



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí  
Department of Social Protection

# Social Inclusion Forum 2021 Annex

Questions and Answers

September 2021

Annex to the Report of  
Social Inclusion Forum  
12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021

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## Questions and Answers from the 2021 Social Inclusion Forum Opening Plenary Session

The following questions were asked during the Opening Plenary on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> April 2021. Questions appear below in the order they were asked on the day. Answers have been supplied to questions from the Government Department with relevant responsibility.

The answers supplied were requested in the weeks following the Social Inclusion Forum, which took place from 12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021, and reflect the situation at that time.

**Question 1:** How will the State implement the EU Child Guarantee that was agreed at the end of March 2021? How will this align with the Roadmap for Social Inclusion?

### **Answer provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disabilities, Integration and Youth:**

The Department is establishing a new International Unit which, as part of its functions, will have a specific focus on the design and implementation of the EU Child Guarantee. This will build on the previous work advanced under the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures whole of government approach to addressing child poverty. The National Advisory Council for Children and Young People will be requested to input and collaborate with the Department on the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee. The implementation of the Child Guarantee will also necessitate close engagement and input from key departments and agencies across government and will have regard to and be aligned with existing Government strategies and priorities, including the Roadmap for Social Inclusion.

**Question 2:** As the definition of social inclusion refers to 'sufficient income', how is sufficient to be measured? Should a benchmark of income adequacy be considered?

### **Answer provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment:**

The Programme for Government makes a commitment to “progress to a living wage over the lifetime of the Government.” This is part of a balanced approach to

achieving an improved standard of living for the most vulnerable in society. The Tánaiste and Minister has asked the Low Pay Commission (LPC) to examine the issues and make recommendations on the best approach to achieving this within the lifetime of the Government as part of its work programme for 2021. The LPC is currently commissioning research on the living wage and intends to provide a report to the Tánaiste at the end of 2021. While definitions of a living wage can vary, the central idea is that it should ensure a socially acceptable standard of living. While the living wage initiative is being considered, Government will be guided by recommendations of the LPC regarding any future changes in the minimum wage. The Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and Council on adequate minimum wages in the European Union aims to ensure that workers are protected by adequate minimum wages allowing for a decent living. It creates a framework to improve the adequacy of minimum wages and for access of workers to minimum wage protection. The proposal includes measures to ensure minimum wages are set at adequate levels. It would require countries with statutory minimum wages to put in place clear and stable criteria for minimum wage setting, indicative reference values to guide the assessment of adequacy and regular and timely updates of minimum wages.

**Question 3:** As a manager of a Family Resource Centre working for very disadvantaged communities which are experiencing food poverty, is there a plan to address this?

**Answer provided by the Department of Social Protection:**

The Department of Social Protection is helping to address food poverty at community level through the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD), an EU co-funded programme. FEAD supports EU Member States' actions to provide food and material assistance to the most deprived. FoodCloud is the primary Partner Organisation to deliver the food element of the FEAD Programme. They are responsible for the procurement and storage of the FEAD products and coordinating collection of the FEAD products by the other Partner Organisations (mainly community-based charities). The food items consist of basic, non-perishable foods which are easy to transport and store. Information on the FEAD programme which is co-funded by the Department of Social Protection, including the list of charities in receipt of food support can be found at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f68e91-fead-the-fund-for-european-aid-to-the-most-deprived/>.

In addition, Commitment 61 in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion is to “*develop a comprehensive programme of work to further explore the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions.*” Joe O’Brien T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for social inclusion established an interdepartmental working group on Food Poverty address this work. The group has met twice and is working to identify the range of work undertaken, or funded, by Departments and other State bodies to address food poverty in its various forms.

**Question 4:** Would a holistic approach to Community Development help alleviate poverty, mental health, local nutritious food, biodiversity, mitigating climate change?

**Answer provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development:**

The definition of Community Development used in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities*, the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the All-Ireland Standards for Community Work is: “*A developmental activity comprised of both a task and a process. The task is social change to achieve equality, social justice and human rights, and the process is the application of principles of participation, empowerment and collective decision making in a structured and co-ordinated way.*” This echoes global understanding of community development as “*a way of strengthening civil society by prioritising the actions of communities, and their perspectives in the development of social, economic and environmental policy*” (Budapest Declaration).

