



Working collectively to support and promote
community work as a means of addressing
poverty, social exclusion and inequality and
advancing human rights

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EU Recovery and Resilience Plan Facility

National Recovery and Resilience Plan

CWI Submission

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The National Recovery and Resilience Plan

Community Work Ireland welcomes the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility and the opportunity to engage with the development of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which we do having consulted with CWI members. CWI is seeking and would welcome the opportunity for ongoing engagement in the processes.

Introduction

Established in 1981¹ Community Work Ireland is the national organisation that promotes and supports community work/community development as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities, and promoting human rights. CWI is a membership organisation comprising over 700 individuals and organisations that support community work/community development and work in the most disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland. For nearly 40 years, Community Work Ireland has played an important role in working to advance policy and programmes that meet the real and pressing needs of marginalised communities seeking to ensure the meaningful participation of communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

The COVID-19 crisis and the challenges it has posed has been unprecedented. The restrictions imposed on communities and society as part of the response to the pandemic has presented many challenges for communities already marginalised by poverty, inequality and social exclusion. COVID-19 highlighted many weaknesses in the Irish social and economic infrastructure and exacerbated a range of social issues that existed prior to the onset of the pandemic.

However, the pandemic also revealed the possibility of interventions to protect marginalised individuals, families and communities made even more vulnerable by COVID that had not been thought possible. Cross-sectoral relationships that included a range of government departments, state agencies and national and local organisations in the community sector and the voluntary sector were built and became a source of dialogue and discussion that in turn formed the foundation on which improvements and protections were put in place.

¹ As the Community Worker's Co-operative

The pandemic highlighted the critical nature of community infrastructure that mobilised, responded and adapted quickly to the needs that presented. It has starkly highlighted the importance of the community development, local development and voluntary sectors. Starting where people are at, a universally acknowledged principle of community work, community workers have been to the forefront of dealing with complex needs within the most marginalised communities.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CWI has been convening the COVID-19 NGO Group, a network of over 25 national and local NGOs engaged in COVID responses with the most marginalised communities in the country, including Travellers, migrants, people living in direct provision, people who are homeless, marginalised rural and urban communities and others. The COVID-19 NGO Group made a number of submissions to Government and NPHET in relation to mitigating the worst effects of the pandemic on these groups and communities. This submission builds on the learning from the NGO Group and consultation on this submission with CWI members.

General comments

The work that CWI has engaged in with the COVID-19 NGO Group has exposed pre-existing marginalisation and exclusion, which has long been part of the dimensions that community work seeks to address. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan should not be about returning to 'normal'. The Plan should facilitate an opportunity to be transformative, imagining a more equal and sustainable society where rights and diversity are respected.

CWI notes and welcomes the stipulation that Plans must devote a minimum amount of expenditure to climate and ensure that the remaining expenditure follows the 'do not harm' principle.

However, CWI firmly believes that this stipulation must be matched with a **similar minimum social spend** that will support a range of initiatives to address poverty and inequality. All other investments and reforms must comply with a similar 'do no harm' principle, which in practice means that all investments and reforms must be **equality and poverty-proofed**. The application of the [Public Sector Duty](#) to the process of developing the National Recovery and Resilience Plan is critical in this regard. The Plan must be based on a rights-based approach to recovery on the basis that those that need most receive most support.

We note that Member States are required to embed the measures they plan in their national budgetary processes and call gender and equality budgeting to be embedded in the Plan and subsequent national budgetary processes and economic decision making to ensure the allocation of resources tackles inequality and gender disparities.

Where positive interventions were made to protect marginalised individuals, families and communities the principle of '**no regression**' must apply and positive development must be maintained and built on to ensure that benefits are sustained.

The Plan needs to be **action-oriented**. People in marginalized communities that have seen the worst effects of COVID-19 need to see positive change and improvements to their lives.

The community sector that represents a diverse range of voices including the voice of minorities and migrants should be represented on all monitoring and oversight bodies.

Initiatives and supports targeted at communities must minimise bureaucracy and be flexible and responsive to needs as identified by the communities themselves.

Green Transition

The Green Transition must be underpinned by a Just Transition. This means acknowledging that the effects of the climate, environmental and biodiversity crisis are felt most deeply by those who are living in poverty and experience the highest levels of social exclusion and inequality. These are the people and communities that are traditionally least responsible for climate change and they are also the people and communities with the least ability to adapt and respond to the effect of climate change.

Invest in programmes to build the capacity of marginalised communities to engage in climate justice and transition.

Invest in initiatives that create the conditions for a Green Transition, such as:

- wide scale investment in public and alternative modes of transport
- addressing fuel poverty by providing opportunities for deep retrofitting of houses for those in marginalised communities and by making alternative methods of warming homes affordable
- addressing air pollution

Digital transformation

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital divide. Access to technology has been one of the fundamental pre-requisites for children and young people to remain engaged in education, for people to work from home and to maintain social contact. However, access is not universal and members of already marginalised communities are the least likely to have the access required.

