

# Social Policy Update

## December 2017

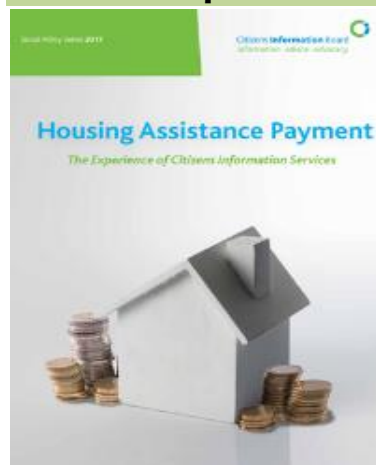
Social Policy Update focuses on the social policy work of CIB and our delivery services throughout the country. It also provides information on national social policy news and developments.

### Contents

<b>CIB Social Policy and Research News</b>	1 - 4
<i>HAP social policy report, submissions on home care services, online access issues, digitalisation and Consumer Protection Code, precarious work and zero hour contracts - changes in employment legislation, mortgage arrears report;</i>	
<b>On the Ground: Social policy feedback from delivery services</b>	5 - 6
<i>Social Policy Returns from services October &amp; November 2017, FIS assessments;</i>	
<b>In the Oireachtas</b>	7 - 8
<i>Medical card eligibility &amp; persons with disabilities, Working Family Payment, Social Insurance Data;</i>	
<b>Policy News, Resources and Opinion</b>	9 - 10
<i>Report on migration and asylum 2016, Poverty and disability, UNCRPD ratification, ESRI report on Budget 2018</i>	

## CIB Social Policy and Research News

### CIB developments and submissions



#### Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) – The experience of CIBs

In November 2017, CIB published a research report on the experience of CIBs in their dealings with the Housing Assistance Payment as it was rolled out in Local Authority areas across the country during 2016 and 2017. This study, which was commissioned by the CIB and undertaken by researchers Dr. Kathy Walsh and Brian Harvey, reflects the experiences of services in providing information, advice and advocacy in relation to the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) scheme within the wider social housing context. The research is in line with CIB's remit to provide policy feedback and highlight issues that are of concern to users of the services it supports and the report identifies some of the key issues with the HAP scheme as follows:-

- The limited stock of private rented accommodation and, specifically, of affordable accommodation;
- The need to make information on HAP available directly to potential tenants and ensure that these HAP tenants are fully aware of the specific conditions imposed by HAP;
- The recognition that some landlords (for a variety of reasons) are reluctant to participate in HAP;
- The importance of continuing to find ways to support tenants to deal with the issue of landlords requiring top-up payments;
- The need to provide more information on HAP to potential landlords;
- The continuing need for discretion, with maximum rent limits in certain cases;

The report stated that HAP is a valuable housing initiative which helps to address the housing needs of those in low income employment as well as those reliant on social welfare. It also concluded that the scheme works best in local authority areas and locations where there is a reasonable stock of private rental accommodation, but less well in locations where there is a high demand for rental accommodation - which, in turn, affords landlords the option to pick and choose their tenants, sometimes leaving vulnerable HAP applicants in particular with limited access to rental accommodation. Copies of the report have been circulated to services nationwide and it is also published on CIB's website [here](#).

## Submission on Improving Home Care Services in Ireland

In October 2017, CIB responded to a Consultation Questionnaire issued by the Department of Health in relation to the development of a new statutory scheme and system of regulation for home care services. The questionnaire sought responses on issues such as the positive aspects of the current system of provision through Home Care Packages and its integration with primary care and community services, hospitals and informal carers. It also sought views on broader issues in relation to home care services such as funding models, the provision of information, standardisation and quality standards.

The CIB response highlighted the challenges that have been reported to CIBs by people with disabilities and older people in getting the supports that they need to live at home. The submission identified the many positive aspects of home care provision, whilst noting that the alternatives would be either increased pressure on carers and/ or the person with care needs having to move into long-term residential care. The submission suggested that the linkages between hospitals and community health services are underdeveloped and that the absence of legislative entitlement and inadequate resources can result in carers feeling overwhelmed by their caring role. In the context of a future funding model, the submission argued for a shared funding approach between the individual and the State and for equality of access to funding for home care and nursing home care, with some inbuilt bias for home care.

