

## Developing well-targeted tools for the active inclusion of vulnerable people

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The Irish Government is committed to a coherent strategy for social inclusion based on the lifecycle approach set out in the national partnership agreement *Towards 2016*.

The key role of employment in combating poverty and social exclusion is recognised. Therefore, for people of working age the main aim of the policy in this area is to provide supports for those who are furthest from the labour market to take up employment. In addition for those outside the labour force, it is important that income supports are provided to sustain an acceptable standard of living. It is also recognised that many people with disabilities would like to take up employment if given the opportunity.

Ireland's high level of economic growth in the last decade has resulted in major increases in employment from just 1.47 million people at the end of 1997 to some 2.247 million by September 2007.

However, the current global economic crisis, exacerbated by domestic difficulties, is creating new challenges.

The labour force fell by 36,500 (1.6%) over the year to the second quarter of 2009 which continued a trend from the previous quarter.

There were 1,938,500 people in employment, representing a drop of 174,300 or 8.2% over the year since Q2 2009. The largest decrease in employment was in Construction where full-time employment fell by 92,000 and part-time rose by 6,000. The employment rate is at a level comparable to that recorded in the first half of 1999 with overall employment now below 2 million.

The average Live Register (number of people claiming employment payments) for 2008 was 227,000. This compares with some 162,300 for 2007. At the beginning of January 2008, the Live Register was 170,000 approximately and by the end of December 2008 it had increased to 291,300. At the end of September 2009 the Live Register was 423,600.

Currently almost 750,000 people of working age were in receipt of payments from the State. These were paid mainly in respect of unemployment, illness, caring, maternity, employment supports and one-parent families.

## The Department of Social and Family Affairs – Ireland

The Department of Social and Family Affairs provides income and support services that impact on the lives of almost every person in the State. At the end of 2008 over 1.2 million people each week claim a social welfare payment and, when qualified adults and children are included, a total of almost 1.8 million people benefit from weekly payments. Over 596,000 families receive child benefit payments in respect of over 1.14 million children each month. The total expenditure by the Department in 2008 was €17.7 billion.

In 2008, there was an increase of over 17% in the number of new claims received by the Department over the previous year.

The Departments goals include:

- providing income and other supports to people of working age, including people with disabilities, and to facilitate them in taking up employment, training, education or development opportunities;
- attaining better outcomes in tackling poverty and achieve a more inclusive society through the provision of income and other support services and co-ordinating implementation of Government strategies for social inclusion.

The current income support system is broadly divided into three categories, consisting of contributory payments, based on pay related social insurance (PRSI) contributions, and a non-contributory social assistance version of the contributory payments and other payments, such as child benefit which is a universal payment not dependent on contributions or means. The payments are contingency based and on the social assistance side other payments, such as One-Parent Family Payment (OPFP) which does not have a social insurance equivalent, have been introduced over the years. The result is that there are a number of payments on the social assistance side, with varying eligibility conditions and requirements to seek employment, that are payable to people of working age depending on the contingency faced. These would include people who are ill, unemployed, long term disabled, parenting alone etc. These payments cover over 430,000 people and almost 50,500 adult and 297,000 child dependants.

The current social assistance payments for people of working age consist of seven payments. While there are a number of common elements in the assessment of means and other qualifying conditions each scheme has its own specific set of rules as regards the assessment of means, tapering arrangements and disregards. Other qualifying conditions are also different reflecting the contingency based approach of the social welfare system. The contingencies cover unemployment, illness/disability, lone parenthood, caring, blindness and widowhood.

The contingency based approach to providing payments has allowed the Department to meet changing needs, for example to provide a specific payment to meet a specific need or to alter the conditions within an existing payment to meet changing needs of that specific group. This flexibility has many positive aspects but has also led to a set of very complex rules and conditions across the social assistance sector. It has also resulted in people who experience the same

broad contingency, unemployment for example, being categorised regardless of their distance from the labour market, i.e. unemployed persons with multiple and complex needs are in the same contingency based group as unemployed persons who are highly skilled and nearer to the labour market.

## Activation Policy Measures

The Department operates a variety of supports for social welfare recipients to assist them to access education, training or work. These include, among others, the National Employment Action Plan, an activation programme under the Social and Economic Participation Programme and the Back to Work and Back to Education Schemes.

