

# Social Policy Update

## February 2018

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.

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## CIB Social Policy and Research News

### CIB developments and submissions

#### Launch of CIB research report on Information Needs of the Deaf Community



Over two thirds of Deaf people surveyed face difficulty accessing public information on their rights. This is one of the findings in the CIB research report on information provision and access to public and social services for the Deaf community, which was launched by the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, Regina Doherty in CIB on 26 February 2018.

This study - commissioned by CIB and undertaken by researchers Tom Martin and Associates - captures the experiences of the Deaf Community in accessing public and social services. The report – which was overseen by a Steering Group comprised of relevant stakeholders such as SLIS, DeafHear, Irish Deaf Society, Deaf Village Ireland, CIB and Dublin North West CIS - shows how members of the Deaf Community have faced severe difficulties in accessing public information in their preferred language - Irish Sign Language (ISL) - and reveals the impact of these barriers on the realisation of their rights. The research found that 78% of survey respondents felt that equality and disability legislation had not improved access to public information and services for the Deaf Community and 63% did not know how to make a complaint to public bodies, if they felt they were being discriminated against.



Minister Regina Doherty and members of the Steering Group at the launch

The Deaf Community in Ireland has over 5,000 Irish sign language users and a wider community of over 40,000 users. This research is both timely and relevant in the context of the recent (December 2017) passing of the Irish Sign Language Act 2017 which recognises ISL as an official language. Amongst other measures, the Bill formally recognises ISL and the rights of users when accessing state services and in court proceedings. While some of the recommendations included in the report are covered in the new legislation, the insights provided in the research (which was based on the lived experience and perspectives of the Deaf Community, as well as other key stakeholders) provide an important point of reference for implementing the new legislation.

The report states that legal recognition of ISL is an important step towards the realisation by wider society that ISL is not just a means used to overcome a disability but is, in fact, an integral part of the unique linguistic and cultural identity shared by the Deaf Community. The new legislation underpins the fact that ISL is an indigenous language in its own right used by a sizeable minority in the State and acknowledges the right of people to use ISL as their language of choice. This message is a central theme of the research and is strongly reflected in the report. The research states that the new legislation is just the start and not the end of the journey for the Deaf Community generally - and for ISL users in particular. Legal rights for ISL users, improved access to public services through ISL, better education for deaf children, suitable third level education and training for deaf adults and quality interpretive services are laid out by the report as important measures on this journey towards full participation of the Deaf Community. The Report can be accessed on the CIB website [here](#).

### **Submission on Policing**

The Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland was established by Government in May 2017, with the aim of reviewing the role, structures, management and ethos of policing in Ireland. As part of a wide-ranging public consultation process, the Commission sought the views of interested parties, for which CIB prepared a submission in January 2018. The submission responded to three central questions posed by the consultation in the context of the current aspects of policing in Ireland – namely, what should be valued, what should be improved and what should be changed. The insights provided were based on the experience that CIB delivery services have in reaching out to vulnerable and marginalised groups in Irish society - such as people on low incomes who are living in deprived communities, people with disabilities and mental health difficulties, Travellers, and new communities/ immigrants. The submission went on to highlight specific areas which CIB felt require additional attention from An Garda Síochána – dealing with illegal moneylenders, access to policing by the Deaf Community, engaging marginalised and new communities, and helping victims of abuse (with specific mention of institutional abuse). The Commission is expected to publish a completed report in September 2018.

### **Consultation on domestic waste collection - Competition and Consumer Protection Commission**



In response to the recent changes in the domestic waste collection landscape, the Government has asked the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to conduct an independent study of the sector. In the context of this study, representatives from CIB and MABS met with the CCPC and highlighted the issues and difficulties that have been raised by people who have been seeking information, advice and assistance from their services in relation to domestic waste collection. These concerns were focussed around affordability and increased costs, lack of competition amongst private operators, coverage, standards of customer service, confusion amongst consumers, lack of transparency in pricing, and difficulties caused by the provision of online-only access.

