



Stronger Charities.
Stronger Communities.

THE WHEEL'S SUBMISSION ON THE DSP STATEMENT OF STRATEGY

February 2023

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About the Charity, Community and Voluntary and Social Enterprise Sector

Independent, community-based, voluntary organisations have long played a key role in supporting and advocating with and for people and communities in Ireland. Indeed, it is often through the initiative and advocacy of self-organising communities that many community, health and social care services have been initiated.

Community and voluntary organisations are involved in every community in the country, providing health and social supports, services and advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities, older people, young people, children, people experiencing poverty and disadvantage, and people at every stage of their lives.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the extent to which we rely on the community and voluntary sector, especially in difficult times. These organisations played a key part in sustaining communities during the crisis, demonstrating their core role as part of Ireland's public service infrastructure. They restructured services to deliver remotely, responded to the need for socially-distanced and safe provision, cut costs, redirected resources to priority areas and designed new service responses targeted at meeting emergent need.

The community and voluntary sector constitutes a significant social economy within the broader economy. It comprises almost 35,000 community, voluntary and charitable organisations; involves over 86,481 volunteer directors and trustees; directly employs 165,000 people; and manages income of €14.2bn per year. These organisations raise over half of this income (more than €8.3bn) themselves, majorly subsidising the cost of public services in Ireland. Indecon Economic Consultants (in a report published by the Charities Regulator in 2018) estimate that the total direct, indirect, and induced value of the work of Ireland's charities exceed €24bn per annum and supports 289,000 employees.

About The Wheel

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises. We are the representative body for this vibrant and diverse sector and, together with our members, we shape and promote conditions in which people and their communities thrive.

We passionately believe that community and voluntary action improves and enriches communities and society. Our simple but ambitious mission is to make Ireland a fair and just place for all by strengthening the capacity and capability of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises to play their part. We do this by representing these organisations, supporting these organisations to do their work, and promoting the importance of the voluntarism and community values that power these organisations. The Wheel has more than 2,000 members and provides support services and representation on behalf of these members relating to matters that reflect their collective interests.

The Wheel's Submission on the Department of Social Protection's Statement of Strategy

The Department of Social Protection plays a vital role in supporting the work of the community and voluntary sector, addressing poverty and inequality across our society. The *Statement of Strategy* is an important document that outlines the Department's objectives, purpose and progress metrics. All of these have a direct impact on the community and voluntary organisations who receive funding from the Department or who work in the areas under its remit.

We welcome many areas of the last *Statement of Strategy* and appreciate this opportunity to feed into the next Strategy, supporting the Department's mission 'To promote active participation and inclusion in society through the provision of income supports, employment services and other services'. This submission will highlight areas in the 2020–2023 Strategy that we believe are of central importance to the effective functioning of the community and voluntary sector in Ireland and, in turn, to improving the lives of those they support.

Summary of Recommendations

- Effective and timely implementation of PathWays to Work, Roadmap for Social Inclusion and Roadmap for Pensions Reform
- Increased investment and sustainable support for CE, RSS and JI schemes
- Increased support for community-led, climate justice initiatives
- Implementation of the Department of Rural and Community Development's *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector* at a local and national level
- Ensuring service provision is coherent with regionalisation across other departments and agencies

Recommendations

Strategic Objective 1: Put the Client at the Centre of Policy and Service Delivery

The Wheel supports the Department's commitment to design its next strategy with those it supports at the centre. Of particular importance under Strategic Objective 1 in the current Strategy, are these commitments:

- Deliver commitments in PathWays to Work, Roadmap for Social Inclusion and Roadmap for Pensions Reform
- Improvement in employability of clients and increased engagement with employers
- Contribute to achievement of Ireland's international commitments including the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the EU Social Charter

Inequality and poverty are still acute problems in Irish society, (in 2021, 11.6% of the population were 'at risk of poverty', including 164,000 children). The Roadmap for Social Inclusion target is to reduce consistent poverty rate to 2% by 2025. **Effective and timely implementation of the above strategies, supported by national budgets, will be vital to addressing these deep societal problems going forward.**

Improving access to the labour market for specific vulnerable groups must also be a vital goal for the Department of Social Protection. Community Employment (CE) schemes, the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) and the Job Initiative (JI) schemes, operated by community and voluntary organisations, have long played an important part of improving employability and active citizenship for many people. It is vital that these schemes continue to receive sustainable funding and support from the Department.