The All-Ireland Standards for Community Work includes “Social Justice and Sustainable Development” as one of the five core values that frame community development. SICAP aims to address high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted and innovative, locally led approaches. It focuses on providing employment and enterprise supports, education and training opportunities as part of the solution to alleviating poverty in areas of high unemployment or among target groups most at risk. There are numerous examples of actions where communities identify the issues highlighted above and design actions to address them. These include promoting positive mental health; the development of Community Gardens to create access to local nutritious food, encourage biodiversity and have physical and mental health benefits; during the COVID-19 restrictions the establishment of Food Banks and other food distribution projects; and methods to broaden healthy eating including on-line cookery courses.

**Question 5:** Can the DSP Social Inclusion Forum note 2019 Indecon Review Careers Guidance: 1. Appoint National Policy Group to develop coherent, long-term strategy for lifelong career guidance?

**Answer provided by the Department of Further Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science:**

On foot of the publication of the Review of Career Guidance, a Taskforce comprised of senior officials within the, then, Department of Education and Skills was established to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the review. The Taskforce has met a number of times and progressed valuable work which began with a detailed consideration of what is understood by Guidance in Ireland and the wider post-primary holistic model that encompasses not just career guidance but education and social personal guidance too. Further work has started to consider how to manage guidance issues within the Department of Education, the need for a cohesive guidance policy framework, the potential value of a guidance curriculum and how the work of guidance counsellors can best be supported by the Department. Following the establishment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the recommendations of the Indecon review now span two Departments, the Department of Education and DFHERIS. Each Department has primary responsibility for specific recommendations of the Indecon report that are relevant to their respective mandates. They continue to collaborate closely to ensure a fully joined-up approach to implementation of the report, which will be rooted in recognition of the continuum of lifelong guidance. Officials of both Departments are working closely to ensure continued progression of the recommendations of the review.

**Question 6:** There are serious issues with the National Childcare Scheme for children and families who are socially excluded. Can this scheme be seen as 'progress'?

**Answer provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disabilities, Integration and Youth:**

The introduction of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) is progressive in its very nature. It is the first statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare in Ireland. It aims to improve children's outcomes, support lifelong learning, make work pay and reduce child poverty. The NCS is designed to be highly inclusive,

to meet the needs of the most economically vulnerable children and those living with other forms of disadvantage. It is based on the principle of progressive universalism and has regard to the best interests of children. The Scheme specifically targets families with varying degrees of economic disadvantage using information from Revenue and the Department of Social Protection to calculate the amount of subsidy paid. Children of families with the least income will get the highest subsidy. This is a fundamental shift away from subsidies grounded in medical cards and social protection entitlements, moving towards a comprehensive and progressive system of universal and income-based subsidies. It represents a significant step forward in combating the poverty traps inherent in previous schemes. Research informed the NCS design to ensure that socially excluded families would benefit. It found that for certain lower paid lone parents working full time, the scheme will bring net childcare costs down. Analysis of the new scheme indicated that the boost to disposable income will be larger for one-parent families than for couples and employed lone parent families will experience the greatest gains. These findings reflect the very considerable work undertaken to poverty-proof the NCS. It has been designed to be flexible, with income thresholds, maximum hours and subsidy rates which can be adjusted. Additional research and analysis has been undertaken to examine any changes to the NCS which might be required to address unusual cases, where this is the right thing to do to protect and benefits lower income parents. A formal review of the NCS has commenced and it is intended that a report will be published in late 2021.

**Question 7:** Has progress been made on the issue of the indexation of social welfare rates to the Minimum Essential Budget Standard?

**Answer provided by the Department of Social Protection:**

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice's Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) is derived from a negotiated consensus, based on focus groups with representative households, and discussions with policy-makers and experts. According to the Vincentians, it is a standard of living which meets an individual's/ household's physical, psychological and social needs, calculated by identifying the goods and services required by different household types in order to meet these minimum needs. The costs incorporate factors such as food, clothing, personal care, health, household goods, household services, communications, social inclusion, education, fuel, transport, personal costs, insurance, savings and contingencies. One of the benefits of the work of the Vincentians is that it

provides the different levels of income needed for a wide range of household types, including the different costs that arise for households in rural and urban locations. For instance, the Vincentians' work finds that the existing levels of payment for some households meets the minimum standard for single people and couples in urban areas but perhaps not in rural areas due to higher transport costs. The work of the Vincentians also highlights issues that may be better solved with improvements in services rather than increases in income. In this regard, improved services, such as the extension of GP visit cards for children and the affordable childcare scheme can result in significant reductions in the minimum income standards needed by households.

