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The Impact of Covid-19 on the Most Disadvantaged in Our Communities

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The Impact of Covid-19 on the Most Disadvantaged in Our Communities

“We are all in the same storm but we are not all in the same boat”

Introduction

As Covid-19, *a major health emergency*¹, impacts on the world, it is critical to understand that both the virus and the strategies being implemented to mitigate it are affecting and will continue to affect the disadvantaged much more than the better off. Bloomberg² argued that the ***pandemic will lead to social revolutions***. Social revolutions aside, and whether they are gentle or radical is yet to be born out. However, what is clear at this stage is ***the most misleading cliché about the coronavirus is that it treats us all the same. It doesn't, neither medically nor economically, socially or psychologically. In particular, Covid-19 exacerbates pre-existing conditions of inequality wherever it arrives***³.

As we are aware, Covid-19 has caused an international health crisis and health services are under extreme pressure. However, radical non-pharmaceutical measures⁴ which have been introduced to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, in particular the closures of schools/creches/colleges, shops and services, have also caused their own crisis. The impact of the pandemic, and the measures taken to tackle its spread, will have significant short and long term effects on us all but they have the potential to result in more negative impacts on the most disadvantaged in our communities.

In some of the poorest and most densely populated places in the world the ability to put in practice mitigation measures is severely limited. The idea of social distancing, handwashing and working from home are almost farcical, and entirely out of reach for people experiencing poverty. Even in Ireland, for many the measures that have been introduced are often only steps that the privileged and/or affluent can afford or maintain without serious consequences. Therefore, we must critically examine the impact of the virus in more than medical terms.

Social distancing is a privilege. It means you live in a house large enough to practice it. Hand washing is a privilege too. It means you have access to running water. Hand sanitisers are a privilege. It means you have money to buy them. Lockdowns are a privilege. It means you can afford to be at home. Most of the ways to ward off the Corona virus are accessible only to the affluent. In essence, a disease that was spread by the rich as they flew around the globe will kill millions of the poor. All of us who are practicing social distancing and have imposed a lockdown on ourselves must appreciate how privileged we are. A view from an Indian Doctor⁵.

While we all understand that the impact of the illness itself has not been equal as it has more seriously adversely affected older people and /or those who have, to use that functional but problematical phrase, *underlying health conditions*, it has also more adversely affected the most disadvantaged, both medically and socio-economically.

Internationally and in Ireland, this pandemic has brought into sharp focus the impact of disadvantage in the most fundamental of ways. While Ireland introduced practical steps to protect

¹ As the HSE in Ireland terms it.

² Bloomberg News is an international news agency headquartered in New York.

³ <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2020-04-11/coronavirus-this-pandemic-will-lead-to-social-revolutions>

⁴ Non-pharmaceutical measures in this context are the measure that governments have taken to reduce the spread of Covid-19 including, restricting travel, cocooning of older people, advice re social distancing and handwashing and the closure of schools/creches/colleges, businesses and services.

⁵ A popular post from an Indian Doctor that was circulated on social media during the Covid-19 Pandemic in March 2020.

some of the most vulnerable, such as preventing evictions, introducing specific social welfare payments, and making changes to homeless services, the fact remains that those who are disadvantaged are the most fundamentally impacted upon. In simple terms, if you have little space of your own, how do you cope when you must confine your movement to this space? Where do your children play if you do not have a garden or a safe, outdoor space nearby? Where do your children play if you are homeless? This was always a difficulty but now with playgrounds closed and people's movement limited where do they go? What happens to families who were relying on extended families to cope with washing, cooking or a safe place to relax? What happens if you were already educationally disadvantaged? What if you have additional learning needs? What if you have lost your employment and can no longer pay rent in the private market where you live? What about people living in communal settings and overcrowded accommodation, the homeless, older people, those in prisons, or on large, poorly serviced Traveller halting sites, in residential care, or direct provision, how do they socially distance successfully?

The Ombudsman has expressed concern over the unsuitability of accommodation in the direct provision system. He said: "In my view the crisis, and in particular the highly contagious nature of the virus, brings into sharp relief just how unsuitable and unsustainable it is to have three or more people in the same room as is the case in many Direct Provision centres, particularly those being used on an emergency basis"⁶.

New figures (May 5th) show there are 1,700 residents in direct provision sharing a bedroom with one or two non-family members, despite advice on social distancing from Chief Medical Officer Dr Tony Holohan⁷

The Social Determinants of Health

All health is impacted upon by social determinant factors. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines the social determinants of health ***as the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries***⁸.

EuroHealthNet⁹, the not-for-profit partnership of organisations, agencies and statutory bodies working on public health, disease prevention, promoting health, and reducing inequalities and which supports members' work in EU and associated states through policy and project development, knowledge and expertise exchange, research, networking, and communications, has asked the question "What Covid-19 is teaching us about inequality and the sustainability of our health systems?":

COVID-19 is painfully exposing the existing and persisting health inequalities in our societies. This pandemic will have the heaviest impact on the lives of people living in deprivation or facing difficult socio-economic circumstances. EuroHealthNet partners – the public bodies responsible for health – are doing their utmost to protect citizens and contain the outbreak. In the difficult days and months to come, the need to work together will be clear. Protecting health is the responsibility of all. Good health starts in the community. In the long term, we must consider how our health systems are structured, their sustainability, and their ability to protect all in times of crisis.

⁶ <https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/0422/1134209-asylum-seekers-complaints/>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/rtenews/status/1257651387820802049>

⁸ https://www.who.int/social_determinants/sdh_definition/en/

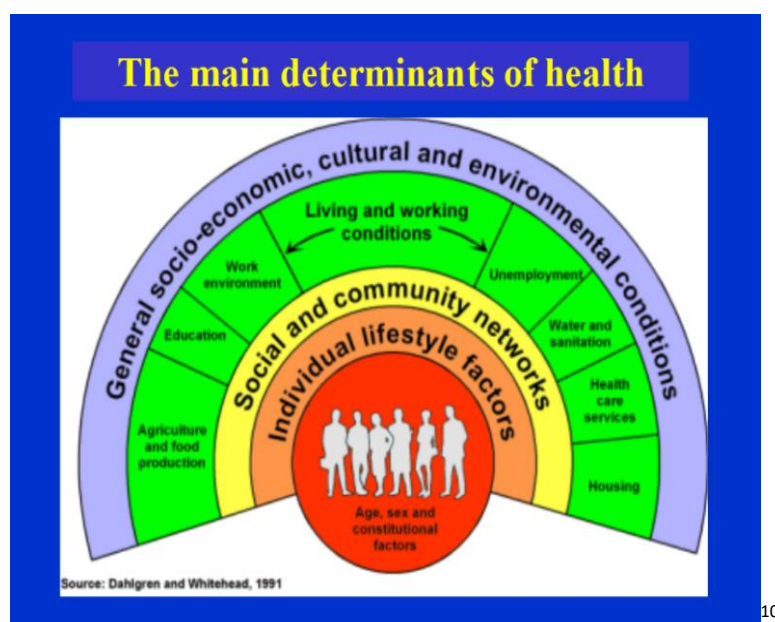
⁹ <https://eurohealthnet.eu/COVID-19>

Research has suggested that most fatalities will be amongst those with underlying illnesses such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart or respiratory disease. The more socially and economically disadvantaged a person is, the more likely they are to suffer from these diseases. Diseases that are largely preventable. This also applies to risks of mental ill-health, which will be exacerbated by isolation, fear, and insecurity. The immediate focus now is on controlling the spread of the disease. Next, we will need to act to address high and rising levels of chronic diseases in our societies and reducing pressure on care services.