The feedback and case studies provided by CISs through Oyster and via a Social Policy Alert were particularly useful in preparing a paper on the topic, which was formally submitted to the CCPC following the meeting. This paper argued that the experiences of CIS clients provides useful evidence regarding the need for ongoing monitoring within the sector, for the need for additional regulation of the waste market in the medium to longer term and for the introduction of a national waiver scheme for domestic waste collection. As part of the consultative process, CCPC has published a consultation paper and invited formal submissions. You can access further information on the consultation [here](#).

### **‘Improving Home Care services’ – CIB media coverage**

In February 2018, a number of media outlets covered a CIB submission on home care services. In particular, an article appeared in the Irish Independent which quoted extensively from a CIB “report” (noting how “elderly

people are being forced into nursing homes due to lack of home care and other community supports”). This report was a CIB submission that was prepared in September 2017 in response to a Consultation Questionnaire issued by the Department of Health in relation to the development of a new statutory scheme for home care services.

The CIB submission highlighted the challenges that have been reported to CISs by people with disabilities and older people in getting the supports that they need to live at home. It identified some of the positive aspects of home care provision, whilst noting that the alternatives would be either increased pressure on carers 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. The submission can be accessed on the CIB website [here](#).

### **Social Policy Network meeting – hosted by CIB**

In January 2018, CIB hosted a meeting of the Social Policy Network. The aim of the Network is to share information and ideas on the respective work of the member organisations in relation to social policy and to act as a support and learning network for those doing social policy work. The focus of the meeting - which was attended by representatives from 18 organisations - was on the caller and query datasets and related social policy data that is submitted to CIB by the network of CISs via Oyster and how this data is used by CIB in respect of its remit to provide feedback on the effectiveness of public policy and services.

The value of this data as a strong evidence base was demonstrated at the meeting, and the dominant concerns around particular payments and schemes were discussed with the network. Representatives from Dublin City Centre CIS also made presentations at the meeting regarding their policy and advocacy work at local level.



#### **ICI specialist support to CISs**

CIB provides funding to the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) for the provision of a telephone helpline support service to the network of CICs and also for a referral support service in respect of more complicated immigration related

cases that may require specialised advocacy from ICI staff.

Citizens Information Services continue to be used by migrants as a mainstream information and advocacy service - over 24% of callers in 2017 (where country of origin was recorded) were from EU or non EU countries. During 2017, CISs logged just over 900 calls to the ICI helpline - which accounted for over one quarter of the total calls to the helpline during that timeframe. The wide range of CICs accessing the helpline highlights the geographic reach of the services provided nationally and also the demographic diversity of communities in Ireland, in both urban and rural settings. An analysis of the calls to ICI shows that CIS staff sought specialised support on a broad range of issues including applications related to international protection, family reunification, visa and residence applications, EU Treaty Rights, citizenship, regularisation of immigration status for undocumented migrants, stateless persons and children leaving the care system.

There is a continued focus by both the CICs and the ICI on identifying and supporting individuals in vulnerable situations - in particular, refugees, persons experiencing domestic violence, trafficking and the residence status of young people. With the exception of international protection applications, across all issues there remains a lack of access to civil legal aid and to specialised legal services for immigration cases - especially outside of the Dublin and Cork areas. For this reason it is not surprising that there is significant demand for the frontline services provided by the CIC and, in turn, the ICI. The ICI also contributes to training to CIC staff and volunteers through the CIB training calendar and in response to training requests from individual services.

# 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.

## Review of Social Policy Returns 2017

During 2017, information staff in CISs submitted 4,579 Social Policy Returns (SPRs) to CIB via Oyster and a further 305 were logged by the Citizens Information Phone Service – bringing the total number received to 4,884. This is an overall increase of 13% on the Returns submitted in 2016. This data helps us to get a clear picture of the problems that people are facing and we continue to use this evidence to make recommendations to government, to consultative processes, to regulators and other organisations on how to improve policy - and the administration of policy.