This is outlined in the *Programme for Government Commitments where the Department of Social Protection has a lead role* section of the document detailed in Appendix B: 'Increase the availability of activation schemes, including those run by local employment services'; 'Enhance back-to-work schemes and initiatives to assist in upskilling those who are seeking new employment opportunities after the crisis'.

Many organisations operating CE schemes are in crisis due to rising energy costs and inflation. These schemes operate on a fixed budget, based solely on the number of participants, and they are unable to cope with soaring costs.

Increased investment is needed in the schemes, which should be focused on supporting all people who want to make a working contribution to their communities to do so. This means ensuring that all people who want to make such a contribution on schemes should be facilitated to participate in programmes through 1) ensuring that the qualifying criteria/on-scheme-durations are not so tight/short so as to render schemes unattractive to many people and 2) ensuring scheme-rates are competitive and 3) ensuring that the scheme's training and development offerings are realistic and relevant for people who may have been out of work for long periods, or who may never have been in unsupported paid work.

The programmes should also be as explicitly oriented around enabling community groups and organisations to meet needs in their communities as they are centred on providing positive developmental experiences for people seeking to enter the world of paid work. Both objectives are mutually complimentary and currently achieved through the programmes. Both should continue and be made explicit through mutually-supporting objectives.

Finally, it is essential that the next Strategy recognises the **role of the community and voluntary sector in helping Ireland achieve its international commitments such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the EU Social Charter**. In addition to targets around reducing poverty in Ireland, these organisations will be central to achieving climate goals in the coming years.

The *Climate Action Plan* acknowledges that climate justice must be a key priority for government and for all society as a matter of urgency. For many years, community and voluntary organisations have led the way on both advocacy and action in relation to climate issues and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Tackling climate crisis has been and will continue to be a ground-up movement led by communities who understand the necessity of drastically changing the way our economy and societal structures work. We must apply the “furthest-behind first” principle in line with the SDGs’ aims. This is the only way to prevent further loss of local resilience, erosion of long-term sustainability and equality in communities, and catastrophic climate chaos for the most vulnerable now and in future generations.

Increasing support for robust participatory approaches is the only way to ensure the scale of the societal response will meet the scale of the challenge. This necessitates that community-led climate action is given a corresponding increase in the level of innovative and flexible funding, along with significant capacity-building resources.

We recommend:

- Effective and timely implementation of PathWays to Work, Roadmap for Social Inclusion and Roadmap for Pensions Reform
- Increased investment and sustainable support for CE, RSS and JI schemes
- Increased support for community-led, climate justice initiatives

Strategic Objective 3: Develop Staff, Structures and Processes

In developing its own internal structures and processes, it is important that the Department of Social Protection continue engaging positively with stakeholders in the community and voluntary sector on the development of policy.

As well as continued engagement with the Community and Voluntary Pillar and other forums, we recommend implementation of the Department of Rural and Community Development's *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector at a Local and National Level*. This provides a positive framework for engagement between state funders and the community and voluntary sector.

The purpose of the document "is to provide an agreed set of values and principles that will underpin the relationships necessary at all levels to provide effective support to communities in particular the most disadvantaged and marginalised". The principles comprise: respect, subsidiarity, harmonisation, value for money, implementation and collaboration.

The issue of regionalisation of services is also of central importance to any structural reform outlined in the next Strategy. Service provision from the Department of Social Protection must be coherent with other government departments and agencies, particularly in the area of health and social care. A joined-up government approach and clarity for vulnerable service users, in particular, will be essential. Digital literacy issues must also be considered in the development of any new processes.

We recommend:

- Implementation of the Department of Rural and Community Development's *Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector* at a local and national level
- Ensuring service provision is coherent with regionalisation across other departments and agencies

Contact

Policy Officer, Lily Power: lily@wheel.ie