Bringing weekly working age social welfare rates in line with the MESL would entail increasing the maximum personal rate to €250 and the Qualified Child Increase to €48.20 for children under 12 and €94.70 for children aged 12 and over. There would be no proportionate increase in the current rate for Qualified Adults in order to meet the MESL. Bringing pension rates in line with the MESL would require an increase of €51.40 for pensioners living alone in rural areas. There would be no increase to the rate of payment for pensioner couples, or pensioners living alone in urban areas. While it is not possible at this time to provide an estimate for those living in rural areas only, the estimated cost of an increase for all pensioners in receipt of the Living Alone Allowance is included in the figure below. The estimated cost of bringing working age and pension welfare payments to meet the MESL, as outlined above, is €2.9 billion.

**Question 8:** Please comment on the dignity of work and the risks of outsourcing and digitalisation further widening social inequality. Can taxation/green economy help?

**Answer provided by Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment:**

New, and legitimate, forms of working arrangements are emerging as the labour market adapts to the opportunities presented by digitalisation, broadband communications and globalisation. This includes the emergence of more freelance type working (i.e. the gig or platform economy) as well as new forms of trading (the sharing economy), which are seen as innovative and important developments that assist in economic growth. It is important that policy adapts to provide social protection for workers in these forms of work, while not stifling social innovation. The Government's approach has been to enhance social security schemes for the self-employed as part of Government policy to make

work pay and encourage self-employment and entrepreneurship so as not to interfere in commercial relationships beyond what is necessary. Since 2017 certain social protection schemes have been extended to the self-employed. Employment and social protections available to a worker generally depend on the individual's employment status.

Currently, a binary system exists in relation to employment status, whereby an individual is either self-employed or an employee. This affects the company/platform and worker in three ways: self-employed workers pay the same social security rate as employees, but companies/platforms do not have to pay the employer rate; self-employed individuals are treated on a self-assessment basis by the tax authorities; and the self-employed are generally only covered by health and safety and equal status legislation, rather than the full range of labour law protections. A series of tests guide decision makers on whether an individual is self-employed or an employee. For platform workers, application of these tests is difficult as: the worker is not always clear about the level of control, direction or management the platform imposes; the worker can be unwilling to be categorised as an employee, and does not see the benefits of losing 'self-employed' status; and it is difficult to investigate and assess the level of control/management effected by algorithms. To improve awareness of employee/self-employed differences, a Government working group has been updating the existing Code of Practice on determining employment status and will publish it in an awareness raising campaign for all workers and employers. The Department of Social Protection has also established a new unit to investigate employment status; investigating and profiling the platform work sector is an important element of its work.

**Question 9:** People who are economically inactive need to be included in employment support programmes.

**Answer provided by the Department of Social Protection:**

The services of Intreo are available to both currently unemployed individuals, as well as those who are currently economically inactive and seeking to enter/re-enter the workforce. *Pathways to Work, 2021-2025* is the Government's national employment services strategy and aims to ensure that as many job opportunities as possible are filled by people who are unemployed with the aim of helping people to secure and sustain employment.

The strategy includes a strand on 'Working for All - Leaving No one Behind' and

seeks to promote better labour market outcomes for all in society. Therefore, the strategy seeks to support those who have become unemployed as a result of the pandemic, as well as those unemployed before the pandemic, those from disadvantaged / minority backgrounds and those looking to return to work or join the workforce, including those currently economically inactive. Examples of the measures set out under Pathways to Work include:

- Introducing an Early Engagement model for jobseekers with disabilities;
- Delivering a new Work Placement Experience Programme with a target of 10,000 places;
- Expanding the JobsPlus scheme to 8,000 places and enhancing the incentive to recruit young jobseekers in particular, by increasing the youth age limit from 25 to 30 years.
- Ring-fencing 1,000 places on employment services and training programmes for people from minority backgrounds of disadvantage;
- Consulting with stakeholders from the Traveller (and/or Roma) community to advise the Public Employment Service in developing tailored support programmes;
- Developing and operating 'Returner' programmes to encourage and support people who left the workforce and have been outside of the workforce for some time to take up employment.
- Delivering a bursary programme, as set out in the Action Plan for Apprenticeship 2021-2025, to fund up to 100 apprentices per annum who are experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and who are from target groups, including lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers and Roma.