During 2017, CIB made a total of 17 submissions on different areas of social and public policy. Most of these were in response to consultations by government departments and covered topics such as personalised budgets for people with disabilities, the Citizens Assembly consultation on the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population and the Working Family Payment. A key submission that continues to be made on an annual basis is the Pre-Budget Submission and this provides a useful insight into the broad range of issues that CIB delivery services are engaged in and are active on. Each of these submissions were drafted using different elements of the data provided by our delivery services. This broad base of evidence is crucial in helping us to identify emerging issues that people are facing, to highlight the difficulties caused by the specific policies that underpin the provision of benefits or services and to understand how the administration of policy is affecting peoples individual circumstances.

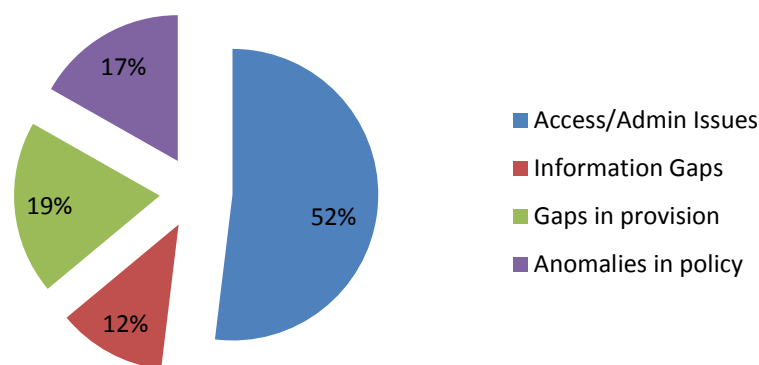
As noted previously, CIS staff submitted a total of 4,579 Social Policy Returns during 2017 – a year-on-year increase of 23% on the 2016 figure. The consistent growth in the social policy feedback received from information services in recent years suggests an ever-increasing awareness and understanding amongst information staff of the role of policy, of how it underpins the provision of social and public services and, ultimately, how it affects the clients that they are dealing with on a daily basis.

Given the size and the reach of the Irish social welfare system, it is not surprising that the provision of information, advice and advocacy on social welfare related matters continues to be the focus of much of the social policy feedback submitted to CIB. Some 56% of all SPRs reported by information staff to CIB were detailing difficulties that clients were experiencing with social welfare-related payments and schemes. This was followed by the Housing category at 13%, then by Health (at 9%), Money and Tax (at 6%) and Employment at 3%. When combined these five broad information categories amounted to 87% of all the cases that were submitted by services – with the remaining ten information categories accounting for 13% of the SPRs.

So despite the wide range of topics being reported as problematic for clients by services, it is possible to see trends and developments in particular areas. Feedback from information services evidences both persistent and newly-emerging challenges that are experienced by their clients in trying to access a variety of payments and schemes – with the most common concerns in relation to social welfare payments and schemes being reported as communications difficulties and also delays in processing and information gaps, or deficits. Some 64% of all of the Returns can be analysed broadly as these types of operational issues – this has increased from 56% in 2016. The remainder of the cases - 36% - are considered by information providers to be difficulties caused by the policies, legislation or guidelines that underpin the operation of schemes, benefits or services – that is, either ‘anomalies in policy’ or ‘gaps in provision’.



## Nature of policy issue



With regard to the concerns around the administration of services to the public, the key issue to emerge from CIS feedback during 2017 was the difficulties caused by the ongoing shift to online access amongst key public service agencies – in particular, DEASP, Revenue and the National Medical Card Unit. As many public bodies understandably seek to provide efficient and effective services to clients through online access, it would seem that such a move has served to impact a significant number of people who are seeking face-to-face assistance from CICs. In particular, CICs have been asked to provide considerable support to people who have limited IT skills and knowledge, those with literacy or language difficulties or those who do not have – or cannot afford – the necessary IT equipment. Information staff have noted in their feedback that many older people who sought their assistance during 2017 did not have access to a personal computer, mobile device or broadband facilities, did not have the skills to understand or use such facilities, and many were not in a position to create an email address with the assistance of CIC staff (when this was required for online registration). Whilst it is clear that the ongoing move to online access to public services has significant benefits for the organisations involved, and for the many digitally-literate and digitally-enabled people who are seeking to access these services, it would seem to be creating a further barrier for people who do not have access to information and communication technologies (for a variety of reasons).