Against the backdrop of this Department-led consultation, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health hosted a number of sessions in November 2017 in relation to the matter of rights, resources and regulation of home care services. At the hearings, Department of Health officials outlined plans for the new home care scheme stating that “the Department is of the view that a stand-alone funding scheme designed specifically for home care is needed, together with an effective system of regulation ... the new scheme will improve access to home care in an affordable and sustainable way. It will provide transparency around service allocation and individuals’ eligibility for services, and ensure that the system operates in a consistent and fair manner across the country. The scheme will also result in more effective integration with other health supports including nursing, therapies, and other primary care services. A system of regulation will be designed to ensure public confidence in the standard of the services provided, and to bring Ireland in line with best international practice.” Reports from these Oireachtas sessions can be accessed [here](#).

### Online access issues and public services

- **Revenue online access**

Over the course of the summer period, CIB received a significant level of feedback from services throughout the country in respect of changes for Revenue customers in how they access Revenue services in order to deal with their routine tax affairs. In particular, services have been highlighting difficulties that their clients have been experiencing with the new requirements around online access to Revenue services – with the myAccount facility now the preferred single access point for all of Revenue’s secure online services. Coupled with this change is the requirement that Revenue customers make an appointment in order to visit the regional/ local offices to speak directly with Revenue staff, thus eliminating the option for drop-in consultations.

The CIB social policy team have used this valuable feedback and the case studies – logged by information staff through the SPR feedback facility on Oyster - to draft a focussed submission on the issue, to be forwarded to Revenue. The submission identifies the disproportionate impact that these new requirements have on older people with limited IT skills, difficulties for people who have literacy or English language issues, people living in rural areas (with limited broadband access) and people with disabilities. Many of the cases being reported by CIBs indicate difficulties for people who have recently taken up work and who are paying emergency tax, people claiming tax reliefs such as medical expenses or fuel grants, people with disabilities claiming various reliefs that

are available to them (such as on aids and appliances, or under the Disabled Drivers Scheme) or – at a more basic level - people seeking to update or review their records.

Services will be informed of any response received from Revenue in relation to these matters.

- **Other online access issues**

Following on from the submission that CIB made to DEASP in September regarding difficulties for clients in accessing their **PRSI Contribution Statements** through MyWelfare.ie, the Department has re-instated the advice on its website that people can access their records by calling their Customer Service Line. This mode of access has been highlighted on the Department's website page [here](#) which provides information for people on how to access their Social Insurance Contribution Record (see also the relevant Parliamentary Question, page 8 below). This is a good indication that the CIB/CIS views on the matter of 'online access only' have been taken on board. CIB has also received confirmation from the Department that **“provision is made for people not in a position to use the online facility to request a statement by phoning (01) 4715898 or LoCall 1890 690 690.”** The CIB social policy team are continuing to monitor all SPRs in relation to the difficulties caused by online access and the use of this alternative facility for requesting records.

Within the broader context of the move to online access it is worth noting that CIB highlighted the difficulties presented for clients in accessing public services in two recent submissions – specifically in a formal response to the DEASP's *Statement of Strategy 2017-2020* and also in a submission on the development of a new framework to improve and develop public services entitled *“Our Public Service 2020: Development and Innovation Framework”* (a successor to the 2014-2016 Reform Plan, being led by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform).

### **Digitalisation and the Consumer Protection Code**

In October 2017, MABS prepared a submission in response to a Discussion Paper from the Central Bank on digitalisation and the Consumer Protection Code. The Discussion Paper, which was published in June 2017 as part of a four month consultative process, set out the potential risks to consumer protection from digitalisation and went on to examine where consumer benefits and risks from digitalisation most arise – that is, the impact on access to financial services, the provision of information, suitability requirements, claims and complaints handling and the retention of consumer records.

The submission noted that the extensive expertise gained by MABS in terms of consumer protection comes from the day-to-day application of the Consumer Protection Code (the Code) in complex casework with clients and also relevant work with organisations such as FLAC and Community Law and Mediation. The submission focuses on the MABS experience of the Consumer Protection Code and of innovation in financial services. It also looks at the associated impacts on MABS client groups and low income consumers and whether the existing protections need to be enhanced or adapted in specific areas. MABS argue that fundamental cultural change is also required in the manner in which essential financial products and services are offered to all Irish consumers. The submission states that MABS would like to see the definition of 'vulnerable consumers' extended to include a reference to people who are living on a low income/in poverty and would also like to see further access by people on low incomes to more affordable financial services enabled by digitalisation.

