing to one based on hours rather than days. Participants noted that the Part-time Job Incentive Scheme is not always an option for people.
- The Youth Employment Subsidy Scheme was seen as a good scheme, which should be open to all, as there is a gap with regard to people accessing work experience.

In response to 'what needs to happen from both a Labour Market and Social Protection viewpoint in relation to Precarious Working' the participants noted:

- The role of the Minister was seen as critical. At the time of the workshops the General Election had just taken place and it was felt that a new Government presented an opportunity to pursue this issue.
- Responding to frontline services and listening to those working on the ground. A bottom up approach is required which would build on and build up local community resources: as part of this there is a need to move away from dictates from above. Particular concerns were raised with regard to education and training. It was also noted that education and training has to change constantly.
- In meeting the needs on the ground, the role of pilot programmes was cited, there are a variety of needs, and one size does not fit all. To that

end collaborative working and learning from trying, from doing were seen as important.

- Participants felt compassion is an essential part of the work that it not valued as it ought to be. The impact and implications of the personalities of providers, practitioners, learners, service users was noted.
- Given the lack of public transport in rural areas, it was noted that a critical element of a programme for unemployed people should be driving lessons and support to take the driving test. The difficulty of decent jobs not being within reasonable commute was also raised and the need to address insurance costs for young drivers.
- Access to good traineeships was seen as important, again transport was raised as an issue. This led to a question: could the opportunity be brought to people? It was noted that this can be hard to do given the nature of a lot of training available. Though participants had examples of practical supports that were available: one employer in Donegal, and Centre Parcs in Longford were bussing people into work; Local Link; and under the Rural Social Scheme a bus was bringing young people to training in Leitrim.
- In one workshop participants noted that providing good services would keep and help to build up rural Ireland.
- Workshop participants noted that standards need to be enforced; that they should be aspired and adhered to; and follow through on recommendations of reviews should take place.
- The importance of welfare to work supports and information was cited, including places / offices where people could go to hear about these supports. There is a need to ensure that information is available for people to make informed decisions. Participants felt the Department of Social Protection could do more in this regard, including ensuring that employers understand how their staff's income may be affected by their working arrangements.
- On the wider issue of employment, the importance of sustainable employment was noted. Greater support for self-employment



start-ups was called for, and the promotion of cooperatives and co-op culture.

- It was noted that sometimes relatively small barriers may stop people from progressing to work. Having a childcare facility near where a training/educational course is run is one example of facilitating involvement of people with parenting responsibilities. The connectivity problem was highlighted and the need to make sure that course start times are aligned in particular to public transport arrivals and childcare provision.
- There are significant challenges facing people with skills obtained in other jurisdictions that are not always recognised here. Participants noted the importance of peoples' awareness of their own skills and that they feel appreciated for what they can do. The recognition of prior learning would be important in this regard.
- One person advised that a person who was a long-term unemployed migrant was offered work, but felt isolated when no one sat beside her during break. Another migrant worker was told that they would not get any work dressed like that – she wore a long skirt. It was noted that both examples show the need to protect workers' rights, enforce equality legislation and increase awareness amongst employers.
- Participants also noted a lack of confidence for some people, the fear factor or lack of awareness of supports for some employers in recruiting people with a disability. This lead on to a discussion about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the importance of providing work opportunities for people who may face very considerable challenges in getting employment.
- Better knowledge of what works out there is required and the need to communicate to people what constitutes decent work.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION: AUTOMATION AND DIGITALISATION

Four questions were used as the basis of the discussions on the theme of 'Automation and Digitalisation' in the workshops and they were as follows:

- 1 What are the challenges facing workers and people seeking work into the future?
- 2 How should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond?
- 3 Are there opportunities for workers and people seeking work as a result of potentially significant developments in automation and digitalisation?
- 4 How does the State need to respond, in policy and in practice?

Though this was the least popular small group discussion, the issues explored came up in the other small groups. In particular concerns were raised that the increasing use of digital platforms and algorithms in recruitment processes has the potential to exacerbate existing barriers and deepen socio-economic exclusion.

In response to "What are the challenges facing workers and people seeking work into the future?" participants noted that:

- The World Economic Forum predictions raised questions about severe competition; how critical life-long learning is; the cost of these developments; and the big challenge to decent work should they prove to be correct.
- Concerns were raised that skilled jobs will be lost and poorer jobs will be left behind. Examples of previous developments were noted: with the arrival of computers, there was a loss of skilled typists and printers; many dock workers were replaced by cranes decades ago. It was noted that migrants working as general operatives and pickers could find these jobs will be lost to automation.
- The question of work sharing was raised but not pursued by the participants.
- There is a need to properly value caring work.

- At the time of the workshops people noted that amongst the jobs where there is a lack of potential employees are nurses, carers, and chefs. It was also noted that facilities management is a big growth industry, described as "*a surgeon for the external environment*".
- The changes that are now underway in the labour market, in the world of work mean that middle class / professional jobs are now under threat, which throws up different challenges politically. Later on in the discussion participants wondered are the professional class working on this, on the question of employability. One person asked "*Are the Mammies of Ireland aware of this?*"
- The group noted that the duration of learning / education has lengthened and that people will be expected to work longer.
- The group noted that the question of cost plays a key role in how work is undertaken with outsourcing playing a significant role.
- The question of a just transition was raised and it was noted that a very different conversation on 'automation and digitalisation' was likely in rural Ireland. Concerns were raised that rural / urban digital divide will exacerbate current divisions.
- A participant asked was anyone mapping the jobs that will be obsolete. Some participants felt it was taking place on the ground through the work of organisations like the Local Employment Service.
- It was noted that younger people are accessing well paid work that older generations don't understand, and the emergence of '*super specialised jobs*'.
- This lead on to a discussion about the control of software / programmes and the inbuilt prejudice visible in algorithms. Even though these workshops took place just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the reduced time it took to develop a vaccination by artificial intelligence was noted.
- All of these development have implications for capital further accumulating wealth, not labour. It was noted that the crisis is now, that the rate of automation and digitalisation is slower now than it will be in the future, that the human workforce could be reduced by 50% over 20 years.