### Trends and developments in schemes and benefits during 2017

Of the 4,884 Social Policy Returns submitted during 2017, the **Medical Card** was the most often-reported individual payment or benefit – with 286 SPRs. This was an increase of 57% on the previous year. Two thirds of these SPRs were concerned with administrative issues – including difficulties with the online renewal of cards (an online application and renewal system was rolled-out in the last quarter of 2017). Other key concerns included lack of awareness of the medical card retention scheme, cases where documentation sent by clients had not been received by the National Medical Card Unit or had been lost, and also cases where clients had not received review forms and were only aware of the loss of their card when visiting their GP or pharmacy.

Within the Top Ten most-often reported payments/benefits (noted in the chart below), only two (Medical Card and Housing Assistance Payment) were not social welfare-related. A further analysis of the SPRs logged in the categories that recorded the most significant increase - Medical Cards, PRSI Records and State Pension (Contributory) - indicates that the main issue at play in each was the move to online access. In the case of PRSI Records, the change to online-only requests for PRSI Contribution Statements occurred in July 2017 and the impact of this move was seen instantly in the social policy feedback submitted through Oyster. Following on from a submission made to DEASP in September 2017 on the difficulties caused for clients, the Department re-

instated the advice on its website that people can also access their contribution records by calling the Customer Service Line.

#### Top Ten most-reported payments/ schemes

	Payment/Scheme	SPRs 2017	SPRs 2016
1	Medical Card	286	182
2	PRSI Records	246	6
3	Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)	199	86
4	Jobseeker's Allowance	179	193
5	State Pension (Contributory)	156	92
6	Disability Allowance	155	148
7	Carer's Allowance	144	137
8	Family Income Supplement	127	181
9	Illness Benefit	110	114
10	Rent Supplement	101	152

Two of the Top Ten categories were concerned with housing-related benefits – the Housing Assistance Payment and Rent Supplement (with concerns about HAP more than doubling on 2016 and those related to Rent Supplement decreasing by one third on 2016). This reflects the roll-out of the HAP scheme across all local authorities during 2017. In the **Housing** category, the SPRs submitted (619) increased by 31% on the 2016 figure – which was, in itself, a rise of 39% on the previous year. The main focus of concern within the housing-related sub-categories demonstrates the inter-related issues within the sector – local authority and social housing, renting a home and homelessness. Whilst the roll-out of HAP has addressed some of the limitations evident in the Rent Supplement scheme, feedback from CISs indicates that the underlying difficulties in relation to housing remain widespread and problematic – rental costs, rent support limits and the availability of suitable and affordable accommodation within those limits.

Within the broad area of **Money and Tax**, the number of SPRs has increased by 45% on 2016 figures (from 189 SPRs to 272 SPRs in 2017). Much of this increase can be attributed to the reports coming from CICs concerning their clients' interactions with Revenue when trying to deal with their routine tax affairs. In June 2017, CIC staff began highlighting difficulties that their clients were experiencing with the new requirements around online access to Revenue services – with the myAccount facility becoming the preferred single access point for all of Revenue's secure online services. Coupled with this change was the requirement that Revenue customers make an appointment in order to visit the regional/ local offices to speak directly with Revenue staff. Reports from CICs indicated that these arrangements presented a number of difficulties for their clients and also for CIC staff who are trying to assist them – and reflect many of the issues that were evident when the changes were implemented regarding online-only requests for PRSI Contribution Statements. This move to online-only access has affected peoples' ability to access a range of tax services – with many of the cases being reported by CICs indicating 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.