**Question 10:** Grassroots community development has been decimated over the past years, it's quantitative as opposed to qualitative, social inclusion should be qualitative.

**Answer provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development:**

The community and voluntary sector was disproportionately affected by cutbacks

during the last recession. The lack of independent funding and reliance on government supports often limits communities' capacity to advocate for change. There was early and sustained criticism of Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) because of its emphasis on meeting targets and collecting and inputting quantitative data. Over the course of the programme targets have been reduced and the information gathered has enabled Pobal to provide Social Inclusion Analysis Data to Local Community Development Committees and Local Development Companies at county and lot level that has supported greater targeting of groups and communities in most need. The development of *My Journey Distance Travelled Tool* in 2020 is an acknowledgement of the need to find ways to capture the qualitative impact of a person's engagement with SICAP and to assist individuals to assess and recognise their own progression. As part of planning for the next programme, due to commence in 2023, there will be a focus on how best to support and recognise quality community work. Consideration is being given to demonstrate the qualitative impact on local community groups and the changes for the communities and target groups they work with.

**Question 11:** Would any of the speakers like to say anything about our relationship in Ireland with alcohol and recreational drug use? (Not a strong feature of the Roadmap)?

**Answer provided by the Department of Health:**

The Department is currently updating the *National Alcohol and Drugs Strategy*. It will have new measures relating to access to services for those with drug and alcohol addiction, a stronger focus on prevention and a range of services for young people. An area of concern is recreational drug use, so a health diversion programme is being developed which will divert those found with drugs for personal use to assess what their needs are rather than facing criminal punishment. This means it will be treated as a health issue rather than a criminal issue and will be a landmark change in policy in Ireland.

**Question 12:** Covid-19 and remote working has highlighted the digital divide that exists, impacting employment opportunities & widening inequality for marginalised groups.

**Answer provided by the Department of the Environment, Communication and Climate Change:**

The Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband to every home, farm, business and school. It is vital to avoid a digital divide to ensure that the people in rural Ireland have the same opportunities as the people in towns and cities. The National Broadband Plan (NBP), a State-led intervention, will be delivered by National Broadband Ireland under a contract to roll out a high speed and future-proofed broadband network within the Intervention Area, covering 1.1 million people living and working in over 544,000 premises, including almost 100,000 businesses and farms and 695 schools. The benefits of broadband have been particularly evident during the recent Covid-19 pandemic with remote working and remote service delivery becoming an overnight reality for many. Quality and reliable broadband is essential in this environment and this is recognised in the Programme for Government. Delivery of the NBP is seen as a key enabler of many aspects of the Programme for Government and will allow policies around remote working and remote service delivery to be realised to their full potential. Bringing connectivity to remote rural locations is central to promoting regional development and Broadband Connection Points are a key element of the NBP. The availability of high-speed broadband services in rural communities can have a transformative effect. High speed broadband will allow citizens and businesses in rural communities to enjoy broadband speeds comparable to and in many cases better than speeds available in towns and cities. This will enable rural communities to avail of the opportunities presented by the digital economy.

**Question 13:** As retro fitting a home is crucial to ensuring a warm safe dry healthy home, many people living on a state pension cannot afford this despite the Grants.

**Answer Provided by the Department of the Environment, Communications and Climate:**

Government supports lower-income homeowners to upgrade their homes by providing free energy efficiency upgrades to eligible homes through the Warmer Homes scheme, administered by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. To

date, funding has been provided for free upgrades to over 143,000 homes under the scheme. In 2020 the average value of the energy efficiency measures provided per household was over €14,800. €109 million in capital funding has been provided this year to support lower income households to retrofit their homes with €100 million of this funding allocated to the Warmer Homes Scheme. This represents a €47 million increase on the 2020 allocation and is the highest ever budget for this scheme. Homeowners in receipt of the Fuel Allowance are eligible for the Warmer Homes scheme, if their home was built before 2006 and they have not previously received works under the scheme. Full details on application processes and eligibility criteria for the Warmer Homes Scheme can be found at SEAI.ie. Other supports are available from Government if there is an urgent need. These include the Department of Social Protection's Urgent Needs Payment and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's Aid for Older People Grant Scheme.