In response to the question “How should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond?” participants discussed:

- The Job rotation approach that was developed in Denmark and used by some Local Development companies whereby people on a social welfare payment were given the opportunity to work in a progressive industry, while the workers took time out to reskill and move-up the ladder.
- Participants noted the economic cost to the State of automation and digitalisation; and that corporations need to also invest in addressing the income challenges arising from the loss of good jobs, in particular the income tax implications. This led on to a discussion about spatial challenges and the implications of the tax take from the Dublin region vis-à-vis the rest of the country.
- On a personal level, it was raised that if a person is from a well-resourced family, they have better options than those from less well-off families. And that for people who are not from such a background, there is an ongoing cost to making a mistake, taking a misstep.
- This led onto a discussion about the formal education system, the need for reform. Gaps in functional literacy were noted, even though young people remain in school, and are often very bright. To address these gaps through second chance education requires good guidance.
- The group noted that the labour market and society are degree focused, though communications skills are often better amongst those who left school early.
- The importance of developing skills through alternative routes was raised, and the impact on personal engagement of accessing these opportunities.
- However, concerns were raised about how targeted provision can be perceived as less valuable than mainstream provision. Particular concerns were raised about the opportunity gaps facing women who wish to return to the labour market and men whose job has disappeared but who are not on a social welfare payment.



- The social implications of the current changes were raised which will exacerbate existing challenges. For example, young men who are NEET, not in employment, education or training, and the particular barriers that they can face if they also have a criminal record.
- At the end of the discussion the group noted the need for a systematic and sustainable approach, questions were raised about engagement with the hi-tech sector, and the need for a targeted approach and responses to labour market exclusion.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION: SUSTAINING AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

This was the most popular small group discussion, reflecting that for many of the participants from affiliated organisations of the INOU this is a key focus of their work, in particular supporting people who are unemployed, have a disability, parenting alone to find and stay in good employment.

Four questions were used as the basis of the discussions on the theme of *'Sustaining and Sustainable Employment'* in the workshops and they were as follows:

- 1 What are the challenges facing people, especially people who may have been long-term unemployed in sustaining work once they access it?
- 2 How should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond?
- 3 Do you see Green Jobs providing some answers?
- 4 How can people exercise their right to decent work, with good conditions of employment?

In response to *What are the challenges facing people, especially people who may have been long-term unemployed in sustaining work once they access it?* the participants discussed:

- A lack of work or access to work with good terms and conditions. Sometimes insufficient hours are offered, leading to uncertainty from week to week, sometimes from day to day, which impacts on whether or not people are able to make ends meet.
- Short-term contracts and the roll-over of these contracts presents difficulties for many people, the importance of job security was highlighted.
- Childcare costs prevent people from taking up work or from being able to stay in employment.
- People who are long-term unemployed are often fearful of losing benefits such as medical card, rent, and trying to help people with these fears and advise them on in-work supports can be difficult.



- More recognition needs to be given to barriers such as confidence/self-esteem issues, soft-skills recognition and development of potential workers. In one small group concerns were raised about a notable lack of soft skills amongst job-seekers.
- Concerns were raised about people losing or leaving jobs in the early stages of their employment, some find the routine difficult, while others find it difficult to break into work cliques when starting a new job. In one small group it was noted that SICAP¹¹ provides in-work supports engaging with employers and employees; some employers are interested in up-skilling employees, e.g. Skills to Advance programme, but others are not supportive, particularly in sectors such as hospitality, child and elder care.
- There needs to be more quality career guidance so that people gain access to meaningful and sustainable work. Concerns were also raised that when people return to employment, especially after being long-term unemployed, there is a lack of on-going support. Participants felt there should be support for the next 3 or 4 years. There is a lack of support for transition, support for mental health during this transition may also be necessary.
- The issue of mental health came up across the three workshops, including the effect on people's mental well-being of not working, of losing or leaving a job in the early stages, the stress of a new position.
- It was noted that to access decent work, some people work a long way from home and that this can affect their mental health and well-being.
- Some participants were concerned about the lack of in-work supports if an employee or potential employee is on medication, they queried whether it was worth a person's time moving into a minimum wage job and the impact on them of having to disclose their illness.
- It was also noted that people living with addiction, who may be now taking methadone, also feel unsupported when they take up employment. Some people are in precarious situations, their lives might appear stable, but a change in life circumstances could suddenly make them vulnerable.
- It was acknowledged that there are some employment supports available to both workers and employers, but that not everyone is availing of them or necessarily aware of them. The fact that employment supports like the Working Family Payment can take eight to ten weeks to come through was raised as a difficulty. In one group it was noted that if a streamlined payment were put in place, with a quick processing time for people transitioning back to work, it would encourage more people to begin the transition back to work.
- In one workshop it was noted that in the Netherlands their equivalent of the Revenue Commissioners offer outreach services, e.g. assisting people with tax returns, which can be useful in breaking down the fear and apprehension some people having using such services when they take up a job.
- There are specific issues that face people living in rural Ireland. In particular transport problems and a lack of local jobs. Commuting times for many people are too long, but high cost of living in Dublin is a major deterrent for people living in rural areas considering relocation.
- Some of these issues arise from the challenges of low population density, but concerns were articulated that there is no plan to keep rural Ireland working, to decentralise jobs and industry. Participants felt that enterprise opportunities need to be shared around rural Ireland and not just centralised in Dublin, as one participant said: *"it's time to spread the joy"*.
- The issue of gaps in high speed broadband need to be addressed. The question was posed: is it more viable to increase broadband than build unsustainable transport links which need to be subsidised? Participants felt that high-speed broadband rollout across the country would help people get flexible jobs that do not require transport, facilitate remote working: the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis has highlighted the importance of such options.
- It was noted that rural transport works better in some places than others, but even in areas

¹¹ Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

where there is more use and more demand for public transport it was viewed as limited. It was noted that it often does not go beyond a certain distance, leaving more remote places with no access.

- Of particular concern for people was the lack of affordable car insurance for young people. Many young people are early school-leavers with very little education and transport to neighbouring areas where there may be work is very limited.
- Participants called for the employability of young people to be increased with training supports and employers working together. Jobs Plus with a training element built into it was suggested.
- In one small group it was noted that transport is viewed as an older persons problem only. While another issue noted as needing redress is access to charge points for electric cars in rural areas. Concerns were also raised that sustainability and climate concerns mean that a good rural transport service is not likely to appear any time soon.
- Across the workshops the danger of a widening skills gap, given technological and other work changes was raised and its implications for people accessing and maintaining decent work. Participants also noted that literacy issues are a major concern for enhancing people's employability.