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) \*

## Carer's Allowance processing times [PQ 5555/18; 6 February 2018]

**Deputy Jack Chambers** (*Fianna Fáil, Dublin West*) asked Minister Regina Doherty if “her attention has been drawn to the fact that new applications for Carer's Allowance are taking at least 17 weeks to process...”;

**Minister Regina Doherty** (*Fine Gael, Meath East*) replied that “my Department is committed to providing a quality service to all its customers. This includes ensuring that applications are processed and that decisions on entitlement are made as quickly as possible. Before a decision can be made on entitlement to Carer's Allowance (CA), evidence must be provided in respect of the care recipient's care requirement, the level of care the carer provides and the carer's means. In general, social welfare schemes with a number of complex qualifying conditions can take longer to process. This is compounded if the documentary evidence provided at initial application stage is incomplete or insufficient; this is often the case with carer's allowance applications. At the end of December 2017, the average waiting time for new CA applications was 17 weeks with 5,284 CA applications awaiting decision. The volume of CA applications on hands is also a consequence of a continued increased intake of claims with the number of applications for CA in 2017 26% higher than in 2015. Staff have been re-assigned within the carer's allowance area to work on claims processing and it is expected that this will improve the processing times for this scheme over the coming weeks”.

## Illness Benefit “waiting days” [PQ 5601/18; 6 February 2018]

**Deputy Tom Neville** (*Fine Gael, Limerick*) asked Minister Regina Doherty about her plans “to review the waiting period of six days for illness benefit; and if she will make a statement on the matter”. In reply, **Minister Regina Doherty** stated that “Illness benefit is a short term payment made to insured people who are unable to work due to illness. The payment is funded by the Social Insurance Fund (SIF) through the payment of PRSI contributions by workers and employers. Normally, payment of illness benefit begins from the seventh day of the illness; no payment is made for the first six days, known as “waiting days”. Waiting days have been a long standing feature of social insurance schemes and are a feature of similar social security schemes in many other countries. The SIF operates on a “pay as you go” basis, with the Exchequer acting as residual financier of the fund when there is a shortfall between contributions received and benefits paid. The fund is central to Ireland's system of social protection and there is a fundamental requirement that it should be protected for current and future generations. In order to ensure the sustainability of the Fund, the number of waiting days was increased in 2014 from three to six. This increase in waiting days was a relatively modest adjustment and many employees still receive their salaries when out sick where their employers have occupational sick pay arrangements in place. Furthermore, people who need financial support are not left without such support during waiting days. A person who has no other income may claim supplementary welfare allowance in respect of the days in question. I have no plans at present to change the number of waiting days for illness benefit. Such a measure would have budgetary implications and would need to be taken into consideration in the context of overall budgetary decisions. When the measure was introduced in 2014, the then projected full-year annual savings of extending the number of “waiting days” for Illness Benefit from three to six days was €22 million, from three to five days €15 million and from 3 to 4 days just under €8 million”.

## State Pensions Reform [PQ 5858/18; 6 February 2018]

**Deputy Willie O'Dea** (*Fianna Fáil, Limerick City*) asked Minister Regina Doherty on her plans “to put in place protection for persons due to retire in the period 2020-30 to ensure they are not financially disadvantaged and

do not receive a reduced rate of pension when the total contributions approach replaces the yearly average approach for entitlement to a contributory pension in 2020”.

**Minister Regina Doherty** replied that “a policy to introduce the Total Contributions Approach (TCA) to pensions calculation was first adopted by Government in the National Pensions Framework in 2010, as was the decision to assess all new pensioners under this approach from around 2020. The Government at that time was aware that there would be some people who would benefit, and some people who would have a lower rate of entitlement as a result of TCA, but the rates of payment would be on a more equitable basis than under the existing system, and the anomalies inherent in the Yearly Average system would be removed. Under the TCA model proposed, people with 20 years of paid contributions (over a period of up to 50 years) could generally expect a full pension, if they also had 10 years of credited contributions (including Homemaker credits for periods from 1994), and this combined with the safety net of the State pension (non-contributory) was considered to be a fair balance in an important reform of the State pension (contributory).... Later this year, my department will engage in a public consultation regarding the final model that will be in place from 2020. This consultation will be a key input to the design of the final structure of the TCA model to be submitted to Government later this year. It will include proposals for the number of years required for a maximum rate of pension, and the treatment of credited contributions and home-caring periods. Subsequent to Government decision, it is intended that legislation be introduced to the Oireachtas. People who have a lower State pension (contributory) entitlement can apply for and may qualify for a higher State pension (non-contributory) of up to 95% of the maximum contributory rate. This is a means-tested payment, but over 70% qualify at the maximum rate due to generous income disregards. This option will remain in place following 2020”.