The Central Bank has stated that the feedback to this Discussion Paper will inform its consideration of any potential future policy outputs in the area of consumer protection and that it will bring forward a consultation paper in 2018 on foot of this process.

### **Changes in employment legislation on precarious work and zero hour contracts**

In December 2017, Minister Regina Doherty announced the publication of the *Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2017*, which aims to improve employment protection measures for people who are engaged in

what is considered to be precarious work (such as those on insecure work contracts or variable working hours). The Bill has been drafted following on from a public consultation in 2016, based around a study by the University of Limerick on the prevalence of zero hour and low hour contracts. CIB made a submission to this consultation (using the considerable amount of feedback from delivery services around this issue) noting that “queries on employment rights and conditions suggest that people who seek information and advice in relation to employment protection matters are generally non-unionised employees, people in low-paid jobs, part-time workers and people working for smaller employers”. Amongst other measures, the Bill proposes that five key terms of employment must be provided to the employee within five days of starting work for that employer (including the name and address of the employer, their pay and their hours of work). It also prohibits zero hour contracts in most circumstances and provides for a new minimum payment for low-paid workers who may be called in to work but sent home again without the promised work – concerns which had been reflected in the feedback from information services. In placing the Bill before the Oireachtas, Minister Doherty noted that the measures in the legislation will be supported by strong anti-penalisation provisions for employees who invoke their rights under this legislation (and can be pursued through the Workplace Relations Commission). It is expected that the Bill will move to Second Stage in the Oireachtas in the New Year.

### **Mortgage arrears among South Mayo MABS’ clients**



In December 2017, South Mayo MABS launched a research report which provided an analysis of mortgage arrears amongst their clients in South Mayo. The study, which was conducted by Dr. Stuart Stamp of Maynooth University and Paul Joyce (FLAC), provided follow-up (and a comparative analysis) to their 2016 report entitled “*An analysis of mortgage arrears among South Mayo MABS clients*”. The research aimed to highlight how this sample of households in longer-term mortgage arrears (50 in number) had fared in light of emerging policy developments and the extent to which arrears had been resolved in the intervening 16 month period.

The findings suggest that although progress has been made, insecurity around the family home continues to be a major issue among these South Mayo MABS clients, which were chosen in 2016 to represent the Service’s mortgaged client base overall. It identified three particular groups among the cohort – about one third of client households who were now reasonably secure in terms of their family homes (and who were in “better circumstances” to begin with), just under one quarter who were considered to be at imminent or likely risk of losing their homes in the foreseeable future and the remainder who were experiencing housing insecurity to varying degrees (with the eventual outcome still uncertain). These last two groups were found to have drawn down their mortgages closest to the ‘Crash’, were offered the longest repayment terms and highest LTV’s, and hence more prone towards negative equity post-Crash. The recipients were the youngest in age, the least financially established at the time, and thereby in receipt of lower incomes from more precarious sources. The study concludes with the suggestion that the “framework for engagement” policy approach employed to date tends to favour those in better circumstances at the outset and to further marginalise those disadvantaged to begin with. On this basis, it argues that the State needs to intervene more assertively with viable resolutions within the context of the ongoing housing crisis.

### **South Galway MABS – research participation**

During 2017, South Galway MABS engaged with an NUI Galway Masters student by way of allowing access to a number of MABS clients to complete a thesis entitled “*Financialization: Its impact on homeowners in Galway City and County*”. This study aimed to investigate the impact of financialization in the housing sector in Ireland – and defined ‘financialization’ as a process whereby financial markets, financial institutions and financial elites gain greater influence over economic policy and economic outcomes. It examined the developments which led to homeowners entering mortgage arrears, the length of their arrears and the subsequent treatment by their lenders or mortgage holders.

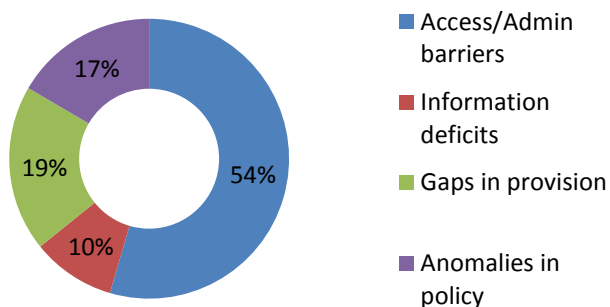
# On the Ground: feedback from CISs and CIPS

This section features an overview of recent social policy returns from CISs and CIPS. The views expressed are those of the individual services.