**Question 14:** Can we define Community? It has changed hugely in the past 50 years. Can re-Building Communities provide many social, economic and environmental solutions?

**Answer provided by the Department of Rural and Community Development:**

Defining Community is difficult. Community is a contested concept but is understood, in Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP), as relating to geographical communities and communities of interest. A common definition of community is a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings. While community may be defined similarly, people will differ in the emphasis they place on particular elements of the definition, as it is experienced differently by people with diverse backgrounds.

**Question 15:** Children went back to school today, some after 4 months. Some schools sent letters threatening to send kids home if they were in wrong shoes, Dept. of Education need a policy?

**Answer provided by Department of Education:**

The Government has been guided by public health advice in relation to the safe

operation of schools. The decision to delay the reopening of schools was in recognition of the need to reduce societal activity and movement. Public health has consistently advised that schools are safe places for both students and staff because of the infection prevention and control measures in place in our schools. The HSE Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) has issued specific advice about children attending school in the context of Covid-19. This covers both children with underlying medical conditions and children living with family members with underlying conditions. For all children, care should continue to be taken to reduce transmission through the measures promoted by HPSC. The priority is that households continue to follow all current advice. There are no specific recommendations in the public health advice to suggest an increased risk in wearing uniforms. The Department has not issued any guidance on the wearing of school uniforms in a Covid-19 environment. Normal washing and hygiene arrangements should apply to uniforms. All recognised schools are managed by the school board of management and any decisions on school uniform policy are a matter for management. Schools should consult with parents and students in relation to this policy.

**Question 16:** Can areas of deprivation be recalculated, as many of the people we work with are now in private rented accommodation?

**Answer provided by Department of Rural and Community Development:**

The Pobal HP Deprivation index is Ireland's primary social gradient tool, used by numerous state agencies for the identification of disadvantage, in order to target resources towards communities most in need. The updating of the index is commissioned by Pobal every five years, following the completion of the national census. The Index is created and updated by independent geospatial, economic and social research experts who use a series of data points from the census to ascertain levels of disadvantage under the three domains of demographic profile, social class composition and labour market situation. The Deprivation index can only be updated following the gathering of additional data through the national census. With the next census now planned for April 2022, it is anticipated that the next update to the Deprivation Index will be published in Q3 2023.

**Question 17:** A Social Inclusion research programme was referenced earlier. Does this provide information on employment of marginalised groups? CSO no longer provides this.

**Answer provided by the Department of Social Protection:**

The Department of Social Protection currently has a 3-year research contract with the Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) which focuses on poverty and social inclusion. The planned research outputs for 2021 are a technical paper reviewing the national basic deprivation measure and a thematic paper examining the relationship between income poverty and deprivation and the role of different income components in addressing income poverty.

The employment of marginalised groups may be addressed in research or other related reports undertaken by other Government departments in the context of specific sectoral plans. For example, the *Monitoring Report on Integration 2020* includes a chapter on Employment and Integration. This report is produced under the ESRI's Equality and Integration Research Programme, which is funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

**Question 18:** Is there a recognition that an inadequate household income is a significant cause of food and energy poverty?

**Answer provided by Department of Social Protection:**

These are complex issues that require access to services as well as income supports.

Deprivation of food is reflected in two out of the eleven indicators used to obtain the measure of consistent poverty. The issue of food poverty crosscuts a number of Departments who are engaged in programmes or services that directly or indirectly connect to the issue of food poverty, from disseminating literature on good nutrition to working with school authorities to provide hot meals. Commitment 61 in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion is to “*develop a comprehensive programme of work to further explore the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions.*” Joe O'Brien, T.D., Minister of State with responsibility for social inclusion announced the establishment of an interdepartmental working group on Food Poverty to address this.

Energy poverty is addressed in Chapter 8 of the Roadmap, which refers to the

existing range of direct fuel or energy related income supports/subsidies available. These include the Household Benefits Package and Fuel Allowance Schemes, delivered by the Department of Social Protection, and the Energy Efficiency schemes which fall within the remit of the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. The Roadmap also refers to the Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty and the Climate Action Plan, which recognise the role that energy efficiency in the home plays in addressing energy poverty, in addition to the provision of income supports.