People in poorer socio-economic circumstances can also be more exposed to infection. They may be unable to self-isolate due to insecure labour conditions which do not allow for teleworking or provide statutory sick or care leave. They also live in closer proximity to each other and are more likely to experience overcrowding. In both the short and long term, they are more likely to experience unemployment and financial insecurities and are more vulnerable to labour market fluctuations resulting from macroeconomic changes.

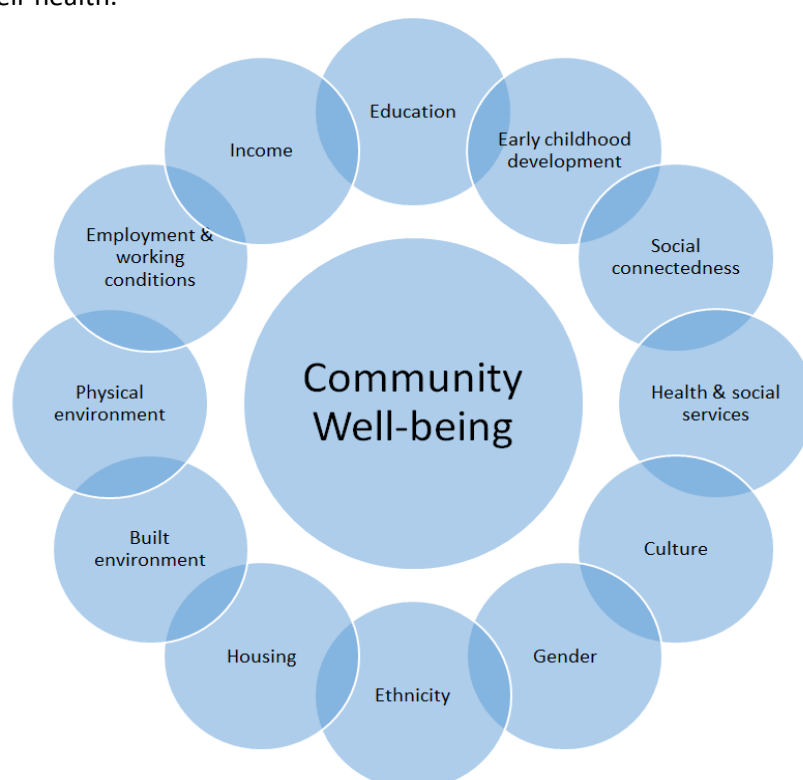
The EuroHealthNet partnership of national and regional public health institutes and authorities has long called for the need to reorient our health systems towards prevention and promotion and providing healthcare professionals with the support and training that they need. This transition, and the reduction of chronic diseases and health inequalities, would relieve pressure on secondary health care services, leaving them more able to respond to crises.

COVID-19 lessons tell us yet again to invest in prevention and health promotion, as well as in the wider health of the workforce, tackling avoidable health inequalities, and boosting health literacy. Solutions to addressing problems in the health system lie beyond it too: it is essential that social protection systems are solid and well-funded. Employment and income support must be provided to cope with additional costs, and consequences of disease and ill health. Investing in these services, means investing in people, in resilience, solidarity and ultimately in the wellbeing of our society and economy.



¹⁰ www.paveepoint.ie

What is important to note is that the reverse is also true. Socio-economic factors are also affected by our health and the non-pharmaceutical measures that are introduced to protect our health. Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting individuals and communities in all areas of their lives and not just their health.



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Therefore, socio-economic factors are critical to really understanding the full impact of the virus and the non-pharmaceutical measures on those who are most disadvantaged in our communities, not just for their health and wellbeing, but also their education, accommodation, economic wellbeing and future. The pandemic has affected all aspects of life as consequence of the interlinked relationship between health and socio-economic factors, as well as the impact of the non-pharmaceutical measures on the most marginalised.

Those who are already disadvantaged in terms of many of the social determinants (such as education, accommodation, employment, income) often do not have the capacity or resilience to cope with the effects the pandemic and the non-pharmaceutical measures are having in these key areas of their lives. Therefore, those who are the most disadvantaged and have the least resources and capacity in key areas will be the most affected and further disadvantaged by the Covid-19 crisis.

The Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)¹² has underlined the need to protect those most vulnerable to Covid-19 and for that to remain a priority in the Government's response. This includes not only those who are most at-risk from the virus but also those vulnerable to the virus's impact because of their social or economic circumstances.

Who will be affected? In Ireland, the communities most at risk of further marginalization because of Covid-19, as outlined by Community Work Ireland¹³, are those that:

- have low levels of access to economic resources and work in the lowest paid sectors;

¹¹ <https://www.cqruralhealth.com.au/droughtleadershipgroups/diagram-social-determinants/>

¹² <https://www.iccl.ie/news/iccl-calls-for-rights-based-response-covid-19/>

¹³ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/covid-19-planning-for-resilience-marginalised-groups-final-1.pdf>

- have inadequate access to social and economic resources;
- have limited capacities and opportunities to cope and adapt and;
- limited access to technologies.

Groups that are made vulnerable because of marginalization include¹⁴:

- | | |
|--|---|
| • Older People | • People living in poverty |
| • People experiencing homelessness | • Those that are experiencing unemployment |
| • Traveller and Roma Communities | • People experiencing poor mental health |
| • Disadvantaged women | • People with addiction |
| • Women experiencing domestic violence | • Lone parents |
| • People seeking asylum, particularly those living in direct provision | • Children at risk of educational and other disadvantages |
| • Migrant communities including undocumented migrants | • Carers |
| • Disabled people | • LGBTI people |

Some commentators have erroneously argued that this is not the time to consider human rights or equality issues, that they are somehow secondary in a time of crisis. Almost as if human rights are luxuries, only to be considered when the fundamentals of life have been addressed. But this is patently untrue. We must protect human rights at a time like this in order to protect the most vulnerable in our communities, as the Irish Council for Civil Liberties highlight:

A rights-based approach to the pandemic will protect all of us, but particularly the most vulnerable. It can inform how we can work together as a society and as a community to addressing the great challenges we face¹⁵.

Clearly, the non-pharmaceutical measures have somewhat impacted on our freedom of choice and movement, but while the Irish Council for Civil Liberties has agreed there can be ***certain limitations on our individual rights to protect public health in times of crisis***, there must be ***a rights-based approach*** while that is happening which ***requires the government to take specific action to protect those who are most vulnerable to the virus and its wider impact¹⁶***.

Specific Issues Raised by the Co-op and its Member Organisations¹⁷

The Co-op and its members acknowledge the huge amount of work and rapid decision making that has been necessitated by this crisis. In particular, the work of government departments and agencies, such as the HSE, the Department of Health, Dublin City Council, the Gardai, as well as the brave and critical direct work being carried out by workers in all areas that are vital to the front line, including medical, caring, travel/delivery and retail, must be commended.

Our concern in this time of crisis is vulnerable communities who are facing real and perilous situations, some of which are impacting on the very basics of survival, including access to food, safe shelter and wellbeing. In this document the Co-op highlights several of the key issues that our members are bringing to our attention in relation to the specific needs of these vulnerable communities.

As this is a fast-moving situation some of the difficulties that were occurring at the start of the Covid-19 crisis have been addressed, or partially addressed, but some have not. Some may be addressed

¹⁴ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/covid-19-planning-for-resilience-marginalised-groups-final-1.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.iccl.ie/news/iccl-calls-for-rights-based-response-covid-19/>

¹⁶ <https://www.iccl.ie/news/iccl-calls-for-rights-based-response-covid-19/>

¹⁷ See Page 31-34 for details on the Co-op and its Members

between the time of writing and then distributing this document. But it is important to note that these issues exist(ed) for many individuals and families due to their socio-economic circumstances.