## Social Policy Returns: October & November 2017

During October and November 2017, CIB received a combined total of 796 Social Policy Returns (SPRs) from CISs (748) and CIPS (48). This represents an increase of 11% on the number of SPRs submitted during the same period in 2016.

### Nature of policy issue



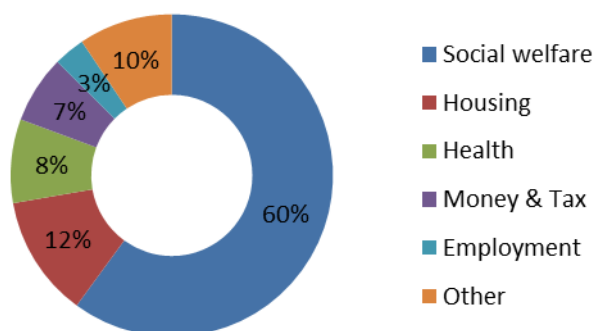
Of these 796 Returns, information providers classified 64% as operational issues (that is, specific difficulties with ‘access barriers’ and ‘information deficits’) and in 36% of the Returns, information providers considered that the cases demonstrated difficulties caused by policies, legislation or guidelines - that is, either ‘anomalies in policy’ or ‘gaps in provision’. This broad classification of policy issues indicates that there has been a continuing increase in the SPRs concerning access barriers in 2017. Much of this increase is in the areas of social welfare, health and money and tax.

The SPRs relating to the *Social Welfare* category increased particularly during October and November, with the specific sub-categories of PRSI Records and Pensions accounting for much of this increase.

The five most-reported specific benefits or payments that were logged during this two month period were:-

1. **Jobseeker’s Allowance:** 46 SPRs
2. **PRSI Records:** 45 SPRs
3. **Medical Card:** 43 SPRs
4. **State Pension (Contributory):** 36 SPRs
5. **HAP:** 31 SPRs

### SPRs - main query categories



The issues that were reported in relation to **Jobseeker’s Allowance** were concerned equally with both administrative and policy issues – with the main administrative issues being difficulties making contact with local Intreo offices, difficulties for some applicants (particularly those with limited literacy or language skills) in filling out multiple versions of application forms, and information deficits (such as the lack of promotion of SWA as a temporary payment and incorrect information being provided to applicants). The substantive policy issues highlighted by services included difficulties caused by the reduced rate of payment for the under-26s, the assessment of an applicant’s means when their spouse is self-employed (when no earnings disregard is applied) and services continue to report on cases where the three-day rule acts as a disincentive to take up work.

**Medical card** concerns continue to account for the majority of the SPRs submitted within the Health category. Most of these referred to administrative difficulties for clients in the application, review or renewal process – in particular, with the online renewal/ application process (many of these issues were detailed in the October edition of Social Policy Update).

The reports that were submitted by services in relation to the **HAP** payment were mainly concerned with the HAP rental limits and the availability of suitable accommodation within these limits. Services also noted an apparent reluctance of some landlords to engage with the HAP scheme, difficulties for some clients who were moving from Rent Supplement to HAP (in terms of the arrears that arise before approval is granted for the HAP scheme) and the lengthy administrative processing time involved in accessing social housing waiting lists in many local authority areas.

## Focus on social policy work at local level

### Family Income Supplement assessments

In this issue of Social Policy Update, we profile some policy work that Co Meath CIS has engaged in with clients around the assessment for the Family Income Supplement. We are grateful to the service for sharing this work – in the form of the case study highlighted below - and expect that it will be of interest and relevance to other services.

*“Co Meath CIS had been contacted by a male client regarding his FIS renewal. His FIS had been renewed and the amount he was receiving had been significantly reduced. His renewal date was October. The FIS section had used his P60 to calculate his average weekly wage, whereas recent payslips and year-to-date figures showed that his current weekly wage was significantly less than the previous year, which was what was showing on the P60. He had sent a handwritten letter to the FIS section alerting them to this, and they responded by passing it to the appeals office, which then passed it back to FIS. We assisted this client by drafting a review letter to FIS and sent it by email. They replied saying it had already been reviewed and would not be looked at again and did not engage further.*

*We forwarded an appeal to the appeals office, which was sent back to FIS and we were informed that if we were not happy with the outcome from FIS we could then contact the appeals office again. The FIS section did not change their decision, so it went back to the appeals office. We submitted detailed information including extracts from the legislation arguing that either a P60 or year-to-date figures could be used and that there seemed to be a tendency to use the method that would result in a lesser amount to the client. The appeal was allowed on a summary decision and the client received the higher rate and arrears.*