**Question 19:** Parents not in employment/training are not entitled to properly subsidised childcare at present unless sponsored, this is not child centred.

**Answer provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth:**

Under the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), families not engaged in work, training or study can receive childcare subsidies, as well as families that are engaged in these activities. By replacing the schemes that were in place previously, the NCS marks a fundamental shift away from subsidies grounded in medical cards and social protection entitlements, and towards a comprehensive and progressive system of universal and income-based subsidies. The NCS represents the first ever statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare in Ireland. It aims to improve children's outcomes, support lifelong learning, make work pay and reduce child poverty. The interests of the child are at the centre of the NCS by supporting both child development and by encouraging work or training. Parental unemployment is a significant risk factor in determining deprivation rates among children, with particularly high deprivation rates where a parent has never worked, or in lone parent households, or where the mother has no educational qualifications. As the NCS promotes both child development and labour market activation, a balanced approach to eligibility for subsidies was incorporated to recognise both. It supports parents who are not working or studying, with access to either school, free pre-school or subsidised childcare. The subsidy rate available depends on the level of family income, child's age and education stage and the number of children in the family. For further information on the scheme please contact the Department.

**Question 20:** The Dept of Health's attitude to People with Disabilities in their quest for education, is backward. Education is a basic requirement for Social Inclusion. How do we progress?

**Answer provided by the Department of Education:**

Legislation is in place to ensure that people with disabilities in Ireland have equal rights of access to education. This sets out the principle of inclusive education where, as far as practical, a child with Special Education Needs (SEN) should be educated with children who do not have such needs, unless it is not in the best interests of the child with SEN, or if it is inconsistent with the effective provision of education for the children with whom the child is to be educated. Legislation also provides that schools must not discriminate against an applicant on a number of grounds, including disability. 'Soft barriers' should not exclude children, including prohibiting schools from taking into account a student's academic ability, skills or aptitude in enrolment. A school may be compelled to establish a special class for a pupil with SEN, where the National Council for Special Education has identified a need for such. Special education support may be delivered in a mainstream class setting, in special classes within mainstream schools or in special school settings. The provision made for different special education support structures is dependent on the needs of the pupil; this can include additional teaching support, accommodations made, and access to Special Needs Assistants. The majority of pupils with additional learning needs receive additional support in mainstream schools. Government has prioritised investment in the area of special education support and is committed to helping every child, particularly those with SEN. In 2021, almost €2 billion will be invested in SEN support, an increase of over 50% since 2011.

**Question 21:** 2020 has highlighted issues of consistent poverty and the need for grassroots Community Development, are there any plans to provide community development at this level and revise Pobal maps?

**Answer provided by Department of Rural and Community Development:**

The Department supports a number of funding schemes that support community development approaches and are delivered at the grassroots level. For example, the Department is running a pilot call for Community Development proposals, directly applied for at the grassroots level.

The Deprivation index, which is a dataset available to view on Pobal maps, can only be updated following the gathering of additional data through the national census. With the next census now planned for April 2022, following a delay caused by COVID-19 restrictions, it is anticipated that the next update to the Deprivation Index will be published in Q3 2023.

**Question 22:** How will the Department ensure that Social Inclusion is centred and embedded at all levels in the planning, and implementation of Roadmap for COVID Recovery?

**Answer provided by the Department of Social Protection:**

This is a commitment in the Programme for Government (PfG), which states:

*As we emerge from the COVID pandemic, we must build upon the unity, which was fundamental in our response, to improve outcomes for those who are struggling on low incomes, struggling with caring responsibilities, having to raise their families alone, or living with a disability. Any changes made in social welfare provisions will continue to be gender- and equality-proofed. We will do this by rigorous implementation of the new social inclusion strategy, A Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025.*

**Question 23:** Community people need to be engaged with employment supports, what is DSP doing to encourage community people?

**Answer provided by Department of Social Protection:**

The Department works with local communities in providing employment support through schemes such as Community Employment (CE). CE is an active labour market programme designed to provide eligible long-term unemployed people, and other disadvantaged persons, with an opportunity to engage in useful work within their communities on a temporary, fixed term basis.