The main concern for the Co-op and our members is that those who are most marginalised and socially excluded are not further disadvantaged by the current crisis, both in the short and longer term.

Advocacy

Vulnerable members of the community are often fearful of officialdom and do not want to raise issues directly. Many have had a negative experience when they have done so in the past and are fearful of retribution from the those about whom they are raising an issue. Therefore, it remains the role of the Co-op and our members to advocate for our communities who need support, which in this time of crisis, is often support of the most basic kind such as food, shelter and access to basic education.

Statutory and funded services/providers are, by and large, doing excellent work, but there are cases of families and individuals being left out/left behind and/or receiving poor quality service regarding their entitlements (e.g. quality of food in emergency accommodations, multiple members of the one family living and sleeping in one room). In such instances it is our role to advocate for them. This is a component of our work we prioritise. Where Co-op members and others in the community and voluntary sector identify families and individuals who are having difficulties in relation to receiving basic supports it would be an abdication of our responsibility to disadvantaged communities to ignore these and not raise the issues.

Information

Access to good quality information is a critical human rights issue. It is crucial that information dissemination measures are well thought out and can reach and target those who need it most. Disinformation, some of which is knowingly spread, can undermine expert advice and seriously damage public information campaigns.

In poorly educated communities and those with the least access to good quality information, there is a need to constantly disseminate information in a variety of accessible methods, providing clear information on health, the non-pharmaceutical measures and mitigation policies. This is particularly true in the context of online information overload from less than reputable sources.

One of the consequences of educational disadvantage is weak adherence to public health messages, where people may not understand, hear, or feel engaged with those messages as a consequence of their own disadvantage, marginalisation and exclusion, which at times may be generational.

Some key recommendations in relation to the communication of public health information were outlined by Community Work Ireland in their Submission on Covid-19¹⁸:

- Ensure that all public information material is literacy proofed by agencies with specific expertise such as the National Adult Literacy Agency and available in different formats for print, radio, TV and on-line.
- Establish and resource creative methodologies for maintaining contact, support and communication with particularly isolated people including through provision of technology, online supports, one to one support, on-line parenting and teen supports.

¹⁸ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission/>

- All state funded advertising in relation to Covid-19 should be assessed to ensure that the diversity of Irish society is reflected therein.
- All state funded strategies to engage and recruit volunteers should include a focus on targeting and supporting people from marginalised communities in their design and implementation.

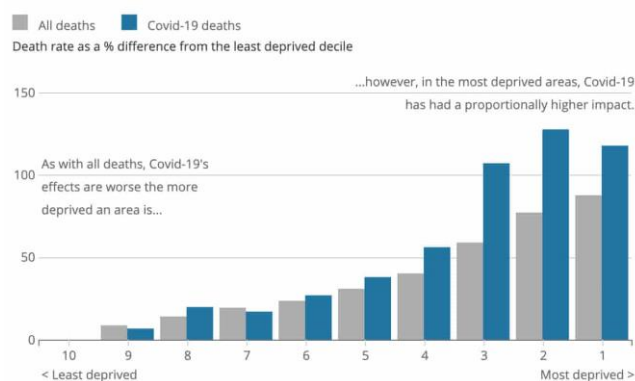
Data

It is imperative that good quality data is gathered and made available about the impact of Covid-19 on disadvantaged communities. It would be extremely valuable if data were gathered on the impact on communities by affluence and deprivation, and on ethnicity. The collection of this type of data, within a human rights framework¹⁹ is critical to identify the impact of this crisis on particular communities, to monitor the progress of policies and interventions by communities and groups, and to provide evidence for further decision making and policy direction, taking into account the disparate needs of different communities. This data is being gathered in the UK and has identified alarming trends.

It has been identified that residents in deprived areas have experienced double the death rates of those in affluent areas, new figures from the Office for National Statistics reveal, and that of the 20,283 Covid-19 registered deaths in England and Wales to 17th April an overwhelming proportion of fatalities were of people from the poorest areas. The most deprived area had 55.1 deaths per 100,000 people, more than double (118%) that in the least deprived areas, where the rate was 25.3 deaths²⁰.

Figure 7: The coronavirus (COVID-19) has had a proportionally higher impact on the most deprived areas

Age-standardised mortality rates, all deaths and deaths involving the coronavirus (COVID-19), Index of Multiple Deprivation, England, deaths occurring between 1 March and 17 April 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Deaths involving COVID-19

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In light of the above data being available for England and Wales, the Co-op wrote to the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to ask if the CSO has comparable information available for the Republic of Ireland and if so, when will it be available to access. If the data is not currently available, the Co-op inquired if the CSO intends to gather such data and publish the information. The CSO subsequently replied outlining a rather complicated and antiquated process for the collection and compilation of registered death data, a process that appears to be determined externally to the CSO, and one which

¹⁹ Human rights framework means data must be collected universally, and not just of minorities or the disadvantaged, and which is answered voluntarily and on the basis of self-identification, and that the collected data is aggregated and anonymised to avoid identification of specific individuals. <https://www.paveepoint.ie/project/ethnic-data-collection/>

²⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2020/may/01/uk-coronavirus-live-job-cuts-end-lockdown-politics-covid-19-latest-updates?page=with:block-5eabe3278f08a459b6585968#block-5eabe3278f08a459b6585968>

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/live/2020/may/01/uk-coronavirus-live-job-cuts-end-lockdown-politics-covid-19-latest-updates?page=with:block-5eabe3278f08a459b6585968#block-5eabe3278f08a459b6585968>. Statistics for England and Wales.

negates the ability to compile data as the National Statistics Office in the UK has done for England and Wales. The Co-op therefore recommends that the necessary changes be made, including legislatively, so that reliable real time death data by geographic area can be gathered and analysed as is happening in England and Wales. Such information is a pre-requisite for effective Covid-19 and post-Covid-19 policy making decisions.

Compliance

It can be difficult for those who are very disadvantaged, such as those in addiction, the homeless, those who are migrants, particularly the most disadvantaged migrants such as Roma, disadvantaged young people, and those who have limited education to comply with and/or understand the range of measures that are in place to limit the spread of Covid-19. As noted above there is a relationship between health and the social determinant factors and part of that relationship is played out in the context of compliance and adherence to public health messages and good practice. Messages not to smoke or to drink responsibly have never been enough to ensure that no one smokes or drinks, and alcoholism remains an addiction issue. One of the factors as to why this is the case is the relationship to socio economic factors.

Disadvantaged communities also tend to have the least formal relationships with decision makers and/or those in positions of power (unless as passive receivers of services). They have limited 'buy-in' with those who make decisions and often feel excluded from/by those roles and have limited engagement with them. Therefore, they can have a tenuous (or negative) relationship with those perceived to be in power and may not adhere and/or believe the message that those in power put forward. In particular they may not believe that the message is for their benefit.

Therefore, in order to support State agencies and national health messages Co-op members also have a role in trying to support compliance in disadvantaged communities by assisting in ensuring that appropriate information (language and literacy friendly for example) gets to disadvantaged communities, and their understanding of the issues is developed and assured.

The Basics: Food, Shelter, Safety and Health

At this time of crisis many of the most disadvantaged in our communities are struggling with the basics of life and the Co-op and its member organisations are raising the following issues and concerns:

Access to food

Our member organisations are involved in providing meals and food parcels to vulnerable people in the community. As a result of Covid-19 services have been greatly expanded and fundamentally changed in the last few weeks. This expansion has put financial strain on organisations. A number have engaged in additional fund raising (GofundMe.ie campaigns) to try to ensure that no one in their catchment area goes without food.