In response to *How should social protection, education, training, employment supports and services respond?* the participants raised and discussed the following issues:

- The complexity of the social welfare system and its impact on people seeking supports and those working on the ground trying to support them was raised. Participants noted that people can be on the wrong payment which can then incorrectly dictate how they progress through the system. Staff in EmployAbility services, for example, are seeing numbers of people on a Jobseeker's payment who should be on a Disability Allowance, which affects what services they are entitled to access and what kind of activation services they engage with. Some people with disabilities are not "job-ready", should not be on a Jobseeker's Allowance pay-

ment, and when they are put through normal activation services that do not take their disability into account, the jobs they end up getting are not sustainable.

- Across the workshops participants noted that the Department of Social Protection needs to provide more comprehensive information and fully explain to people what their entitlements are; for people who are making the welfare to work journey, what supports may be available and entitlements they can keep. For example, if the person had been long-term unemployed they could hold onto their medical card. It was also noted that many people find it hard to access information in Intreo offices.
- Participants felt that the onus should be on the Department / Intreo to work with employers who take on new employees who might experience challenges in the workplace. It was also said that every small employer should know about the Wage Subsidy Scheme to support the employment of people with a disability. However, it was also noted that the workload involved in applying for these schemes can act as a deterrent for some employers.
- Concerns were raised that currently the Department / Intreo does not have the capacity or view as a priority working with employers / employees to support people in new positions.
- It was also noted that different Intreo offices use different criteria when advising people, and participants wondered what training staff working in Intreo have received to ensure that they assist people appropriately, and that they become more familiar with the practical every day barriers preventing people from returning to work.
- A lack of quality guidance by Intreo was raised and that the approach needs to be holistic, compassionate and personal: the specifics of each person's situation are key. Within this discussion better direction by activation services including career guidance was sought for unemployed young people.
- However, it was also said that there is a big cohort of people under 25 who are not being helped, not being referred or activated, presumably because they are not in receipt of a social welfare payment themselves.

- A call was made for people who are on a Jobseeker's payment who take up part-time work to have their social welfare payment assessed on hours rather than days basis, as is presently the case¹².
- Another call was made for more funding to support workers in community based organisations to do check-ins, keep in contact with more people who have used their services over a longer period of time, to make sure their transition back to work goes as smoothly as possible. The complexity, nuance, and details of payments and schemes were noted and support workers often feel unable to provide sufficient information to the people using their services and would welcome more support from the Department.
- Participants discussed the need to think of what services or programmes could benefit people more distanced from labour market e.g. people who are long-term unemployed, who left school early. Some participants felt that programmes and pre-employment services dealing with long-term unemployment should be longer to account for the personal development support needed to get people into sustainable, suitable positions after long gaps in employment.
- It was also noted that some supports are not available until someone has been on a social welfare payment for a long period; and that joint work with employers is required so that when people do get jobs after being long-term unemployed they can stay in them.
- It was noted that employers are often unaware of welfare-to-work supports, the nature of social welfare system and its interaction with work, in-work supports (Working Family Payment), and the importance of highlighting these and ensuring that employers develop an understanding.
- A variety of issues came up when training and education were discussed. Some people wondered whether the Department was keeping people for JobPath instead of allowing them to progress to training. People who are selected for activation can have their learning paths disrupted by having to take unsuitable employment. While others noted that sending people on a course does not necessarily translate into better wages, more sustainable or fulfilling work. Concerns were raised that the Department was just ticking a box when someone went on a course.
- The need for quality guidance for career path development, to ensure people do not stay on "a hamster wheel" of courses was stressed; and to address the fear of no support after a training programme.
- The roll of programmes like Skills to Advance, which are targeted at people in employment whose job may be changing or going was highlighted, and the need for the Education and Training Boards to publicise it well. Even though these workshops took place before COVID-19 pandemic struck, participants also noted the need for digital hubs to support online work and learning. In particular, to support people to get back into learning who have not been in a classroom setting for a long time, and may have had bad experiences in these settings. It was noted that the idea of going back into a classroom to retrain / up-skill at a later age is not always a welcome prospect.
- There were a variety of views on employment programmes like Community Employment (CE) and Tus. It was noted that these schemes have minimum time requirements, often a year on an eligible social welfare payment. Some participants felt that if these waiting times were reduced so that short-term unemployed people could also participate on them, the impact on

¹² In a 2011 report NESC noted that "The ability to claim compensation for part-time unemployment is constrained by the criterion that, to do so, a person must be wholly unemployed on three days out of six. This results in hugely uneven treatment. For example, a person with one regular hour of work per day on each of four working days (a total of four paid hours a week) does not qualify, while a person with full-time work on three working days (a total of twenty-one paid hours) does." (p142) Available at http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_reports/en/NESC_123_2011_full.pdf While in a 2020 report NESC observes "The applicability of PUP and TWSS to students is interesting, as they are not available for full-time work, and so usually are not eligible for unemployment payments. This observation suggests the possibility of some flexibility for those only available for part-time work to be eligible for unemployment payments, without the requirement to seek full-time work." (p124) Available at http://files.nesc.ie/nesc_reports/en/151_Future_Social_Welfare.pdf



unemployment would be positive. Others noted the importance of CE, Tus and other programmes for people looking to transition back to work who have been unemployed for some time. There was a call to reinstate the double payment for people in receipt of Disability payments and the One Parent family payment.

- However, other participants said that schemes like Community Employment can be a dead-end for participants, with little prospects of further employment at the end of them. Just moving people from social welfare payments onto a scheme and then back onto payments does not create any sort of upward mobility. It was also noted that decent conditions for workers in these schemes needs to be assured.
- Rural Social Scheme can be restrictive in eligibility criteria and does not offer training, which some participants felt needed to be reviewed.
- In one discussion it was noted that it would be very useful to reinstate the Back to Work Allowance.
- A call was made to promote better the services that are available on the ground through, for example, the Jobs Clubs who support unemployed people to enhance their digital skills, interview skills and confidence building. Concerns were raised how disruptive and disempowering it can be for people when they engage with local services themselves as walk-ins, then are activated by the Department, and often sent somewhere else to re-start their engagement.
- Further discussions took place on people who are hardest to reach, often significantly distanced from labour market. There was a call for new schemes, enhanced funding to incentivise

employers to take on people with disabilities or excluded because of their socio-economic status; as well as more awareness-raising of current schemes such as Jobs Plus, and the Wage Subsidy Scheme.