**Question 24:** One of the biggest issues to be highlighted by the pandemic has been the digital divide - especially for People with Disabilities. Will the strategy be responding to this?

**Answer provided by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth:**

The Department will consider the experience of people with disabilities of accessing information and communication technology during the Covid-19 pandemic. This will be done as part of the work of the Assistive Technology Working Group which has been established by the Department to deliver on Action 53 of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

**Question 25:** An incentive is needed to encourage employers to take on Travellers. Would DSP consider a wage subsidy scheme or something similar for this purpose?

**Answer provided by the Department of Social Protection:**

Pathways to Work is Government's national employment services strategy and represents the Government's overall framework for activation and employment support policy. *Pathways to Work 2021-2025* is the next iteration of the strategy and was published in July 2021. The strategy includes specific commitments to support the employment of persons from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds, including Travellers.

**Question 26:** Return of the Community Development Plan is welcome. How do we ensure it and other community and social justice initiatives will be (local voice) protected from cuts with political change?

**Answer provided by Department of Rural and Community Development:**

The Community Development Programme Pilot was introduced to advance the Programme for Government commitment to "*Introduce, on a phased basis, a number of projects similar in approach to Community Development Projects.*" Initial funding of €1m for 2021 has been secured and it is anticipated that similar funding will be provided for 2 further years. At this time the programme will be

reviewed, and the success of the project will inform the level of ambition to continue with and expand the programme.

**Question 27:** Vital free impartial Adult Careers Guidance available 37 Regional services for all outreach and inclusion intention integrated from Literacy/FET/Up/reskilling.

**Answer provided by the Department Further Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science:**

Guidance in Further Education and Training (FET) is primarily delivered through 16 Education and Training Boards (ETB) across the country, where dedicated Adult Education Guidance Services (AEGS) are available to aid progression and to ensure learner needs are met. 37 AEGS across the 16 ETBs offer impartial and confidential services which are free of charge and open to all. They deliver guidance and information to FET provision and options to learners and potential learners, before, during and after FET training. In addition, the Guidance, Counselling and Psychological Service in Youthreach and Community Training Centres provide supports for young people on these programmes. Guidance is also delivered to apprentices and trainees through the training centre network. Creating Pathways is one of the three core pillars of the second Further Education and Training Strategy 2020-2024. The strategy recognises that ETB provision of guidance on education, training, employment and careers to all in their region is critical to creating lifelong learning pathways. The Strategy recommends a more integrated approach to Career Guidance across the ETB's and the development of a centralised on-line portal offering accessible information and advice.

**Question 28:** There is a very strong relationship between education, employment and welfare (CES 2015-2024); How can Back to Education be reimaged to address the role of Adult Education in Social Inclusion?

**Answer provided by Department of Social Protection:**

The Department supports jobseekers through a broad range of education and training courses with a strong focus on upskilling the long term unemployed. Some of these are short-term and provided by specialist training providers,

including Education and Training Boards. Those looking to study full-time second and third level courses may apply for the Back to Education Allowance scheme (BTEA). The objective of BTEA is to assist those who are distant from the labour market to acquire the necessary education to improve their chances of becoming independent of the social welfare system. BTEA, which is designed to support second chance education, enables eligible persons to pursue approved education courses and to continue to receive income support for the duration of a course of study, subject to meeting certain conditions. Approximately 6,400 students were being supported in the 2020/21 academic year. BTEA is not intended as an alternative form of funding for people entering or re-entering the third level education system. The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant payable by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science represents the primary support for people pursuing education.

**Question 29:** Is there going to be an input from grass roots experience like ourselves involved?

**Answer provided by Department of Rural and Community Development:**

*Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024* was co-produced by Government and people from the community development, local development, community and voluntary, and local government sectors. The preparation and implementation of the strategy was and will be informed by community development principles and there is a clear commitment to engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders. There will also be a significant consultation process when planning for the next iteration of Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP).

**Question 30:** Remote working should achieve Sustainable Development Goal of Decent Work, digital access should be included in a payment supplement when returning to work whilst on a DSP payment.

**Answer provided by the Department of Finance:**

Where e-workers incur certain extra expenditure when working remotely or from home, such as additional heating and electricity costs, there is a Revenue

administrative practice that allows an employer to make payments up to €3.20 per day to such employees, subject to certain conditions, without deducting PAYE, PRSI, or USC. The provision of equipment by the employer to enable the employee work from home will not attract a Benefit-In-Kind charge where the equipment is provided primarily for business use, nor will the provision of a telephone line, broadband and such facilities for business use where private use of the connection is incidental.