Some issues that our members have raised include:

- There are people in the communities whose access to food is tenuous. Some live in homeless provision and do not have access to a kitchen or cooking facilities and were relying on eating out or with friends and family, or with voluntary agencies, many of which are now closed or have very limited access. After some difficulties at the start of the crisis homeless services are now required to provide three meals a day. There have been reports that some services are not always providing adequate food (quantity and quality) as they are required to do. In such instances the Co-op has brought the information and specifics to the direct attention of the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) and DCC.

- There are people in the community, often older people or people with mental and physical health issues, who are unable to cook for themselves. They may not have a functioning kitchen or the capacity to manage for themselves. These people previously may have had meals on wheels or a communal meals service and they need to be catered for. Co-op members are providing these services and/or accessing other services for vulnerable people in the community they link in with to ensure that they are provided for.
- Children in DEIS schools and/or those who attended afterschool projects received food in these settings. In some cases, this was a hot meal. As the children are no longer attending school and afterschool's there are concerns about the welfare of some of these children. Schools and community groups, including Co-op members, are providing alternatives to these children. But there are concerns that children and families are under more pressure in relation to food due to children being at home and eating at home all day when previously this was not the case. There are concerns that some children are not being fully nourished. A number of Co-op members are involved in providing meals to children and families in this situation, while others are supporting children and families to link with other providers.
- There are overall issues of poverty. Family's food bills are increasing during this time as there are more people at home for longer periods of time and food poverty is a reality for many families. Good quality nutritious food is not the cheapest food so there are concerns about both the quantity and quality of food that children and families are eating at this time.

Violence

The Co-op and its member organisations are concerned about domestic violence and violence against children. There are increased tensions in homes due to the restrictions, people are bored, under each other's feet, possibly suffering from isolation and/or mental health issues. These homes are likely to be experiencing additional stress with everyone at home with many experiencing new unemployment and the fears and worries about Covid-19 adding to tensions.

Further concerns include:

- There are serious concerns that women and children, who are vulnerable to the violence of someone who also lives in the home, are now at serious risk. These women and children are getting less time outside of the home and
 - they have less opportunities to mix with others to get support
 - limited benefit from bystander intervention
 - little or no time to get a break from the home situation
 - abuse of children is less likely to be suspected by others because families are isolated
 - face to face interventions are not in place at present and therefore these women and children are more vulnerable than ever.
 - Co-op member organisations who provide afterschool projects noted they are concerned about a number of children who are clearly stressed at home and find both school and afterschool a respite. When and where appropriate the Co-op liaises closely with Tusla staff.
- Women are in isolation and may be in lock down with their abusers.
- Our work with minority ethnic communities leads us to be concerned that the sex industry is still at work, and women in this position are extremely vulnerable, even more so at this time.
- The potential for the financial abuse of older people who cannot go out as freely to shop and or access their money/payments including being put under pressure to support younger family members who are under financial pressure.

Community Work Ireland identified some specific recommendations at this time in relation to Violence against Women²²:

- Fundraising for frontline services may be diminished during the crisis, the government must consider this. On 8th May 2020 the Government launched a €40m Stability Package for the Community & Voluntary sector specifically targeting organisations that have suffered a loss of income because of Covid-19.
- Tusla needs to allocate additional funding for refuge spaces and plan for alternative additional refuge spaces so that they can practice physical distancing.
- It is crucial that An Garda Síochána treat women living in abusive situations as a vulnerable group, and that safety and protective orders are enforced
- The current provision of emergency barring orders should be extended in this crisis to ensure women can access safety and protective orders outside of court settings, for example from a Garda station, as needed.
- The national awareness campaign should be continued for the duration of the crisis.

The Co-op would also like to add that women in prostitution who are seeking an exit need additional support, care and compassion when it comes to meeting the criteria for welfare and housing supports, such as Habitual Residency Status and emergency accommodation.

Homelessness

There are specific concerns about individuals and families who are homeless. The Co-op and its member organisations have been advocating on issues in relation to specific cases from the start of this crisis, and some of the issues have been resolved. In the early days of the crisis, some homeless people were still being sent out of the accommodation during the day despite advice to socially distance and limit movement. These individuals literally had nowhere to go, no place to rest during a long day, to eat, to use bathroom etc, not to mention the fact that they had no option but to wander the streets. Some private emergency accommodation does not provide/have cooking facilities. It is important to note that these issues have now largely been resolved, in some cases due to advocacy and interventions from the Co-op and homeless people themselves. See below an extract from a letter written by homeless men, which was printed in the *Irish Times* on the 24th of March²³.

Sir, – The nation's schools, colleges and cultural centres were closed on March 12th because of the risks posed to public health by the corona virus. People were advised to stay indoors, to observe social distancing protocols and, if symptomatic, to self-isolate immediately. How, then, are the homeless to protect either themselves or the public from the spread of the virus if they're deprived of shelter on a daily basis? How is it in the interests of public health to continue with these deprivations?

During the first few days of this crisis the homeless were forced to frequent restaurants, cafes and pubs in order to feed themselves and avail of toilets and bathrooms. Today almost every business in Dublin is closed and still the homeless roam the streets for hours on end with nowhere to go for toilet facilities and must stand in out of the weather, or cook for themselves. If we're forced to return to shelters in which self-isolation is virtually impossible.

It is our understanding from how the virus is transmitted that if one of us becomes unwell, the chances are that all of us – living cheek by jowl – will become unwell too. How will the health services cope with a wave of the unwell from the homeless community? The question is not as unfair as it might seem.

²² <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission/>

²³ <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/coronavirus-and-homeless-people-1.4210164> Only part of this letter has been reproduced.

To evict people during a deadly pandemic in a city of empty hotels is about as morally dubious as exporting food during a famine. Why, when the Government's response to the emergency has been so laudable in every other respect, is it so poor in respect of the homeless?

As members of the homeless community, we appeal to the humanity of the State for a similar chance, and we make no apologies for believing that we deserve one. – Yours, etc, RAY HALPIN, CAMERON NEILSON, ISMAIL MECHOUGT, GLEN CARTHY,

The Co-op also notes the report in the Irish Times on Friday the 24th of April '***Newly homeless people refused emergency accommodation, Some hostels only providing breakfast and shared rooms, says Mendicity, Irish Times, Kitty Holland Social Affairs Correspondent***²⁴.

Some other specific ongoing concerns include:

- The continuation of overcrowding in homeless settings, families in one room, and/or non-family members sharing facilities (bathrooms, bedrooms, communal spaces). As recently as May 5th the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) confirmed that many single people continue to share rooms.

The Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) has confirmed that many of the single people who are in homeless accommodation in the Dublin region share rooms with others. In a statement, the executive said that as of the end of March, there were 2,906 single adults in emergency accommodation in the region. "Many of these single people do share rooms whilst in emergency accommodation," the statement said²⁵.

- What will happen to families in family hubs if they have to isolate and/or test positive? What are they to do? What happens to their children if they are lone parents? Who will care for them? The Co-op is aware that such matters are high on the agenda of Tusla.
- There are difficulties for families managing in hubs or hotels with children where they have limited space. In one example a family stated they are only allowed to leave for one hour a day. This family has four people living and sleeping in one room-mother, father and two teenage girls.
- Much of the country's emergency accommodation is based in the inner city which suffers from a paucity of green spaces to exercise - this is examined further below.
- There is a lack of cooking facilities and food storage space in most private emergency accommodation. Notwithstanding this residents are now getting meals after some difficulties at the start of the crisis.
- Some private emergency accommodation providers still expect their residents to leave the premises for two hours a day so that cleaning can be carried out.
- A significant cohort within the homeless population have health needs, which include mental health and addiction issues, both of which can impact on the individual's adherence to public health advice and their own health care regime. These individuals may be non-compliant with non-pharmaceutical measures and/or not adherent to their own treatment.
- There are still people sleeping rough in Dublin, estimates vary, with a recent report putting figures between 25 and 90²⁶. For these rough sleepers there are very specific issues
 - Limited shower and laundry facilities available for rough sleepers.
 - There are issues with food supply and access to hot meals.