### **Bogus self-employment [PQ 8466/18; 20 February 2018]**

**Deputy Willie O'Dea** (*Limerick City, Fianna Fail*) asked Minister Regina Doherty on “her plans to deal with the issue of bogus self-employment”. **Minister Regina Doherty** replied, stating that “bogus self-employment arises where an employer wrongly treats a worker as an independent contractor in order to avoid tax and social insurance contributions. There are already robust arrangements in place for dealing with complaints of bogus self-employment. Social welfare inspectors inspect a wide range of businesses, as part of their ongoing compliance operations. Inspections are also undertaken jointly with other agencies, including the Revenue Commissioners and Workplace Relations Commission. Where evidence of non-compliance is detected, this will be pursued. Officials also investigate specific cases referred to my Department's scope section. This section determines employment status and the correct class of pay-related social insurance, PRSI.... Under the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005, there are specific offences in relation to employment contributions. On conviction, fines and-or imprisonment can ultimately be imposed.

Data from the recent CSO Quarterly National Household Survey record 312,000 individuals as self-employed in 2017, or 15% of total employment. This is consistent with the average levels of self-employment within the EU. There is no evidence of a significant change in the level of self-employment over the past 16 years, since we started collecting the data. The classification of a worker for PRSI purposes can be complicated by the use of intermediary employment structures..... Revenue estimates that there are some 15,000 people employed using structures such as personal service companies and managed service companies....My Department has concerns that such mechanisms may be used to reduce the amount of PRSI and tax being paid, with a subsequent loss to the Exchequer and the Social Insurance Fund. A report on the issue, prepared by officials from my Department, the Department of Finance and the Revenue Commissioners and informed by a public consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, was published at the end of January following Cabinet approval\*. The report finds that the available data does not indicate that self-employment is accounting for any significant increased share of the labour force and accordingly the perception of the level of disguised employment may be overstated...”

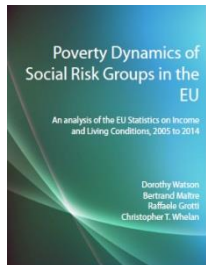
\*This report on “The use of intermediary-type structures and self-employment arrangements: Implications for Social Insurance and Tax Revenues” can be accessed [here](#).



# 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.*

## ESRI Report on poverty



In January 2018, the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) published a research report called “Poverty Dynamics of Social Risk Groups in the EU” which examined the significance of different systems of welfare regimes and their effectiveness in protecting vulnerable groups in 11 EU countries, during the period 2004 – 2014. The study was commissioned from the ESRI by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, as the final report in a research programme co-ordinated by the Social Inclusion Division to monitor poverty trends under the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2017. The research was based on the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) dataset over the period 2004 to 2014.

The study found that the gap in the rate of persistent deprivation experienced by vulnerable adults (as compared with the rate experienced by other adults) was the largest in Ireland, and also increased the most of any country during that timeframe. With regard to particular vulnerable groups, the research found “deprivation is always highest among lone parents and adults with a disability” – specifically, that the persistent deprivation rate in Ireland is 26% higher among lone parents and 14% higher for adults with a disability than for other adults. In the UK, the gap was found to 23% and 11% respectively and across the remaining nine countries, the average gap was 16% and 8%. In terms of policy implications, the report argued that policies that aim to reduce poverty among the general population do not adequately address deprivation experienced by vulnerable groups. Further, it suggested that measures to address the barriers that lone parents and people with disabilities face when trying to access the labour market are crucial (such as access to affordable childcare, flexible work arrangements, protection of secondary benefits and support in seeking employment, training and work experience). The report can be accessed on the ESRI website [here](#).