- The high support employment service team mentioned in the briefing note circulated before the workshop was highlighted. One participant said that it *“would be great because it would prevent people becoming overwhelmed when ‘dropped in the deep end’ of getting back to work”*. Participants felt that adequate resources need to be acknowledged and provided to ensure that needs like literacy are properly met.
- In one workshop a good discussion took place on addressing the significant challenges facing Travellers. Prejudice against Travellers as jobs applicants is very prevalent, regardless of the applicant’s qualifications or suitability for the job. Local, regional discrimination of Travellers means that they often have to resort to changing their name into Irish and using a “settled” friend’s address when applying for jobs, because they know they will be discriminated against if they use their usual name and address.
- Participants discussed work that is going on around the country, for example, in Cavan the local Traveller group and local development company produced a report looking at the challenges facing young Travellers. One participant felt that young *“Travellers need to be caught before they leave education”*. Promoting the benefits of education, the potential, and ambition in young members of the Traveller community.
- Other participants felt that social enterprises are very suitable for Travellers. It was noted that

there are social enterprises that are Traveller-led and have proved successful around the country, for example, Kingdom Furniture (Kerry), Bounce-Back Mattress Recycling (Galway), and that this should be explored further.

- Other factors preventing marginalised groups from accessing employment could be the lack of opportunity in rural areas and a feeling of futility in applying to jobs when there are so many who experience prejudice by employers.

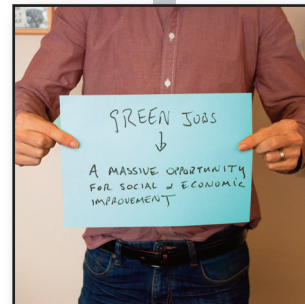
In response to *Do you see Green Jobs providing some answers?* the participants noted:

- Green jobs should be a part of Ireland’s enterprise strategy. There are so many opportunities to create these jobs in Ireland due to our capability to, for example, produce electricity by wind and wave technology. In one group it was said that “we should be researching renewable energy”.
- Participants noted that it is inevitable and that “we should be ahead of the curve”. There are also potential green jobs in construction, such as retro-fitting homes, transport and agriculture. Amongst the other examples participants talked about were: work on wind turbine technology in Tralee; Bord na Mona changing to greener energy, renewables, biodiversity.
- The possibility of reskilling and upskilling people for new green jobs was raised, including ‘Just transition’ programmes for re-purposing jobs into green jobs and supports for the workers affected to be able to take up these new opportunities. It was also seen as important to upskill export/import workers to make industries “green”.
- There is a need to provide financial incentives to develop green industries and to involve IDA and Enterprise Ireland where the opportunity exists to substantially ‘scale-up’.
- Participants noted that many “green jobs” already exist, that green jobs are everywhere, but need to be improved. Examples given included care jobs, agri & food, some building jobs.
- Concerns were also raised that there is a danger of green jobs being turned into “schemes”. An example was given of people working on

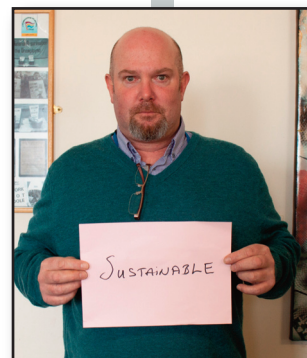
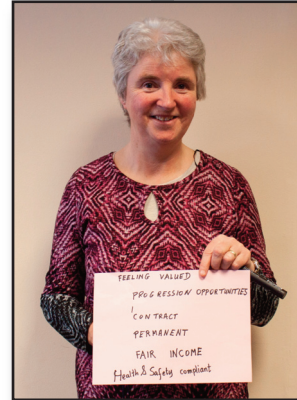
walkways under an employment scheme which the participant felt did not constitute a ‘decent job’. There was a call for green jobs to be good jobs, and for improvement to the quality of jobs on schemes, including greater flexibility of criteria.

In response to *How can people exercise their right to decent work, with good conditions of employment?* the following was raised:

- Across the workshops concerns were articulated about the lack of knowledge amongst workers of their rights and how rights and entitlements need to be better known. To that end more awareness needs to be raised about what actual rights workers have, as they are often not made clear by the employer themselves.



- Low paid workers are often afraid of raising concerns, participants noted that people who are not in a Trade Union need protection, and that Trade Unions need to reach out.
- Start the conversation, “make noise” in low-paid jobs. There needs to be more emphasis on bringing to light poor conditions and terms in employment, where these are often more important to workers than just low pay.
- There is a clear role for Trade Unions and collective bargaining. Employers need to be influenced to improve conditions.
- More advocacy for unionisation of workers outside of unions/representative bodies is needed. Participants note that it would be important to normalise unionisation and encourage all workers to join unions despite threats from employers/businesses to cut jobs if workers unionise.
- To that end workplace democracy and the right to collective bargaining should be at the forefront of the discussion about decent work and rights. People need to be made aware of their right to exercise their rights without penalisation and about participation in the discussions around conditionality and rights.
- It was also noted that change has to come from the top, at policy levels, even if the conversation/grassroots movement gains traction.
- On a practical note, participants noted that better transport systems would give people more options and opportunities to secure decent work.
- An example was also given of work undertaken by migrant care workers and the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland to combat poor conditions and pay in care work. They created *The Great Care Co-op*, a carer owned / worker co-operative¹³ that provides higher rates of pay and better conditions. This kind of co-operative initiative could provide more sustainable work.



¹³ For further information see <https://tinyurl.com/y6fycbbo> or <https://www.inou.ie/analysis/e-bulletin/2020/09/11/the-great-care-coop/>

WEBINAR ON DECENT WORK

On September 16th, 2020 the INOU ran the final engagement of our Decent Work project, a webinar at which the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) were asked to speak. The presenters were **Tony Geoghegan**, IHREC Commissioner; **Ger Gibbons**, Policy Officer, ICTU; and **Nichola Harkin**, Employment Law Solicitor, IBEC.

Ann Fergus, Chairperson of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) opened the event, noting the importance of decent work, not only as a concept but practically on the ground.

John Farrell, INOUE Development Worker facilitated the morning, at which more than ninety people participated. After the three guest speakers, **Brid O'Brien**, INOUE Head of Policy and Media, presented the work of the project to date, a summary of the issues discussed across the three workshops and themes, key findings and next steps for the project, including this report and a short video.

IHREC PRESENTATION BY TONY GEOGHEGAN, COMMISSIONER

I am very pleased to be here to set out the work of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission ('the Commission') on decent work which is one of our key strategic priorities. I am especially pleased to be involved in this event which is the concluding part of a project by the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) on decent work funded under the Commission's Grants Scheme. Increasing our engagement with civil society organisations such as the INOUE is a key priority for us. Such engagement opens up more opportunities for dialogue and co-operation as well as informing and adding value to all our efforts to advance the right to decent work in Ireland.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

The Commission is an independent public body, established on 1 November 2014 under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, reporting directly to the Oireachtas. We have a mandate to protect and promote human rights and equality and to encourage the development of a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the State. The Commission is Ireland's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) and National Equality Body (NEB).