²⁴ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/newly-homeless-people-refused-emergency-accommodation-1.4236252?mode=amp>

²⁵ <https://www.rte.ie/news/dublin/2020/0505/1136627-homeless-accommodation/>

²⁶ Dublin Inquirer People Who Are Sleeping Rough Are Struggling to Find a Place to Shower by Laoise Neylon 22nd April 2020 https://dublininquirer.com/2020/04/22/people-who-are-sleeping-rough-are-struggling-to-find-a-place-to-shower?fbclid=IwAR2X7xwCzYoiTqht9GHicCJRvPcg3fxRG6H5mcmIo_Q5lz9KZBAzRoeU

Accommodation

The Co-op welcomes the emergency measures that were introduced on the 27th of March²⁷ which include a prohibition on evictions for a period of three months, a rent freeze, and the increase in the notice period for tenancies of less than six months from 28 to 90 days. As noted by Social Justice Ireland:

What would, just a few months ago, have been seen as an insurmountable breach of the Constitutional rights of landlords was possible to enact in an emergency in a matter of days²⁸.

These measures will offer some protection for some of the most vulnerable tenants. It is hoped that this moratorium on evictions will not be ended suddenly at the end of the crisis period. It will be important that tenants who have lost their incomes be given the opportunity to tackle rent arrears, which are beginning to accumulate due to the Covid-19 employment lay-offs, in a manageable and equitable manner.

In relation to accommodation, some specific issues need to be noted and these include:

- In both local authority accommodation and the private rented sector there is 'hidden' overcrowding, a situation where there are more people living in the accommodation than stated to the landlord. In the private rented sector there are also cases of significant overcrowding where the landlord is aware of the numbers in the accommodation and is in breach of the Residential Tenancies Board regulations. These are generally exploitative situations where the tenants are particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable. There are cases in local authority accommodation where the overcrowding has resulted from increased family size as well as people 'on the floor²⁹.' These cases of hidden and non-legitimate occupants are a serious concern as these individuals almost always have nowhere else to go and maybe fearful of being identified as living there. Therefore, these individuals most likely remain almost invisible to officialdom. These individuals often turn to the Co-op and our member organisations for support. Many of these individuals are highly vulnerable as their ability to access support may be hampered by their accommodation situation.
- Large families (often inter-generational) living in small spaces and where they would be unable to maintain social distancing and self-isolation should one member of the family become ill.
- Some families are sharing with relatives and extended families to prevent family members becoming homeless and having to access homeless services.
- Overcrowding in both the private rented sector and DCC accommodation is an Achilles heel in the national effort to socially distance and limit the spread of Covid-19. While there are plans in place and currently being implemented to reduce numbers in homeless accommodation and Direct Provision no such policy appears to exist to deal with overcrowding outside these settings.

In relation to overcrowding we wish to emphasize: **Overcrowding in the private rented sector is a potentially dangerous conduit of Covid-19 as lockdown restrictions are gradually lifted.**

Many families in the inner city are struggling with confinement in their homes as a result of less space inside and outside their own homes and less quality green space around their homes. The

²⁷ Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020 (the 2020 Emergency Measures Act)

²⁸ Emergency Measures – Human Rights and Cost Implications - and Covid-19 24th April 2020

<https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/emergency-measures-human-rights-and-cost-implications-and-covid-19>

²⁹ Colloquial term for someone living in the home unofficially.

inner city has significantly less green open spaces than other parts of Dublin, as one study in 2016 noted:

Residents of Ballsbridge are up to 20 times more likely to have a tree on their street than those living in the north inner city, a study on the quality of Dublin's residential environment has found. The north and west inner city are much more likely to have vacant sites and derelict buildings and less likely to have open green space and protected structures than the southeast of the city. "In Dublin 2, from Dublin Castle to Fitzwilliam Square and from Iveagh Gardens to Trinity, there is about 30 hectares of green open space and practically no vacant or derelict land," he said. "In the greater Liberties area of Dublin 8 there is three times more derelict or vacant land than green space and about 30 hectares or derelict or vacant land"³⁰.

Less green space around homes is compounded by the fact that many families live in small flats, apartments, or houses with no gardens. Therefore, families who are less likely to have gardens are also less likely to have open, green public spaces near them, within the two-kilometre limits. These difficulties are often exacerbated by drug dealing, life-threatening drug-related intimidation and anti-social behaviour in the limited public and green spaces available.

The historic physical neglect of more disadvantaged communities in terms of the provision of quality outdoor space for recreational use has fundamentally exacerbated the stress and tension of an already difficult situation for those communities and families.

In the light of this a key challenge in the coming period will be to increase outdoor recreational space and develop a systematic approach to greening the inner city.

The Co-op notes that in the light of Covid-19 there is also a need to examine planning regulations and the recent trend in planning and building developments in Dublin for Co-living and student housing³¹. These styles of accommodation provide small private personal spaces, often little more than a small bedroom, with larger communal areas such as communal kitchens and living rooms, with the more exclusive versions including luxury facilities such as gyms. The viability, suitability and demand for such accommodation will have to be examined in the light of the current crisis where communal settings have proven to be of such high risk. Both living models now look exposed and vulnerable.

Mental Health

Despite resources made available online for people who may be experiencing mental health difficulties, and the recently launched *In This Together Campaign*³² for people to *Stay Connected, Stay Active and Stay Mentally Well during Covid-19* a number of people in the community continue to express feelings of isolation and loneliness during these unprecedented times, particularly older people with less access to technologies.

Targeted phone support to these individuals remains crucial to ensure their wellbeing and to identify additional needs as they arise. The Co-op has noted that at this time the phone and internet is a challenging way of staying connected for many vulnerable people. With disadvantaged communities and the vulnerable there is a need to build and maintain relationships. This is even more important

³⁰ Research from the department of geography at UCD and *Redrawing Dublin* authors Paul Kearns and Motti Ruimy. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/street-trees-proliferate-in-wealthy-areas-reveals-city-research-1.2552994>

³¹ Recent development include the exclusive Node in Fitzwilliam Square <http://node-living.com/about-us.html>. Planning for Co-living in Fumbally, Dublin 8 <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/commercial-property/co-living-company-buys-mckillen-fumbally-site-for-about-10-5m-1.3898326>. Student accommodation such as that in Summerhill, Dublin 1, Angier Street, Dublin 8, Thomas Street Dublin 8,

³² <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/433d0f-an-taoiseach-launches-inthistgether-campaign-for-people-to-stay-con/>

at this time and requires an additional focus when it cannot be done face to face. Some specific issues that have been identified include:

- There are serious concerns about the mental health of families, particularly more vulnerable families and those living in homeless accommodation.
- Isolation is causing stress, loneliness and anxiety. Many vital support services being closed is causing people to feel depressed and low.
- There are increased stress levels among families, mostly mothers, who continue to be primary carers to their children and other relatives.
- There are increased tensions at home due to confinement.
- Much of the resources that are available in relation to mental health are in written English and there are many people unable to access those due to literacy and/or language barriers.
- There are issues with trauma and grief for those who are bereaved, and this is exacerbated during this time when funeral rites cannot be adhered. There are also some concerns that people continue to meet up in people's homes after funerals.
- Families are also bereaved by non-Covid related deaths and are impacted by current restrictions re: hospital visits and limited pastoral care all of which is impacting on mental health.
- Families and children are also not able to go to hospital, visit older vulnerable people, limiting their contact with those who are ill, which means they cannot give or receive comfort from people who are important to them in their life.
- There are concerns for individuals who were availing of mental health services and dependent on the routine for their wellbeing. These are now isolated and often without the supports they were accustomed to thereby further negatively impacting their mental health.