## Left Behind in the Cold? – MABS report on fuel poverty

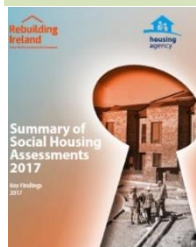


In February 2018, Minister of State at the Department of Health, Catherine Byrne T.D. launched a report on fuel poverty which had been commissioned by the Money Advice and Budgeting Service, Dublin 10 & 20. The report - ‘Left Behind in the Cold?’ - is a follow-up study on previous research undertaken in 2013 and was based on interviews with MABS clients during 2017. On a broad level, the research found that, despite the national economic recovery, the level of fuel poverty amongst clients of Dublin 10 & 20 MABS remains at unacceptably high levels (at around seven in ten households). In particular, the research identified that 72% of households surveyed were living in fuel poverty (down from 79% in 2013) and that 56% of households reported that they had gone without heating in the previous twelve months due to lack of money (this figure is four times the national average). The report also notes a move amongst these households towards pre-payment meters for electricity and heating costs, which seems to have resulted in a noteworthy decrease in both arrears’ incidence and associated disconnection. However, it seems that the relatively low levels of disposable income amongst clients continue to result in frequent self-disconnection and an inability to devote scarce resources to energy saving measures.

The report found that gender, age and employment status all impact on the risk of clients experiencing fuel poverty, that financial exclusion remains a related problem and also that there is emerging evidence of a “poverty premium” in the form of additional payment administration charges amongst certain providers of pre-

payment facilities. The findings suggest a need for a more integrated, multi-dimensional approach to fuel poverty – both locally and nationally - which addresses socio-economic, institutional, environmental and individual dimensions to fuel poverty. The full report can be accessed [here](#).

## Housing Agency – Summary of Social Housing Assessments 2017



In January 2018, the Housing Agency published a Summary of Social Housing Assessments for 2017. This summary brings together key information on social housing assessments from all Local Authorities on an annual basis, as committed to in the Social Housing Strategy 2020. This annual summary is used to provide a strategic picture of the numbers applying for social housing, to observe trends as they emerge and to give a profile of the households with an identified need for social housing support (which includes data on age, employment status, source of household income, basis of need for housing support and specific accommodation requirements). The report identified that 85,799 households were qualified and in need of social housing support as of June 2017. Other key findings identified by the 2017 data include:-

- 25 of 31 local authorities saw the number of households waiting for social housing fall;
- Single person households make up almost 45% of all households on the list;
- Almost 42% of all households on the list live in Dublin;
- Being in need of rent supplement is the most commonly cited basis of need for social housing support (41%);
- The majority (57.5%) of those qualified for social housing support are unemployed;
- The median waiting time for a household on the list now stands at just over 4 years and almost a quarter of the 85,799 households are waiting more than seven years for a social housing support.

The full Report can be accessed on the Housing Agency website [here](#).

## Make Work Pay for People with Disabilities – DEASP consultations



The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has initiated a consultation process in relation to how it supports people with disabilities. This consultation has emerged in line with a series of recommendations of the Report of the Interdepartmental ‘Make Work Pay’ Working Group, which was published in April 2017. (CIB was represented on the Working Group and also

made a formal submission to the consultation process in 2016). The Report set out to establish what works best for people with disabilities when considering taking up (or returning to) work, in terms of financial supports. The Report’s recommendations that relate to this consultation were focussed on promoting early intervention, with specific recommendations stating the need to:-

- “reconfigure the Disability Allowance scheme for new entrants to give effect to the principle of early intervention” by “supporting 16-18 year olds with significant support needs, which is currently paid by means of Disability Allowance, to be paid via Domiciliary Care Allowance up to 18 years of age”;
- “explore the possibilities for the reform of the structure of the Disability Allowance for those between the ages of 18-22 to focus on participation in education, training and/or social inclusion according to individual capacity”;
- “apply the principle of early intervention across all illness and disability schemes, adapting existing schemes where necessary to give effect to this principle”.

A series of consultation seminars will be held in various locations around the country during March 2018 (having being postponed in early March due to weather conditions). Further information on the consultations can be accessed [here](#).