The Commission is composed of 15 publicly recruited members, appointed by President Higgins, including the Chief Commissioner Sinéad Gibney.

In its current Strategy Statement 2019-2021, the Commission prioritised advancing the right to decent work. A Standing Statutory Worker and Employer Advisory Committee, which I chair, brings together representatives of ICTU and Ibec to advise the Commission on implementing the priorities in it, and it has been a very valuable collaboration.

As set out below, decent work activity happens across all the Commission's functions through legal actions, public awareness, policy and research development, international reporting, public sector equality and human rights duty compliance, and civil society engagement.

DECENT WORK

The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) definition of decent work is used by the Commission as the starting point for the development of a human rights and equality based approach to its realisation:

“Decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.” (ILO Definition of Decent Work)

The Commission monitors the State's compliance with decent work through reporting to the United Nations (UN) on the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and group specific human rights instruments on: women, ethnic and religious groups, and persons with disabilities. Reports are also made in relation to the Council of Europe on the European Social Charter. In early 2020, the Commission reported on collective complaints dealing with the right to be represented by a trade union, and in 2022, we will report on the labour rights in the European Social Charter.

We are aware that when we speak about human rights, they must be meaningful to rights holders, both for individuals and communities. Eleanor Roosevelt put it aptly when she said, “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In **small places, close to home**—so **close** and so **small** that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world.” Ireland has committed to implement the right to decent work. We need to apply the international right to decent work in Ireland.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY BASED APPROACH TO DECENT WORK

Speaking more specifically about the initiatives that the Commission takes, I would like to begin with our research and policy work:

RESEARCH AND POLICY

What do universal rights mean for people living in Ireland? The first step in developing a human rights and equality based approach is the interpretation of rights in a national context, in a way that is relevant to rights holders from all communities and groups. As part of the Commission's research programme with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), we engaged with a wide range of stakeholders last year to identify what we call 'dimensions' of decent work in Ireland.

These are the six dimensions identified:

- ◆ Access to work;
- ◆ Adequate earnings;
- ◆ Employee voice;
- ◆ Security and stability in work;
- ◆ Equality of Opportunity and Treatment in Employment; and
- ◆ Health and safety.¹⁴

The right to decent work can be progressed. Alternatively, progress that has been made can be undermined, and the right to decent work can regress. A recent example is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on decent work. Releasing the right to decent work during this pandemic is a major challenge as efforts are made to prevent regression and address inequalities. There is a need for more disaggregated data to understand emerging issues and offer solutions. In addition to this forthcoming report on decent work, the Commission has published a number of research reports that provide an evidence base on work for particular groups protected by equality legislation. Furthermore, our international reports provide a wealth of evidence on decent work in Ireland and are good reference material for civil society organisations like the INOU in your work to advance decent work.

Part of the remit of the Commission is to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the State relating to the protection of human rights and equality and to make recommendations to the Government. I would like to draw

¹⁴ Unpublished, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Economic and Social Research Institute.

your attention to our Observation on the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017. In the observations, the Commission reaffirmed its position that Irish equality law should be amended to prohibit discrimination based on socio-economic status.¹⁵

LEGAL

The legal work of the Commission involves providing information, offering legal assistance, taking cases or appearing as *amicus curiae* or ‘friend of the court’.

Information to the public on human rights and equality legislation, including the *Employment Equality Acts 1998-2018*, is provided through the Commission’s **Your Rights Information Service**. During 2019, of a total of 2,165 queries received, 474 related to employment equality queries. The breakdown was as follows:¹⁶

- ◆ 36% disability discrimination;
- ◆ 24% gender discrimination; and
- ◆ 12% race discrimination

Under **Section 40** of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Commission “*can provide legal assistance before the WRC (Work Place Relations Commission) and the Courts to individuals in respect of litigation that concerns human rights and equality issues.*”

During 2019, all employment litigation outcomes (five in total) concerned disability discrimination in the workplace. Three out of the five resolved in favour of the client by settlement or mediation. One complaint was not upheld, and one complaint was upheld.

The Commission can also apply to the Superior Courts (High Court and Supreme Court) for liberty to appear as *amicus curiae* (‘friend of the court’) in proceedings before that court that involve, or are concerned with, the human rights or equality rights of any person. It is up to the court at its discretion to grant or refuse our involvement. Once invited to participate, which is normally the case, the Commission assists the Court by making submissions on the relevant human rights and equality law.



¹⁵ <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2018/01/Observations-on-Equality-Miscellaneous-Provisions-Bill-2017.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/IHREC-Annual-Report-2019-English-version.pdf> pg. 14

Some relevant examples are set out below:

WRC – Stephen Dunne v. Sky Handler Limited (2019)

Mr. Stephen Dunne was dismissed from his employment as an Aircraft Service Agent with Sky Handling Partner Ltd specifically due to his dyspraxia.

The WRC adjudication found the company had failed to provide reasonable accommodation and that Mr Dunne discriminatorily dismissed. Sky Handling Partner Ltd was ordered to review its employment procedures and to pay Mr. Dunne €15,000 in compensation, the equivalent of 18 months' pay.

High Court – Robert Cunningham v. the Irish Prison Service (2020)

Mr Cunningham, a Prison Officer, suffered a back injury as a result of a work related injury and could not engage in control and restraint, a duty which formed part of his role. The IPS took the view that they are exempt under the EEA from providing reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities, and thus offered Mr Cunningham early retirement. Mr Cunningham won his case in the WRC, but the Labour Court overturned this decision finding that the IPS were under no obligation to provide reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities.

The High Court overturned this decision finding that the IPS and other emergency service providers were under an obligation to provide reasonable accommodation to employees with disabilities. This case has been appealed to the Court of Appeal.

NHV v. the Minister for Justice and Equality (2017)

This case saw a Burmese man (NHV) living in direct provision for several years, challenge the refusal to grant him permission to seek employment, as the man was still awaiting determination of his application for refugee status. NHV challenged the constitutionality of the section in the Refugee Act 1996, which, it was argued, precluded the Minister for Justice and Equality from granting him permission to take up employment. He was granted leave to bring the appeal to the Supreme Court as it was decided that the matter is one of public importance under article 34.5.3 of the Constitution.