*However, we have noticed since, that a number of clients coming into the service regarding their FIS renewals are having their amount calculated using whichever method is more favourable to the client. In fact the same client returned with his next renewal and this time the P60 calculation was more in his favour and that was the method that was used. In that same week, another client had their calculation done using year to date figures which was more in their favour. Despite ongoing challenges, it is heartening to see this small change which is of benefit to the client”.*

If your service is engaged in any locally-based social policy initiatives that you feel may be of relevance or interest to other services, please feel free to contact Social Policy Executive, Bernie Kennedy in the Kilkenny office at 0761 07 9624 or at [bernadette.kennedy@ciboard.ie](mailto:bernadette.kennedy@ciboard.ie), as we would like to highlight this important work in our Social Policy Update.

This section looks at policy-related questions and debates in the Oireachtas, with a particular focus on issues currently arising in social policy feedback from Citizens Information Services. The text may be edited. For the full text of any PQs/debates featured here, go to [www.oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie) \*

## Medical card eligibility & persons with disabilities [PQ 38950/17; 11 September 2017]

**Deputy Margaret Murphy O'Mahony** (Fianna Fáil, Cork South West) asked the Minister for Health for his plans “to review medical card eligibility criteria for persons with disabilities in order to facilitate their participation in the workforce.”

In response **Minister Simon Harris** (Fine Gael, Wicklow) stated that “an interdepartmental ‘Make Work Pay’ group was set up under the Government’s comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities. This group was independently chaired by Professor Frances Ruane and I thank her for the wonderful work she did. The group’s report sets out findings and recommendations, some of which deal with the potential loss of a medical card, which can act as a barrier to take-up of employment for persons with disabilities who wish to engage in work and have the capacity to do so. When that report was published, I was struck by the concern people with a disability had about losing the medical card. Be it a real or perceived concern, it was one of the biggest barriers in many cases. The report made two principal recommendations regarding medical cards and people with disabilities. The first was to raise the medical card income disregard from its current level of €120 per week for people on Disability Allowance or on Partial Capacity Benefit. I am strongly committed to the implementation of this recommendation. To that end, my Department is working with the HSE and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection in order to assess the number of people who would stand to benefit under this measure and, most importantly, to examine the best administrative route to implementing a change in the earnings disregard. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that this work is expected to be completed shortly and it is my intention to implement the recommendation by the end of 2017. The second recommendation was that the medical card guidelines be amended to remove a requirement that employment be of a “rehabilitative nature” in order for the associated income to be disregarded from the calculation of income when a person with a disability is being assessed for a medical card. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that this recommendation has also been accepted and is being implemented by the HSE”.

## Working Family Payment [PQ 43728/17; 2017]

**Deputy Willie O’Dea** (Fianna Fáil, Limerick) asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection “if she is no longer planning on introducing a working family payment as committed to in the programme for Government in view of the fact that the Government has retained family income supplement as the working family payment; if so, the rationale behind this; her plans to reform the operation of FIS in terms of the number of hours required to be worked in order to receive this payment”.

**Minister Regina Doherty** (Fine Gael, Meath East) stated that “the Department’s approach to developing the working family payment was guided by two principles. First, that it should ensure that work pays, and second, that it should have a positive effect on reducing child poverty. To advance the commitment contained in the Programme for Partnership Government, the Department established an internal working group and an Inter-Departmental Group of the relevant Government Departments to consider proposals. As part of this process the Department carried out an extensive analysis of its existing range of supports that are aimed at assisting individuals to take up employment. The analysis showed the existing in-work supports are very effective, and work well in assisting individuals make the transition from unemployment into employment. These findings are confirmed by the ESRI’s research into the Department’s existing in-work measures, and Eurostat figures, which show that the parental in-work poverty rate in Ireland is 5.8%, significantly below the EU 28 average of

11.2%..... Consequently, the analysis carried out by the working group did not support the need for the establishment of a new scheme. In the context of Budget 2018 it was decided to re-designate the Family Income Supplement (FIS) scheme as the Working Family Payment (WFP), which will bring it more visibility as a payment aimed specifically at working families. The new name better reflects the nature of the payment and the Department would encourage families to look into seeing if they are eligible for the payment.