There are certain issues with anti-social behaviour in a number of communities. This is both ongoing anti-social behaviour and behaviour which is in breach of the social distancing guidelines. Issues include:

- Large gatherings of young people in public areas, including drinking and loud music, where others in the community, due to drug related intimidation, are fearful of making reports to the Gardai.
- Open drug dealing, house parties, and anti-social behaviour at a high volume.

There are also numerous positive reports of events being managed safely in flat complexes and communities, including balcony bingo and karaoke. DCC and community organisations are working closely together in organising and managing many of these popular events, all of which go a long way to boosting local community morale. DCC's support and initiative in this regard is highly appreciated.

Addiction

There are concerns about the impact of Covid-19 on addiction, and drug use during this period. The non-pharmaceutical measures have impacted on illicit drug supplies, demands and dealing. Some specific concerns include:

- There is a risk of people in addiction relapsing as access to services is more difficult.
- Drug dealing in parts of the inner city has become much worse due to a drought in other parts of the city. There is a concern that teenagers are now being used as runners on bicycles and more will get drawn into the drug scene as time goes on.
- There appears to be a reduction in the cost of drugs which is very tempting to drug users.
- There are fears for some individuals who prior to the outbreak, were in the early stages of availing of services to deal with drinking/alcohol and now are isolated in a home with another drinker.

- Some people in addiction are clearly not adhering to the social distancing guidelines.
 - Groups of drug users are still congregating together and moving about the streets together.
 - Binge drug use and drinking continues, often in groups and indoors.

Vulnerable Older People

Covid-19 has brought into sharp focus the needs and welfare of older people in our communities. While the medical focus is on care homes and communal settings at this stage, there are concerns about the over 70s who have been asked to cocoon and how their basic needs can be met and supported.

With funding support from Dublin City Council, Dublin City Community Co-op has created and designed a comprehensive Cocoon Kit (Activity & Information Pack) for older people and distributed packs to 710 older people across the inner city. Information regarding pack contents is available directly from Dublin City Community Co-op.

It is important to remember that older people are not a homogenous group and are as diverse as any other age cohort in Ireland. It is therefore essential to be aware of this diversity and the importance of respect for older people themselves. Some of the language that has been used to date in this crisis has not been reflective of best practice. The Irish Gerontological Society recommends avoiding words and phrases that ***are or appear to be discriminatory, imply unnecessary connotations, or that group all older people together into any category***. Dr. O'Shea advises, ***"just use the neutral term, older people, we must also take care to remember that Older people are just as diverse as younger and middle-aged people"***³³.

Some specific issues include;

- There is a national crisis in relation to the isolation of older people and the ability of many organisations and state agencies to link with the most isolated. National strategies need to be more targeted and work closely with local organisations to reach the most vulnerable within communities.
- Many older people are being left out of the communication loop, in particular those who are disadvantaged and/or who have little or no understanding of the internet or access to social media, smart phones or computers / tablets. Therefore, greater emphasis needs to be given to providing information to these older people and creating access to the digital world and media literacy for the future.
- The physical distancing of older people is resulting in loneliness and/or depression due to lack of social interaction.

"One of the lasting legacies of this pandemic may well be that Ireland finally wakes up to the worth of older people to our country. We need to grow a collective and societal responsibility to show how we appreciate, value, consider and talk about older people, and getting our language correct is an important part of that. There is no better time to start than now", said Dr. O'Shea³⁴.

Vulnerable Children and Young People

The EU Alliance for Investing in Children, which brings together over 20 European networks, noted in its 'Joint Statement on Protecting Children and their Families during and after the Covid-19 crisis'³⁵:

³³ <https://www.irishgerontology.com/news/latest-news/mind-your-language>

³⁴ <https://www.irishgerontology.com/news/latest-news/mind-your-language>

³⁵ <http://www.alliance4investinginchildren.eu/joint-statement-on-protecting-children-and-their-families-during-and-after-the-covid19-crisis/>

As COVID19 continues to spread across Europe, it is bringing havoc and devastation to people's lives, exposing weaknesses of European healthcare systems, and intensifying social inequalities. Although children are considered as a low-risk group, they will be hit hard by this public health crisis. The widening of already existing inequalities means that those who need most support – such as access to adequate healthcare and education – are not receiving it and will struggle most to deal with the catastrophic economic consequences of the pandemic.

In 2018, 23 million children were growing up at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU. This number was already unacceptably high for one of the wealthiest regions of the world.

Alarmingly, this number is now expected to increase considerably in the coming year(s) as the economic consequences of COVID19 in Europe take their toll. Various global and European bodies already estimate that the impact of the current pandemic on the European economy will be much more devastating than that of the 2008 recession. Its ultimate scope remains unknown. The fight against poverty and deprivation should not be dropped from the political agenda; on the contrary, investments in our future education, child protection, health and nutrition, will help Europe reduce the damage and avoid future crises.

It is therefore more important than ever to put children at the heart of the EU's crisis de-escalation measures and recovery strategy. An overarching social and sustainable Europe 2030 Strategy, an ambitious EU long term budget and a holistic Council Recommendation on the Child Guarantee are needed to support the EU's most vulnerable, including children and their parents in the long run.

The Co-op and its member organisations work with vulnerable children, young people and families through youth work, education services, childcare services, afterschool services and family support as well as supporting individuals with a wide range of issues. Needs of these young people and children identified at this time include:

- Parents expressing their concern about being able to cope with having children kept inside for such a long time, and the additional strain of having all the children home puts on a family. Some parents are finding it very difficult with children inside and away from their friends especially as many live in cramped conditions. As noted above many families do not have access to an outdoor space which accelerates the problem.
- Strife within families has increased which is a worrying concern.
- Small children from different family settings have been seen playing together outside, especially in gated communities where they cannot be seen. It is difficult to promote social distancing in confined spaces.
- Some households do not have access to WiFi and/or devices which further excludes children from participating in online services, including education services.
- Children are now being 'encouraged' to go online as parents become fraught trying to cope, when previously they would have been discouraged to spend long periods online. It is questionable as to how much supervision is happening and what the consequences of this will be. Young people who have access to the IT hardware seem to now have free reign on the internet which may produce other problems going forward.
- Parents of teenagers are expressing their frustration with dealing with house-bound and bored teenagers. Older teenagers are getting more and more bored and it can be expected

that this will get worse as the situation continues. It is a worry that these teens will become increasingly lax in terms of social distancing.