Following an initial judgment in May 2017, the Supreme Court initially adjourned the case for six months. On 09 February 2018, the Court declared that section 16(3) (b) of the International Protection Act 2015 (which provided for the absolute ban on employment for asylum seekers) was inconsistent with the Constitution and was, therefore, invalid.¹⁷

Marie Daly v. Nano Nagle (Supreme Court) (2019)

In July 2019, the Supreme Court delivered its judgment, and reversed the previous decision of the Court of Appeal by setting out that reasonable accommodation can involve a redistribution of any task or duty in a job, provided that it is not disproportionate in the context of the employment in question. The Supreme Court pointed to an approach that looks at the individual's employment in the round by considering it within the wider context of its relationship to fellow workers and the workplace. The Court also held that, whilst it is not mandatory to consult with the employee, it would be prudent for employers to do so.

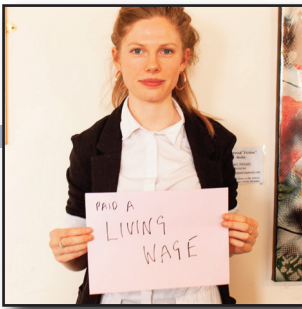
The Court also focused on the dignity of the person and the centrality of the State's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ('UNCRPD') ratified by Ireland in 2018.

Under **Section 31** of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the Commission also has a legal function to prepare codes of practice to further the protection of human rights, the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity.

The provisions of these codes are admissible in evidence and may be taken into account in proceedings before a court, the Workplace Relations Commission or the Labour Court.

During 2019, the Commission concluded the following Codes of Practice, which are awaiting Ministerial approval: draft Code of Practice on Equal Pay; revised Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work. During 2020, the Commission concluded a Code of Practice on Rights of Families at Inquests and has commenced a Code of Practice on Reasonable Accommodation in Employment.

¹⁷ <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/IHREC-Annual-Report-2019-English-version.pdf>



Strategic Engagement

The strategic engagement work centres on using public awareness initiatives to reach rights holders, policy makers and the general public more broadly and promoting the importance of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty to put human rights and equality at the heart of the public service and have a two way engagement with civil society organisations who work directly with rights holders. The Commission supports civil society organisations through grants to further their work and create spaces to inform the work of the Commission and vice versa – just like we are doing here today.

Public Awareness on Equality Rights

In line with its statutory remit in relation to the equality legislation, the Commission is developing a public information campaign aimed at increasing awareness of the existence and basic principles of Ireland's primary equality legislation – the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts.

The public information campaign will be supported with the publication of updated information booklets on the rights set out under the Employment Equality Acts and the Equal Status Acts.

Promoting implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

The Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (The Duty), set out in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 places a legal obligation on all public bodies to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of employees (and persons to whom they provide services). The law requires public bodies to undertake an assessment of the equality and human rights issues relevant to their function and purpose; take actions to address these issues; and report on progress made.

This provides an important framework to systematically consider and reflect the particular needs of staff and service users at risk of inequality, discrimination or disproportionate impact, and helps to mitigate and avoid unintended consequences.

The Commission has produced guidance and tools kits for public bodies on the Duty, which is also very relevant for civil society organisations like the INOU and Trade Unions as you all have a clear role in advocating for the Duty as a mechanism to improve workplaces, including employment issues, and service provision.¹⁸

Civil Society Engagement

Finally, I am finishing with civil society engagement, it is very important for me as an IHREC Commissioner to be here today and to listen to the results of your conversations with people around the country, most of whom have themselves experienced unemployment or precarious working conditions. I said that the starting point for the Commission is the definition of decent work set out by the ILO, but I also said that human rights have to be made real for people and communities. Your conversations and conclusions as to what decent work means are hugely valuable to you as you go forward, but they will also inform and enrich our work as a Commission. Our joint efforts will contribute to the further implementation of the right to decent work in Ireland. Realising the right to decent work cannot be completed alone, but through collaboration and partnership across civil society, and through employer and trade union representatives coming together as they have today.

¹⁸ <https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/>

ICTU PRESENTATION BY GER GIBBONS, POLICY OFFICER

DECENT WORK – A TRADE UNION PERSPECTIVE

I would like to give a trade union perspective on decent work; specifically, why collective bargaining is not only central but essential to its achievement, and is needed now more than ever as we seek to recover from Covid-19.

Before doing this, I would firstly like to say a little about ICTU and about the role of unions in Irish society. ICTU brings together over 40 unions in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland that in turn represent over 700,000 workers across the island of Ireland.

We work at a European level through the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and at international level through the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), both of which in turn represent tens and hundreds of millions of workers across Europe and the globe.

While the Irish legal system upholds the right of workers to *join* a union, almost uniquely in the western world, it does not require employers to recognise unions. And while many employers do so, a substantial number do not, or make it difficult to be a member; research carried out a number of years ago found that just one in four employers (27%) in Ireland allowed unions access to their workplaces. Hostility to unions is the reason why being dismissed for membership or proposed membership or engaging in union activities is automatically considered an unfair dismissal under Irish law.

Despite these impediments, more and more people have been joining unions in Ireland over recent years. Central Statistics Office data indicate that membership grew by almost one-fifth (18%) between 2016 and 2019, or twice the rate of the increase in total employment (9%) over the same period. While this still left membership below where it was before 2008, and well below early 1980s' levels, it challenges the narrative that unions are no longer relevant or needed. It should also be pointed out that over the same period, the proportion of Irish



adults who said in EU surveys that they had a positive view of unions increased from 57% to 72%.

Why is this the case?

It is simply due to the fact that people realise that the core functions that unions have always fulfilled are needed just as much today as in the past. In a world of work where there is still an inherent power imbalance between an employer and an employee, unions provide the mechanism through which workers can *increase* their bargaining power – hence collective bargaining and collective agreements.

I would like to cite some recent findings about collective bargaining from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in support of this argument. These findings are set out in the OECD's November 2019 report 'Negotiating Our Way Up – Collective Bargaining in a Changing World of Work'.

First, the OECD found that there is a difference in pay, a 'union wage premium', for workers who are covered by a firm-level collective agreement and those who are not. It put this at between 10-15%, and higher for women, young workers, new immigrants and for 'non-standard' workers, i.e. workers who are either temporary or part-time, as increasing numbers of young workers now are.

Second, it found that unions enhance health and safety at work; for example, employers are more likely to report accidents in unionised than in non-unionised workplaces.

Third, it found that workers covered by collective agreements are generally one third more likely to receive training than non-members.