Invest in an audit of access to digital technology deficits and further invest in addressing those deficits.

Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, including economic cohesion, jobs, productivity, competitiveness, research, development and innovation, and a well-functioning single market with strong SMEs

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the concept of essential work and critical work to the fore of thinking in Irish society. There has been a renewed respect for the public service and those that work in the public service, particularly the health services. There has also been a new acknowledgement of others that work in often poorly paid, female-dominated jobs that are now regarded essential for the economy and society.

Invest in the creation of a new model of work based on decent pay and workers' rights and use conditions attached to public funding to drive this reform.

Social and territorial cohesion

The pandemic has brought increasing pressures on communities to remain in their immediate communities. This has exacerbated many of the intergenerational complex issues faced by communities and in many cases reinforced by the activities of the Far-Right deliberately stirring and exacerbating racial and ethnic tensions. These need to be addressed before they get to a level where they threaten social cohesion and increasing the level of Garda activity is insufficient to address the structural causes and impacts of the issues.

Invest in community work and youth work and an infrastructure that facilitates communities to become sufficiently empowered to address racism.

Health, and economic, social and institutional resilience, including with a view of increasing crisis reaction and crisis preparedness

Community Infrastructure – Response, Recovery, Resilience

The response to the pandemic would not have been possible without a national and local community sector that was quick to mobilise and adapt and respond to the needs of their communities. This was the case, for example, with the Traveller community where Traveller organisations have been to the forefront of advocating for the needs of the community, as well as providing supports on a front-line basis. However, there is a need to ensure that there is national coverage and to ensure that the voice of communities is heard at the highest levels.

Community development and the involvement of communities in strategies to address the range of issues they are facing will be critical to recovery and the development of resilience. The State needs to consider the serious issues that existed in communities pre-COVID, that have been exacerbated by COVID and that will become even more stark if they are not addressed as part of a framework of recovery and resilience. Communities need to be engaged in the solutions to these issues through a robust process of community development supported by the necessary community infrastructure, including by professional community work.

Invest in the extension of the commitment in the Programme for Government to introduce autonomous community development projects in the most marginalised areas and with the most marginalised communities. This will lead to the creation of a sustainable community infrastructure that will contribute to ensuring social cohesion and crisis preparedness.

Strategies to address poverty, social exclusion & inequality

Ireland has a series of strategies and plans to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality. The implementation of these strategies and plans need to be resourced and supported even more urgently now than before.

Invest in the implementation of the Irish plans and strategies to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

Public services

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical nature of public services and their importance in all aspects of life.

Invest in a drive to achieve to drive an equal and sustainable recovery based on public services, fair taxation, valuing the care economy, equality and sustainability

Universal Health Care

COVID-19 has shown that universal access to health care is not only possible but desirable and achievable.

Invest in universal health care that is accessible for all that require it.



Care

Care, for older people, for children and young people, for disabled people, has become a key talking point. COVID-19 has taught us that care should not be privatized but rather regarded as a public service to which access is assured.

Reform the current system of privatized care in all its forms.

Invest in public care systems that are accessible and affordable to all that need them. Invest in the care economy to create a society that values care, people and the planet.

Restrictions

The restrictions imposed by COVID-19 do not affect everyone equally. For some, there are many recreational amenities with a 5Km or 10Km radius. This is not the case for all. For some, the prospect of working or learning/studying from home was realistic because they had the access to technology and space within their homes to facilitate this. This is not the case for all. Some people have the capacity to self-isolate or quarantine. This is not the case for all. As a country we need to audit the capacity of people, particularly those in marginalised communities, for capacity to follow public health guidelines, without it proving detrimental to physical and mental health.

Invest in the ability of people, particularly those in marginalised communities, to follow public health restrictions.

Invest in public amenities, parks and green spaces supporting bio-diversity, environmental awareness and a sense of being valued and of pride within communities.

Policies for the next generation, children and youth, including education and skills.

The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people has been well documented. Rising mental health concerns, lack of hope, fear for the future, growing educational inequality, fears of 'a lost generation', digital poverty, child poverty, soaring levels of youth unemployment, lack of 'normal college life' for those in third level education, uncertainty regarding the leaving cert and lack of social development opportunities are all taking their toll. These issues are exacerbated for children and young people from marginalised communities, who may not even have the minimum of access to technology that might give some protection against the worst of the COVID-19 effects.

Immediate and urgent investment is required to begin to mitigate the worst effects of the crisis on this cohort. Policies for children and young people and the next generation work best when there is direct engagement with communities and need to be embedded in community supports.

Invest in Educational supports for young people living in poverty

Invest in vocational education and training for young people

Invest in Youth work and youth supports in disadvantaged communities

Invest in Measures to address the digital divide

Implementation, Review & Monitoring

It is critical that the voice of those most affected by COVID-19 are to the fore in the implementation, review and monitoring of the Irish Recovery and Resilience Plan. Community Work Ireland would be happy to engage in this regard.