- In some cases there is a lack of parental control over other family members who are noncompliant. There are concerns about mid-age teenagers (14-15yr olds) who do not seem to see the seriousness of the situation and are totally bored at home. They are the most difficult to engage online though as they much prefer to just 'hang around' and are missing this type of interaction with their friends. Parents are struggling greatly to keep their teenage children indoors. The children just sneak out of the house to be with peers.
- Hygiene is a concern for the most vulnerable children. One Co-op member who works with a number of highly marginalised children uses the opportunity of the weekly trip they organise to the local swimming pool to use the shower facilities to deal with these hygiene issues in a discreet manner. The pool, Sean Mc Dermott Street, is undergoing repair and not available and regardless of repairs is unusable until restrictions are lifted.
- There are concerns about loneliness among young people due to physical isolation from their supports which include their friends, supportive adults in their community including youth workers, teachers, counsellors, peers and other relatives.
- Some lone parents are unable to go out to run errands because they are minding their children at home.
- The management of children who may have challenging behaviour is very stressful in these circumstances for adults and the children.
- Some families do not have support networks within their families to take care of children if they get sick themselves.
- There are concerns that some children considered to be at risk and who are now not visible outside the home face particular dangers. Children who were previously visible and signs of abuse and neglect picked up by schools, afterschool's and youth projects are now alone with whatever family situation that they face.
- Referrals to Tusla are 'significantly down' in some areas. In Dublin North Central Tusla is reporting a 50% drop in child protection referrals. This is worrying as it is extremely unlikely child abuse has declined and the more plausible explanation is because of Covid-19 restrictions abuse is not getting picked up on and reported as would normally be the case. Dublin South Central Tusla is reporting an increase in child protection referrals and an increase in domestic abuse referrals/calls. The situation in Dublin South Central is the opposite to the national trend where nationally child protection referrals are down.

The Chief Executive of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, has expressed concern about the effect school closures during the Covid-19 emergency are having on children at risk, with the number of referrals to the agency significantly down since schools closed last month. Bernard Gloster said schools play a significant part in the reporting of concerns about children at risk of neglect or abuse as they normally have contact with children "all day, everyday". Schools make up a quarter of reports to Tusla each year regarding children at risk. Speaking on RTÉ's Morning Ireland, Mr Gloster said that children at risk are now spending more time without the support system they would normally have around them - at schools, sports clubs and in other social interactions³⁶.

- There are concerns that because of necessary social distancing guidelines and movement-restriction measures that Tusla services such as access visits and Meitheals³⁷ could be negatively affected thereby impacting on children.

³⁶ <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2020/0414/1130333-tusla/> Updated / Tuesday, 14 Apr 2020 08:37

³⁷ Meitheal is a Tusla-led Early Intervention Practice Model designed to ensure that the strengths and needs of children and their families are effectively identified, understood and responded to in a timely way so that children and families get the help and support needed to

The Future, Education and Income

At this time of crisis many of the most disadvantaged in our communities are struggling in vital areas of their lives, including education, employment and income. We wish to raise the following issues and concerns:

Education & The Digital Divide

Parents and children are worried about the education of children and the long-term impact on children of being out of school. There are very particular concerns about children who are already in DEIS schools (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and/or disadvantaged in terms of education. Children who are already educationally disadvantaged will be most impacted on.

The Irish Youth Foundation found that 47% of children and young people felt that they were behind with studies while exam stress was the biggest issue for young people, in addition to mental health issues, isolation and loneliness³⁸.

School closures have shifted education from the classroom to the home, and for the immediate future the burden of education now falls largely on parents. Both parents and children are struggling with home schooling/school at home. Some specific issues include:

- How do educationally disadvantaged parents support their children's education when the children are not in school? One inner city secondary DEIS school has reported that on average only 4 out of 20 students are logging in regularly to classes.
- Some families literally do not have the physical space to provide a safe and usable space for children to learn. Those in emergency accommodation are seriously disadvantaged in this regard. There are families living in overcrowded flats and accommodation where children do not have bedrooms of their own. Bedrooms may be shared between two, three, four siblings, or sharing with adults, where there is literally no physical room or space.
- Older children are often obliged to provide care to their younger siblings as their parents have to work outside the home where the nature of the parents' job does not allow for them to work from home (e.g. food outlets, packaging, warehousing, frontline medical and care work etc). These teenage care givers are struggling to manage their own education while caring for younger siblings.
- Schools are providing information, education materials and support via emails, *WhatsApp*, *Teams*, *Zoom* and other digital means, but there is a need for appropriate and accessible education supports for families of school age children. Many parents have expressed an inability (either because of their own lack of knowledge or lack of access to WiFi and/or IT hardware) to engage with Apps and other platforms used by schools to engage learners remotely.
 - Parents and/or children need to have the skills to access all the mechanisms
 - How do those who do not have the IT equipment manage? Consider two or three children in a home and one computer (or none).
 - The need for laptops and access to internet/Wi-Fi is an issue for some children in emergency accommodation.

improve children's outcomes and realise their rights. It is an early intervention, multi-agency (when necessary) response, tailored to the needs of the individual child or young person. Meitheal is voluntary and can only be undertaken when the parent/carer provides their written consent. Meitheal is used in partnership with parents to help them share their own knowledge, expertise and concerns about their child and to hear the views of practitioners working with them. The ultimate goal is to enable parents and practitioners to work together to achieve a better life for the child. https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Master_Meitheal_Toolkit.pdf

³⁸ Irish Youth Foundation Youth Sector Covid-19 Response Survey March –April 2020 - <https://iyf.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Irish-Youth-Foundation-Covid-19-Survey-Presentation-PDF.pdf>

- There are costs for this type of provision. Some children who do not have Wi-Fi are accessing school activities on their phone, which is exceedingly difficult and can be expensive regarding the consumption of data.
- Maths and Irish are presenting an additional challenge to many parents especially in the higher classes/years.
- School is a way for children to receive social support as well as educational support. This includes combating isolation by being with peers, providing structure and routine to the day as well as having adults from outside of the home who are constantly monitoring their wellbeing.
- There are serious issues and concerns about children with special needs and additional educational needs.
- There are concerns about the interruption of student's studies which may see the loss of, what may be an already tenuous, educational engagement where students are losing their routine and the security of school. There are specific concerns about vulnerable children in the final year of primary school that should be transitioning to post primary school in August/September 2020. These children, often boys, are at real danger of not successfully transitioning due to the length of time out of school.
- There are concerns about the mental health of children and young people out of school and out of their structured social circle for a considerable period of time. These concerns are echoed by research carried out by National University of Ireland Maynooth³⁹, which highlighted specific concerns about:
 - DEIS Schools worried about their pupils.
 - Pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN), and 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL) pupils.
- On Friday the 7th of May the Minister for Education, Joe Mc Hugh, after weeks of speculation and debate, announced that the Leaving Certificate was to be cancelled rather than postponed. The students will be offered **calculated grades** which will be **estimated marks and class rank orders will be collected from schools and will then be adjusted as part of a national standardisation process. However, students will also have the opportunity to sit the exams at a later stage when it is safe to do so**⁴⁰. The difficulties around holding a safe Leaving Certificate are understood but there are several concerns about this proposed system and how it will impact on students. There are also concerns about the stress and mental health of students and families who have been experiencing weeks of uncertainty. Stress is likely to continue as students are now facing an untried system which will impact on their access to future education pathways. Specifically, for the Co-op there are serious concerns about the fairness and impact of this system on disadvantaged students. Research from the UK, which uses predicted grades, has found that disadvantaged students are often under graded in these systems.

Predicted grades are used in the UK, where students receive university offers based on their predicted grades. The biggest research study to date on how they operate is by Dr Gil Wyness of University College London. She found that only 16 per cent of applicants achieved the grade points that they were predicted to achieve. The vast majority – 75 per cent – were over-predicted. The level of accuracy also varied dramatically between disadvantaged schools and independent schools. Among high-achieving students, applicants from low-income homes were more likely to have their grades under-predicted compared with those from high-income backgrounds⁴¹.

³⁹ Covid-19 – Practice in Primary Schools in Ireland', co-wrote by Dr. Jolanta Burke and Dr. Majella Dempsey of Maynooth University, was published in April 2020.