As participants in this project will have heard, Ireland is nominally committed to promoting decent work by having ratified international legal instruments such as ILO conventions and the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as by committing over recent years to more 'programmatic' measures, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Central to all of these are commitments to promote collective bargaining. For example, SDG 8.8 commits to protecting labour rights while principle 8 of the Pillar of Social Rights states that the social partners,

i.e. unions and employers, '*shall be encouraged to negotiate and conclude collective agreements in matters relevant to them*'.

It is often difficult to see these commitments being followed through in Ireland. While we welcome the fact that the new Programme for Government commits to progressing to 'a living wage over the lifetime of the Government', we regret that it contains no clear commitments concerning collective bargaining, other than in early years care and education (and then solely to address high staff turnover).

However, there are a number of developments at European level that could see progress on these commitments over the coming years. For example, the European Commission appears to be placing increasing emphasis on incorporating the SDGs and the European Pillar of Social Rights into European economic policy-making, including the substantial funding measures being put in place to promote Europe's economic recovery from Covid-19. And it is also preparing draft legislation on 'fair minimum wages', due by the end of the year, as well as an Action Plan to implement the Pillar on Social Rights, due next Spring.

We believe that it is important that all policy-makers and stakeholders in Ireland who are committed to decent work support these initiatives.

In fact, given the disproportionate economic impact of Covid-19 on sectors with a higher share of low-wage and precarious workers, it is essential that such measures are supported.

I referred a few moments ago to last year's OECD report on collective bargaining 'Negotiating our Way Up – Collective Bargaining in a Changing World of Work'.

This report represented the culmination of a considerable amount of OECD research over recent years into the role and impact of collective bargaining in OECD countries, including in Ireland.

In essence, the OECD found that the collective bargaining systems of countries such as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway, where up to 90% of workers are covered by coordinated, sectoral agreements that leave room for negotiation at firm-level, produces the best labour market outcomes, as measured in

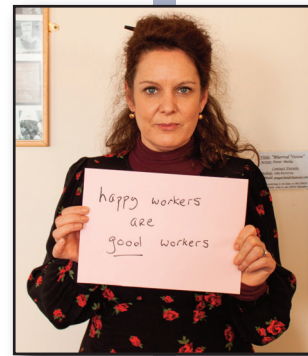
terms of higher employment and lower unemployment rates, particularly for women, young workers and migrants, and also greater wage equality and higher productivity; better outcomes than produced by Ireland's system of mostly firm-level negotiation but some sectoral bargaining and much better outcomes than produced by countries such as the UK and the US where negotiations takes place only at firm level.

To give one somewhat simplistic example, despite all of the talk about Ireland being at full employment before the onset of Covid-19, all of the continental and Nordic countries mentioned had higher employment rates than Ireland and all performed better on the EU social scoreboard, which compares EU countries on a range of indicators including decent work.

On the basis of these findings, the OECD now recommends that all governments put in place a legal framework that promotes collective bargaining in *'large and small firms alike and that that allows labour relations adapt to emerging challenges.'*

To conclude, given all that has happened over the past six months, I think these recommendations are even more relevant now than when they were made late last year. If we wish to see a real recovery in employment and one that is based on decent work, we need to promote collective bargaining.

I could say more about this but I will finish at this point and would be happy to take any questions.



SMARTER WORLD, SMARTER WORK

How we work in changing

Globalisation, rapid digitalisation, changing lifestyles and new consumer preferences mean jobs and careers are being transformed. Furthermore, the pace of change is accelerating. This brings great opportunities, but also risks.

The new world of work is more exciting, but also less predictable.

How organisations, government and individuals respond to these trends will fundamentally affect the quality of our jobs and our lives into the future. It will determine the ability of businesses to prosper and, more fundamentally, it will shape our society and living standards for generations.

In this presentation, I look at how we can take the right approach to these changes so that we can best enable decent work to prosper in the future.

In particular, I will present Ibec's Smarter World, Smarter Work campaign¹⁹ which looks at what is changing and sets out an ambitious vision for our economy and our society. Crucially, it identifies what action we need to take now if we are to reap the rewards and avoid the pitfalls.

Smarter World, Smarter Work Campaign

The vision of Ibec's Smarter World, Smarter Work campaign is of a new era of quality job creation and improved living standards. An era defined by an embrace of technological and workplace change in business, at home and right across society. An era that provides individuals and organisations with the environment and supports they need to thrive and reach their full potential.

The Smarter World, Smarter Work campaign proposes a range of actions across four key areas:

- 1 Investment in skills and employability;
- 2 Flexibility at all life stages;

- 3 A dynamic labour market;
- 4 Smoother career transitions.

In this paper, I will consider each of these four areas.

Investment in skills and employability

Automation, digital platforms and other innovations are changing the types of jobs being created and the nature of work itself. This rapid change presents big challenges, including the potential to exacerbate income and opportunity inequality.

To address this, public policy must focus on investing in an individual's employability rather than maintaining roles that will eventually become redundant. It must prioritise an inclusive and lifelong approach to skills development. At present, Ireland's lifelong learning rate is less than half the benchmark set by the EU and significantly below what is required by a knowledge-based economy.

The ability of an individual to fulfil their career potential depends on attributes and skills that are developed at an early stage in the education system. Employability and entrepreneurial skills are required for an unpredictable future workplace. Flexibility, resilience and an appetite for learning must be ingrained in what we teach and how we teach it in schools and colleges. Curriculum reform and career guidance is required so that subjects reflect the changing world around us.

Flexibility at all life stages

The workplace of the future will be very different. It will be more diverse and more flexible. A fundamental rethink of how we manage and support this new working environment is required.

More varied career paths bring new stresses, with more periods of change and flux as individuals move through their working lives. Balancing social and personal needs with the demands from employers and work can be difficult.

To manage this transformation, employers will need to facilitate and champion new, more adaptable ways of working, including making greater use of technology. How career paths are managed will also need to be re-examined.

Public policy needs to change to better support those at work. We need an approach to childcare, lifelong learning, retirement, pensions and taxation that

¹⁹ Further information is available at <https://www.ibec.ie/influencing-for-business/ibec-campaigns/smarter-world-smarter-work>

keeps people engaged with the labour market, and which doesn't discriminate or disincentivises work.

A dynamic labour market

How we regulate our labour market will be a key factor in determining our ability to attract and retain jobs in the economy.

Businesses need to be able to compete successfully in international markets. A balanced relationship between the employer and employees is essential.