Where an employer does not pay €3.20 per day to an e-worker, employees can claim a deduction under section 114 of the Taxes Consolidation Act (TCA) 1997 in respect of actual vouched expenses incurred wholly, exclusively and necessarily in the performance of the duties of their employment. PAYE employees are entitled to claim costs such as additional light, heat and broadband in respect of the number of days spent working from home, apportioned on the basis of business and private use. Guidance can be found at: <https://www.revenue.ie/en/tax-professionals/tdm/income-tax-capital-gains-tax-corporation-tax/part-05/05-02-13.pdf>

The national remote working strategy, *Making Remote Work*, commits the Tax Strategy Group to reviewing the current tax arrangements for remote working in respect of both employees and employers. The Tax Strategy Group will take account of the economic, financial and organisational implications arising from the experience of remote working during the pandemic and assess the merits of further enhancements for consideration in the context of Budget 2022.

**Question 31:** Breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and exclusion as early as possible must be a priority.

**Answer provided by the Department of Social Protection:**

Addressing the intergenerational cycle of poverty and exclusion continues to be a Government priority and is also high on the EU agenda with the introduction of Proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a Child Guarantee. The *Roadmap for Social Inclusion* recognises the strong role of parental employment and/or attachment to the labour market, in addressing child poverty, along with effective income support systems for those who cannot work and access to services. Supporting people throughout the lifecycle continues to be important in addressing poverty and social exclusion, as well as breaking the intergenerational cycle.

The Department helps to prevent child poverty by providing income supports for families. There are a number of child-related supports including: Child Benefit; the Working Family Payment; increases for a Qualified Child (to primary social welfare payments); and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. The broad objectives of Child Income Support programmes are:

- To provide assistance to households with children in recognition of the higher costs incurred in child-raising and childcare to allow parents' choice in how this is undertaken and;
- To provide targeted assistance to no- or low-income households with children to minimise labour market disincentives or positively contribute to labour market incentives in order to reduce poverty in these households.

Social transfers play a crucial role in alleviating poverty and inequality. Ireland is consistently among the best in the EU for reducing poverty through social transfers. A key means to tackle child poverty is supporting parents returning to work. The Working Family Payment and Back to Work Family Dividend support parents to take up and remain in employment.

**Question 32:** Is there a plan to look at the HAP rates/Rent rates countrywide, as a lot of clients on HAP are paying landlord quite a sustainably amount over and above the HAP they receive and I feel this is forcing them into poverty?

**Answer provided by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage:**

Under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme, tenants source their own accommodation in the private rented market. Accommodation should be within the prescribed maximum HAP rent limits, which are based on household size and the rental market within the area concerned. Increased rent limits for the HAP scheme and the Rent Supplement Scheme were introduced in 2016 in conjunction with the Department of Social Protection, with consideration of data gathered by the Residential Tenancies Board and the HAP Shared Services Centre. HAP rent limits were increased significantly, by 60% in some cases. Maximum rent limits for the HAP scheme are set out for each housing authority area by the Housing Assistance Payment (Amendment) Regulations 2017. Local Authorities have discretion, due to local rental market conditions, to exceed the maximum rent limit by up to 20%, or up to 50% in the Dublin region for households either in or at immediate risk of homelessness, which is assessed on

a case-by-case basis.

While there is no legislative provision precluding HAP supported households contributing towards their monthly rent, Local Authorities have a responsibility to ensure that tenancies are sustainable and that households in the scheme are in a position to meet the rental costs involved. Increasing the current HAP rent limits could have negative inflationary impacts, leading to a detrimental impact on the wider rental market, including for households who are not receiving HAP support. The Department closely monitors the level of discretion used by Local Authorities, taking into account other sources of data, including the Residential Tenancies Board rent data. It is considered that the current maximum rent limits, together with the additional flexibility available to Local Authorities, are generally adequate to support the effective operation of the HAP scheme. The Programme for Government commits to ensuring that HAP levels are adequate to support vulnerable households, while efforts are ongoing to increase the supply of social housing. The Department continues to keep the operation of the HAP scheme under review.