The **Employment Action Plan (EAP)** is the main welfare-to-work measure under which all persons between the ages of 18 and 65 years who are approaching three months on the Live Register are identified by the Department and referred to FÁS (the National Employment Service) for interview with a view to assisting them enter/re-enter the labour market.

Statistical information on the progress of this initiative can be seen at <http://www.entemp.ie/labour/market/monthlyreports.htm>

### High Supports Process

In January 2003, FÁS (the National Employment Service) introduced a new High Support Process (HSP) for jobseekers who are suffering personal barriers to employment. Components of the HSP are:

- Participants availing of the HSP are assigned to FÁS Employment Services Officers and / or Local Employment Service Mediators under a caseload management system.
- The process is available to long-term participants on the Job Initiative Programme as well as jobseekers referred to FÁS under the National Employment Action Plan who are identified as 'Non-Progression Ready'.
- FÁS Employment Services Officers and LES Mediators provide support as appropriate. Such support is arranged in consultation with external agencies such as the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Health and Children, and the Department of Education and Science.
- A total allowance of €2,200 (maximum) per person is available when sourcing the relevant intervention.

The High Supports Process was broadened in 2007 in order to provide a range of customised and flexible supports, including training to assist jobseekers - including disabled people - to enter the labour market. It is now part of the FÁS menu of programmes that is available for people with disabilities. In addition, protocols and systematic assessment tools are being developed to aid effective decision making in terms of supports required to people with disabilities who wish to enter the labour market.

In addition the *National Development Plan 2007-2013* (NDP) provides for the Social and Economic Participation Programme which involves investment of some €50 million over the lifetime of the NDP. The objective of the programme is to meet the key objective of promoting participation and social inclusion through activation measures aimed at people of working age. Activation, for the Department of Social and Family Affairs therefore, is being placed on a level with service delivery and control as a central part of the core business of the Department.

Department of Social and Family Affairs Facilitators are working nationwide to help social welfare recipients identify appropriate training or development programmes which will enhance the skills that individuals have and ultimately improve their employment chances as well as help them continue to develop personally. They work by either arranging directly with local employers or education institutions or with other Government agencies to seek out the most appropriate programme which will help each individual reach their potential.

The **Back to Work Allowance (BTWA)** scheme is part of the Departments programme of initiatives designed to assist long term unemployed people, lone parents, people with disabilities and other social welfare recipients undertake self employment. The scheme allows for retention of a reducing proportion of the social welfare payment plus secondary benefits over two years.

The **Back to Education Allowance (BTEA)** scheme facilitates the long-term unemployed, lone parents and other social welfare recipients in gaining access to second chance education, either at second or third level, by payment of a weekly allowance. The objective of the scheme is to raise educational qualifications and skills levels among the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged groups in order that they will meet the requirements of the modern labour market.

#### **Mentoring - cf Willing, able, mentoring (WAM) - placement programme for graduates with disabilities**

Mentoring is fundamental to the WAM approach and key to its success. Mentoring is a process through which an experienced person provides support, guidance and encouragement to a less experience person. Every placed candidate on the programme is assigned a mentor within the workplace; someone who works in the same organisation but is not the mentee's direct line manager or supervisor. The mentor fundamentally acts as a sounding board for the mentee and also helps with social integration into the workplace.

Mentoring contracts which outline goals for both mentor and mentee are drawn up prior to the commencement of the placement and signed by both parties in order to provide a structure for the relationship. The majority of those involved in WAM found the mentoring process to be beneficial and worthy of wider application.

#### **Pre-placement training**

Prior to the commencement of placements, training is provided to participating managers, mentors and mentees (placed candidates) on the programme. Training covers topics such as the WAM programme itself, disability awareness, the mentoring model and work ethics. It is during the pre-placement training that mentors and mentees are brought together for the first time to establish the boundaries and ground rules of their new relationship.

For further information see [http://www.ahead.ie/employment\\_wamprogramme\\_howitworks.php](http://www.ahead.ie/employment_wamprogramme_howitworks.php)

### Area Partnerships

First established under the 1989 national social partnership agreement, area partnerships involving local employers, local worker representatives and other local actors were established in areas of high unemployment to develop a multi-faceted response to disadvantage and social exclusion, and particularly long-term unemployment. These partnerships are funded under the National Development Plan's Local Development Social Inclusion Programme. (LDSIP) is a series of measures that are designed to counter disadvantage and to promote equality and social and economic inclusion.