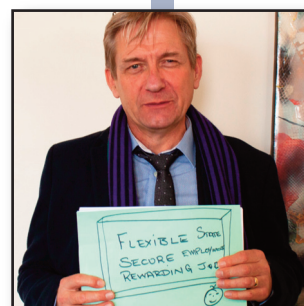
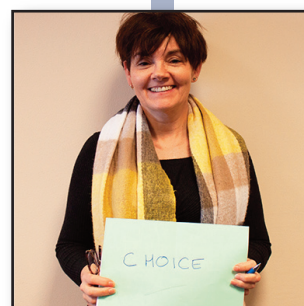
Our focus must be on providing well designed and stable labour market regulation that allows for flexibility – enabling employers to respond to changing business demands, while also creating opportunities to build decent work for those wishing to vary their levels of participation in the workforce. Well-designed policy supporting competitiveness and job creation will maximise the potential of individuals to devise the next generation of innovative products, processes and services needed to support sustainable decent employment.

Smoother career transitions

Economic, technological and social changes mean people are moving between working and non-working life more often during their lives. This is often by choice, but sometimes because of economic circumstances.

Employment interruptions and transitions need to be organised in such a way that workers have the necessary support structure to combine working and non-working life. Smooth transition between work and non-working life is a crucial element in the quality of work and employment. It is key to enabling more people to participate and remain in the workforce and combine paid work with other responsibilities and activities, including family.

The current employment, social protection and pensions systems need far-reaching reform. These should not be regarded as services we turn to only in tough times. Instead they should provide proactive, innovative and responsive supports, in tune with the needs of a dynamic and rapidly changing society and labour market.



WEBINAR PLENARY

- The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's lives and their ability to find and maintain decent work was raised. The lack of disaggregated data is creating difficulties in ascertaining the impact of this health crisis on different groups. The role of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), which was replaced by the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS), in keeping a link between the employer and the employee was noted.
- However, COVID-19 has also highlighted weaknesses in the labour market. One participant who works with people in Direct Provision noted that securing decent work is very difficult, and that COVID-19 has made this much harder.
- It will be interesting to see how the proposed Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare in the Programme for Government deals with access to decent work issues.
- One participant brought to the Webinar's attention that the European Commission President Ursula von Der Leyen as part of her state of the union address earlier on September 16th, had specifically highlighted her full support for collective bargaining.
- Another participant asked Tony Geoghegan to explain what he thinks would be involved in re-orienting employment services and supports as laid out in the sixteenth slide of his presentation as follows:
 - Embed decent work in assessment, planning and actions to address issues.
 - Re-orient employment services and supports.
 - Include decent work in procurement processes and contracts through 'social clauses'.
 - Adopt IHREC Public Sector Duty COVID-19 Guidance: applying a human rights and equality lens to the design, planning, implementation and review of initiatives and responses.
- The role of technology in assisting people with literacy issues was raised, which could help to address exclusion from the labour market. In particular, developing a new language through symbols and colours to communicate and work while people's literacy skills are being developed.
- Particular concerns were raised about the Home Help Sector. It is seen as an area that has regressed in relation to decent work. One participant noted that private agencies manage this sector and employees have very little security; that conditions for these workers were much better in the past when this work was managed by HSE; and given the numbers of people employed better regulation is required. Another participant noted that creche workers are also in vulnerable positions.
- The issue of sick pay, how poor it is, the necessity to have a proper sick pay scheme was also raised. Concerns were also raised that people do not receive a payment for the first six days of their illness, which can be particularly challenging if people have few other resources, this will be changed to three days from March 2021.
- A number of participants noted the work that takes place on the ground, through for example, the Educational and Training Board's Adult Education Guidance Service for people who are long-term unemployed and people who have become unemployed more recently. Another example was a Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) providing free supports to anyone of working age on returning to employment, education, self-employment and working towards better employment options.
- Other participants noted that civil society organisations are essential in providing a platform for workers both employed and unemployed in actually having their voice heard in decision making arenas; and that this type of workshop is important in moving forward, as we are in life changing times and we must rise to the challenge to bring about change.
- Ann Fergus, INOU Chairperson wrapped up the meeting, thanked the speakers and the attendees for their participation. She noted that technology had facilitated many people and organisations to keep working, including the INOU, but that there are costs involved which some people struggle to cover, and that we must be mindful of this and its impact on exclusion.

KEY FINDINGS

- The concept of empowerment is a very important one, essential in practice, and needs to be an integral part of Ireland's employment services and supports.
- Need to address distance from the labour market, including people who are not on a social welfare payment, and capture their journey properly.
- Important to provide work opportunities for people who may face very considerable challenges in getting employment, could be part of Corporate Social Responsibility.
- Proper provision of aftercare support for people taking-up work.
- Importance of actual and virtual networks to combat isolation, and the need for them to be adequately resourced.
- Need to map the jobs that will be obsolete, identify their replacements, ensure people are given the opportunity to re-skill to avail of emerging opportunities.
- Earn and learn - providing opportunities for people to earn while they learn can be very important to provide people with the chance to reskill. A job rotation approach has been used in the past, whereby unemployed people were given the opportunity to work in a progressive industry, while the workers took time out to reskill and move-up the ladder.
- Need to ensure that targeted programmes are properly supported, valued by and have good links into mainstream learning and employment opportunities. This should work in tandem with a systemic and sustained approach to address labour market exclusion.
- The need to properly address the challenges facing people seeking decent work who, for example, live in rural areas, who are Travellers, have a disability, parent alone, are returning to the labour market after a long gap, whose job has changed or become obsolete, young people who left school early, or people who have limited access to technology.
- Green jobs should be an integral part of Ireland's enterprise strategy, building on the country's natural strengths, and addressing our climate responsibilities justly.
- Promotion of cooperatives, co-op culture, and alternative ways of working.
- Need for greater flexibility in work practices and facilitate more people to work from home (pre-COVID-19 point).
- Importance of workplace democracy and protecting workers' rights.
- People need to be made aware of their right to exercise their rights without penalisation and to participation in discussions around conditionality and rights.
- Need to ensure that there is greater awareness of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) definition of decent work, and the European Union's Pillar of Social Rights (PSR).
- Need for the ICESCR / ILO definition / PSR to be integrated into policy & practice, and for greater compliance with equality legislation.
- Need for those working on the ground to feed into Government policy development and implementation, and for their issues to be heard and responded to appropriately.



Araby House
8 North Richmond Street,
Dublin 1, D01WY49

Tel: 01 856 0088
Email: info@inou.ie
Web: www.inou.ie

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