In relation to the working hours requirement associated with qualification for payment of the WFP, a person must be engaged in full-time insurable employment which is expected to last for at least 3 months and be working for a minimum of 38 hours per fortnight or 19 hours per week. This “hours worked” eligibility criterion has been reduced significantly since the introduction of the scheme in 1984, from 30 hours per week to 19 hours per week in 1996. It is important, however, to ensure that the WFP does not inadvertently subsidise unsustainably low earnings or encourage employers to offer minimal hours of employment. For low-income workers with less than the minimum hours of employment for the WFP and working on a casual basis up to and including 3 days per week, the jobseeker’s allowance scheme provide in-work income support through daily disregards and tapered withdrawal of payments. Individuals on jobseeker’s benefit can also work up to 3 days per week. For each day they work they lose a proportionate reduction in their jobseeker’s benefit payment. If a person cannot meet the 19 hours WFP threshold the Department offers a number of other schemes, which can provide income support that can be combined with earnings from employment, subject to each individual’s circumstances. These include jobseekers allowance and benefit (which permit an element of casual work), disability allowance, carer’s allowance, the one-parent family payment, jobseeker’s transitional payment and the part-time job incentive scheme. Combined, the Department provides an extensive system of social welfare support, which facilitates recipients taking up some employment while maintaining their social welfare payment. Given all of the above there are no plans to reform the operation of the WFP in terms of the number of hours work required to qualify for payment”.

### **Social Insurance Data [PQ 47391/17; 2017]**

**Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** (Fianna Fáil, Galway West) asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection “if contributions records requested by Deputies on behalf of persons who have no broadband or who are not familiar with computers will continue to issue to persons in the interest of equality and fairness; and if she will make a statement on the matter”.

**Minister Regina Doherty** (Fine Gael, Meath East) responded saying that “the Department is committed to providing a contribution record statement to all customers who require one and will provide this in written copy by phone request in the case of customers who are not in a position to use the online facility. However, the main facility for accessing social insurance contribution statements is now online, via the MyWelfare.ie application. This service was introduced on 27 January 2017; and details of how to register are available at: <https://www.mygov.ie/en-IE/GettingStarted/>. The online application has been designed to ensure that all customers can access their records directly and conveniently; and do so in a much shorter timeframe than was previously possible. Registering for MyWelfare.ie also enables a customer to apply online for payments including jobseeker's and maternity/paternity benefit; to close claims for payments, to make appointments, view claims and benefits information; update their address and to request payment statements. Some 800/850 customers per week currently engage successfully with the service to request copies of their record; and this number is increasing on a month-by-month basis. The new service is an efficient and secure service and also allows for the automated processing of requests, which as you will understand, allows the Department to concentrate its resources on maintaining and updating social insurance records for customers. As set out at the outset, any customer who has a difficulty engaging with the MyWelfare service can contact the Department’s customer service team on 1890 690 690 or 01 4715898 for assistance. The customer service team is available to assist from 9am to 5pm and is also open during lunchtime”.



# Policy News, Resources and Opinion

This section features developments, resources, events and opinions likely to be of interest to those engaged in policy work.

CIB does not endorse or otherwise any of the policy positions featured.

## Annual policy report on migration and asylum 2016



In November 2017, the ESRI published the Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2016 (in line with its role as Irish National Contact Point of the European Migration Network). This report provides an overview of trends and policy developments in the area of asylum and migration during 2016 in Ireland. It pulls together information on a wide range of migration-related issues including statistics on migration, details of legislative developments and administrative changes, relevant case law, Irish integration strategy as well as highlighting developments in the international protection process, changes to borders and visa policies, human trafficking, and citizenship and naturalisation trends.

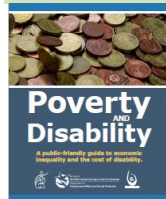
The report stated that the number of citizens from non-EU countries legally living here at the end of 2016 rose to over 115,000 (compared to 114,000 at the end of 2015). The top five nationalities (accounting for 48% of all people registered) were Brazil (13%), India (12%), China (9%), USA (7%) and Pakistan (6%).