The programme is implemented locally by 37 Integrated Local Development Companies, 17 Urban Partnerships and 2 Employment Pacts. These are not-for-profit companies that target the areas of greatest need in the country, to provide an area-based response to long-term unemployment and to promote social inclusion across three measures – Services for the Unemployed, Community Development and Community Based Youth Initiatives. All implementing bodies are companies limited by guarantee, without share capital

The following disadvantaged individuals and communities are specifically named amongst the **target groups**:

- The long-term unemployed;
- Disadvantaged women;
- Disadvantaged young people;
- Asylum seekers and refugees;
- Travellers;
- Substance abusers;
- Older people;
- Lone parents;
- Disabled people;
- The underemployed;
- Homeless people;
- Young people at risk;
- Ex-prisoners and ex-offenders;
- Low-income farm households;
- Disadvantaged communities living in isolated rural areas or deprived urban areas.

See [www.pobal.ie](http://www.pobal.ie) for further information.

### Local Employment Service

Ireland's National Employment Service (NES) consists of 2 strands, Employment Services operated by FÁS, the National Training and Employment Authority, and the Local Employment Service (LES) which operates mainly through Local Area Partnership Companies on contract from FÁS, the national training and employment authority.

The Local Employment Service (LES) was established on the recommendation of the Task Force on Long-Term Unemployment (1995). The intention behind this initiative is to provide the gateway or access point to the full range of options which should be available to enable a long-term unemployed person return to work. This is based on co-ordinating the services of State agencies and the community sector, so that the focus is on the needs of individual job-seekers.

The LES is two-way - it serves the needs of both the unemployed and employers. The unemployed can avail of mediation, guidance and placement services, while employers have access to a pool of suitably matched unemployed clients. The service was set up in

The objective of the LES is to focus on the provision of services to those most disadvantaged in the labour market as a direct response to the local context within which it operates.

The Local Employment Service Network (LESN) act as the gateway, or access point, to the full range of opportunities which are available to enable a long-term unemployed person enter/re-enter the labour market. The services provided by LESN are tailored to the needs of each individual client and the local environment within which they operate. Services provided include guidance, training, education and employment supports and are made available through a network of Contact Points.

Key Services include:

- **Labour Market information:** Provision of information and advise on areas that relate to the client labour market situation, such as welfare-to-work issues, education, employment and training opportunities, including referral to related services.
- **Mediation and Guidance:** Registration and orientation; provision of intensive personalised guidance leading to development of a career path plan; career counselling; referral to other LESNs or third party agencies; assistance with securing active labour market programmes and employment; post-placement supports.
- **Group Guidance:** Provision of tailored options to meet the needs of a specific client group.
- **Client-Employer Liaison:** Contact with employers, identification of vacancies suited to clients and potential training needs; advocating on behalf of clients; information and referral to job vacancies.
- **Post-Employment Programme Assistance:** Provision of the full range of LESN supports to persons experiencing difficulty in accessing employment from labour market programmes.
- **Post-Training/Education Programme Assistance:** Provision of the full range of LESN supports to persons experiencing difficulty in accessing employment from employment related training or education.

The LES operates through a network of Offices and outreach centres located in 25 designated disadvantaged areas.

## People with Illnesses/Disabilities

### Context:

#### Nos. of recipients of payments

At the end of 2008, some 164,000 people were in receipt of weekly disability-related payments, with a further 17,500 qualified adults and almost 40,400 qualified children benefiting from these payments, giving a total of some 221,900 beneficiaries. Between December 2007 and December 2008 the total number of recipients of disability-related schemes increased by over 4%.

#### National Disability Strategy

A National Disability Strategy was launched by the Irish Government in 2004. A key feature of the Strategy is the preparation under the Disability Act 2005 of statutory plans on disability (Sectoral Plans) by six Government Departments, covering, inter alia, social security; employment; and disability care services, which have to be approved by Parliament. The three Government Departments in these areas - the Departments of Social and Family Affairs, Enterprise Trade and Employment, and Health and Children - are legally obliged to address co-operation between one another on employment issues in their respective Sectoral Plans.

In July 2006 the Department of Social and Family Affairs launched its Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005, which is aimed at developing services that not only give people with disabilities financial security but also encourage maximum participation in society. One of the objectives of the plan is to "engage meaningfully with persons of working age, particularly marginalised groups and provide services directly and in co-operation with other relevant agencies to encourage and support these people in taking up relevant work, training and education or development opportunities".

It was in the context of the wider policy environment, trends and developments influencing future direction of training and employment policy for people with disabilities that in December 2006 the Department applied for and obtained funding under the European Social Fund, Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013.

The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment Sectoral Plan on disability provides for the development of a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. Work is proceeding on this Strategy on a cross-Departmental basis, and guided by an advisory Forum on employment of people with disabilities which includes the relevant Departments and state agencies, disability representative organisations, disability service providers, the supported employment provider umbrella body, the social partners and the National Disability Authority.

## Disability Activation Project

The Disability Activation Project was approved for funding under the new European Social Fund Human Capital Investment Operational Programme 2007-2013. The high-level objective of the Project is to design and implement a comprehensive employment strategy based on individual case management that will have the capacity to increase the employment rate of people with disabilities. The Project, commenced in 2008 with a pilot in the Midlands, aims to provide a service for people with disabilities or long-term illness to encourage them to consider taking up education or training with a view to returning to employment.

During 2008, people who were receiving illness or disability related payments in the pilot area were contacted by the new service and individualised plans were drawn up to enable them access the programme. These progression plans are geared towards progressing into education, training and exploring employment opportunities which will lead to an improved quality of life. A key feature of this new service is the new approach to interagency co-operation.

## National Economic and Social Forum project on those distant from the labour market

The National Economic and Social Forum in 2006 published a report, which has helped inform the development of policy, entitled Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market, focusing in particular on measures to support those who are most distant from the labour market,. This can be downloaded as Report no. 33 from this link <http://www.nesf.ie/dynamic/pdfs/No-33-Creating-a-More-Inclusive-Labour-Market.pdf>

## Relevance of the Norwegian example of good practice to the situation in Ireland include some of the following issues that have arisen in Ireland

- The task of examining the various data bases to select potential clients for the Activation programme has proved to be onerous and time consuming.
- Details of the nature of the disabilities and a persons capacity to engage are not readily available from current systems.
- To date of the people with disabilities interviewed while the majority express the desire to enter or return to the labour force a large percentage feel unable to do so at the time of interview due to a variety of difficulties.
- It is quite evident that the person's health condition is but one of the inhibitors. Others include, low self esteem, redundant skills, lack of work experience, low educational achievements, depression, family circumstances, finances, benefits traps, availability of work locally, etc.

- Engaging with employers to ensure that the benefits of enhanced supply will result in transitions to sustainable employment on the part of people with disabilities. This is a particular area of interest for the Irish situation as not much progress has been made in this area to date in the project.

## Customer Profiling

In Ireland a new policy initiative aimed at better targeting and earlier intervention with those who need it most is being progressed. The Department of Social and Family Affairs has developed a profiling model in conjunction with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). The model is stated to be highly accurate by international standards. Customer profiling will provide a mechanism for segmentation of the customer base which will facilitate early, targeted interventions, with those who need them most. This approach will lead to efficient and effective focusing of resources and programme savings. Legislative provision for collection and use of profile information is contained in the SW Pensions Act 2009. The introduction of customer profiling in Ireland has been strongly recommended by the OECD.

The profiling system will use a set of characteristics, combined with coefficients reflecting their relative importance, to statistically calculate the probability of an unemployed person finding work early, or becoming long-term unemployed. Unemployed claimants will be selected for (potentially) a variety of intervention regimes based on their profile score. To achieve this, certain characteristics must be captured at claim stage and linked to relevant characteristics already held or captured as part of the existing claim process. Cross-referencing with a defined set of coefficients provides the basis for calculating individual profile scores. Based on these scores, those with pre-determined probability levels of becoming long-term unemployed can be selected from earlier target interventions.

## References

Fitzgerald E, Ingoldsby B and Daly F, (2000) Solving Long term unemployment in Dublin Dublin: Dublin Employment Pact

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