It also highlighted the following key statistics:

- The number of newly arriving immigrants increased year-on-year to 84,600 at April 2017 from 82,300 at end April 2016. Non-EU nationals represented 35% of this total, as of April 2017;
- Returning Irish nationals were the largest immigrant group in the year to April 2017;
- Approximately 4,127 persons were refused entry to Ireland at the external borders. Of these, 396 were subsequently admitted to pursue a protection application;
- A total of 2,244 applications for refugee status were received in 2016, a drop of 32% from 2015 (3,276);
- The overall grant rate for cases at first instance (by the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner – ORAC) was 16.8% in 2016. The Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) received 1,559 new appeals from negative determinations of refugee status during the year and issued decisions in 539 cases, with ORAC's original recommendation affirmed in 351 cases.

The report also noted a number of legislative and administrative changes during 2016 – in particular, the commencement of the International Protection Act 2015 and the initiation of the single application procedure under the Act, which came into operation in December 2016. In addition to this, the International Protection Office (IPO) replaced the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal was replaced by the International Protection Appeals Tribunal. An online appointments system for all registrations at the Registration Office in Dublin was also introduced in September 2016, as was an electronic Employment Permits Online System (EPOS). The report can be accessed on the ESRI website [here](#).

## Poverty and disability



In November 2017, Minister Regina Doherty launched an information booklet which had been prepared by Inclusion Ireland called '*Poverty and Disability; A public-friendly guide to economic inequality and the cost of disability*'. Inclusion Ireland had produced the booklet in order to raise awareness and provide information about the issue of poverty and disability for people with intellectual and other disabilities, and for their families, carers and supporters.

The booklet, which was published to mark the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, looks at the cost of disability and at the inequalities that people with disabilities experience due to the higher costs associated with their disability. It highlights the role that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) could play in Ireland in the context of enforcing the right to a standard of living (see item below) and it also lays out the extra direct and indirect costs of living for people with disabilities. The guide can be accessed [here](#).

### **Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities**

On 5 December 2017, Minister Finian McGrath stated (in response to a Parliamentary Question) that “the Cabinet has agreed to formally ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities....We will be returning to this at the next Government meeting to put the formal process in train and I am confident that all the necessary administrative processes will be completed within a few weeks....I also welcome the progress made in recent weeks and months on the drafting of legislation by the Department of Health on the deprivation of liberty. It is a positive development and testament to the fact that genuine progress on meeting the needs and rights of people with disabilities is being made. Deprivation of liberty is a sensitive and important matter which goes to the heart of fundamental freedoms and human rights. Legislative proposals in this area will have significant implications for families, the operation of the health services and the courts. It is important the people fully understand what is being proposed. In this regard, I will be inviting submissions from stakeholders and the general public.

We are making good progress in making all of the Convention's requirements operational in Ireland in an appropriate manner. Considerable progress has been made to overcome the remaining legislative barriers to Ireland's full implementation of the Convention as set out in the 2015 roadmap. The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 was signed into law on 30 December 2015 and is a comprehensive reform of the law on decision-making capacity. Section 5 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993 was reformed through a 2017 Act of the same name to facilitate the full participation in family life of persons with intellectual disabilities and the full expression of their human rights. There are two further priority implementation issues. These are the enactment of the Disability (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2016 and the commencement of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 which requires the Decision Support Service to be operational and ready to roll out the new decision-making support options”.

### **Budget 2018: Impact of Tax and Welfare Policies**



In December 2017, the ESRI published a research paper which examined the distributional impact of the tax and welfare changes that were introduced in Budget 2018. The analysis uses SWITCH, the ESRI tax-benefit model, which is based on data gathered by the CSO for almost 8,000 households in its nationally representative Survey of Income and Living Conditions. This model, the ESRI suggests “provides good coverage of the main policy changes in Budget 2018” – although it noted also that “two aspects of policy which are not included in the current analysis: the Housing Assistance Payment and the Affordable Childcare Subsidy scheme. Separate reports on both of these topics are in train”. The study was a relative analysis which focused on the impact of the specific tax and welfare changes as proposed in the budget compared to a “distributionally neutral” budget, that is, one which indexed tax and welfare payments in line with expected wage growth (about 3 per cent in 2018). This analysis found that the 2018 budget provisions led to small losses for all income groups (when compared to the benchmark of a neutral budget) - with the average loss at 0.4%. When the budget measures were broken down by family type, the analysis found that this average loss of 0.4% affected about one-third of families, whilst some four out of ten families – mainly single people in employment – have smaller losses of 0.1% - 0.2%. Greater losses (of 0.6% - 0.7%) are experienced by single earner couples with children, retired couples and a group including those outside the labour force (specifically students and those with a disability). The full text for the assessment can be accessed [here](#).