⁴⁰ <https://www.rte.ie/news/education/2020/0508/1137313-leaving-cert-q-a/>

⁴¹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/leaving-cert-to-be-cancelled-but-will-plan-b-be-fair-to-students-1.4247907>

- Not all teachers and schools are diligently engaging with their students with anecdotal reports from across the country of frustrated and angry parents questioning where their children's teachers have gone. Students from disadvantaged families generally have far less social capital and confidence to address such issues directly with the school principal and/or boards of management.
- Foreign students in Ireland to study English are a cohort of concern. Many recently arrived foreign students have been stranded with no money, no jobs and no PPS numbers following the closure of English language schools that are refusing to provide refunds. While classes may be conducted online for the time being the challenge for the students is the inability to get their paperwork completed, get jobs and so their initial reserves of cash are running dry creating real hardship especially regarding food and rent payments. Primarily the issues are the inability to fulfil legal necessities, often due to the closure of offices such as the immigration offices, long delays (as in many weeks) accessing PPS numbers, access to exceptional needs payments and supplementary welfare allowances. Co-op members are supporting several individual cases, mostly with food parcels, food vouchers and sign-posting to free take-away meal services such as Crosscare, as well as linking in with the response and advocacy being developed by the students themselves.

International students who arrived in Ireland recently are facing financial and personal ruin. "A substantial number of English language learners from non-European countries are now stranded in Ireland," an industry source has confirmed to Hot Press. "They are struggling to find housing as well as employment, while battling with the colleges for a refund. LOST IN BUREACRACY-A recent large-scale survey conducted by Fiachra Ó Luain, a language specialist and teacher, revealed that international students coming to Ireland frequently find it difficult to deal with the bureaucracy required by Irish immigration. Students also list accommodation problems, challenges in accessing PPS numbers and social protection as being amongst the most pressing concerns of international students coming here.

Non-European students typically come to Ireland on temporary visas that are valid for up to 90 days. They must then enrol in a "visa-eligible" educational programme, and open a bank account with sufficient funds in it to show proof of financial stability, before they can obtain an Irish Residency Permit (IRP) card. This card, which is issued by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service, allows them to work. Once the local immigration office issues an IRP card students are required to apply for a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN), which is required for both education and employment purposes. Like many international students who arrived in Ireland last month students have been unable to fulfil those legal necessities. Immigration offices are closed and PPSNs won't be easily granted to non-resident applicants.

The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) had recently confirmed that student IRP cards whose expiry dates fall between March 20th to May 20th "will be automatically renewed for two months". This was one among a number of new measures, which were devised to accommodate international students during the coronavirus pandemic⁴².

The Department of Education recently announced that the Government has allocated €10m to schools to be spent on measures to address the digital divide being experienced by students.

⁴² <https://www.hotpress.com/culture/international-students-stranded-ireland-denied-refunds-22814352>. Only part of the article has been reproduced.

The Government has allocated €10m to schools to be spent on measures to address the digital divide being experienced by students. The purchase of laptops for Leaving Certificate students who need them will be a priority. Around €7m has been allocated to second-level schools and €3m to primary schools. The funding will be used to purchase devices that will be owned by schools and loaned to students. All schools, with the exception of fee-charging schools, will receive a proportion of the funding based on enrolment numbers and disadvantaged schools will receive 10% more.

The principal of one Dublin secondary school has said however that the funding is not nearly enough. Twenty-six students are due to sit their Leaving Certificate exams at Mercy Secondary School this year and Principal Michelle O'Kelly says the funding the school will receive amounts to just over €100 per Leaving Cert student. She says a survey of students found that they all required laptops. In many cases this is because home computers are being used by parents or other siblings⁴³.

Several DEIS schools have worked out the amount they will receive from this grant, with one school of 160 students estimating it will receive €2,900 in total and a school with 750 students will get €17,000. This works out at circa €20 per student or €120 per 6th year student. The department's memo to schools last week suggested two devices which the schools could order directly from them at a cost of €979 or €1,178. Therefore, this new announcement will clearly not tackle the digital exclusion of disadvantaged pupils.

The Maynooth Research also highlighted the following concerns;

- ***Time out of school with work being sent home furthers inequality and fosters disadvantage, as a lot of families won't have the time, resources, knowledge or sometimes interest to help their children the way others do***
- ***As a DEIS school many of our children do not have supports/ resources at home to facilitate remote learning***
- ***As a DEIS school, most children do not have parental support and are months - years behind their age peers in non-DEIS schools. This break from school will have a detrimental impact on their concentration levels⁴⁴.***

These fears are echoed by school principals, for example principals in Dublin DEIS (Disadvantaged) schools were reported in RTE as being extremely worried about their students.

"My students started out not on a level playing field, and now it has become even more unequal." They don't describe them as hurdles, they are barriers. The divide that already existed between the classes has now, they say, become a chasm. Many students have been obliged to take on onerous childminding and other household duties while their parents go out to work. Many students do not have access to computers, especially during the day when a parent may need the household's only computer for their own work. For those who have to rely on their phones for remote school learning the cost of credit is a huge problem. Many students simply cannot afford to download the material that they need.

The principal of a large mixed school tells RTÉ News that 30% of his students are not engaging in remote learning. He puts this down to a combination of factors; a lack of access to technology, household responsibilities, and a lack of willingness among them⁴⁵.

⁴³ <https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/0422/1134053-education-coronavirus/>

⁴⁴ Covid-19 – Practice in Primary Schools in Ireland', co-wrote by Dr. Jolanta Burke and Dr. Majella Dempsey of Maynooth University, was published in April 2020.

⁴⁵ <https://www.rte.ie/news/education/2020/0403/1128434-principals-respond-taoiseach/> 4 Apr 2020 Only part of the article has been reproduced

The Co-op's own experiences are echoed in a paper by the Institute for Public Policy which states that one of the potential consequences of the current school closures is a widening of inequalities in education and skills⁴⁶.

There is likely to be a high level of variability in both the school's and parent's capacity to provide and effectively use these resources. Some households may lack the physical resources necessary to support children's learning (e.g. overcrowding, desk space, computers), while others may have time constraints, particularly if parents are engaged in essential services (e.g. retail, supply chain, healthcare workers). Parents with literacy issues may also struggle to engage with the curriculum, while the heightened stress and health problems arising from Covid-19 may make it difficult for both parents and children to engage in schoolwork. In all cases, these issues may be more salient in lower SES (socioeconomic status) households.The concept of summer drift, or the decline in academic skills experienced among lower SES children during the summer break (Alexander et al., 2007; Co-oper et al., 1996), is likely to be further exacerbated the longer schools are closed.

Although findings from this research are sparse, there is some evidence to suggest that lower SES children may be particularly impacted by school closures and the subsequent loss in instructional time that results. ... Indeed, it is possible that higher SES children may actually benefit from home schooling if their parents have higher levels of education and more motivation to invest in their child compared to teachers⁴⁷.

Community Work Ireland noted that in relation to education there is a need to⁴⁸:

- Conduct an audit in association with community workers, community work organisations, youth groups and schools to assess technology deficits, including hardware such as computers/laptops and printers, software such as appropriate software to access online education, and appropriate and affordable Internet access. Where deficits are indicated, they need to be addressed immediately.
- There needs to be emergency interventions to support ongoing schooling where necessary for those at risk of educational disadvantage and early school leaving.
- Allocate ring fenced resources to community development, youth and local development organisations to provide safe and secure technological supports to families and young people who are most at risk.

To ensure that Covid-19 does not exacerbate educational inequalities further it is important that resources are in place to support all families, particularly children in DEIS schools. If school closures are to be further extended similar initiatives targeting educational outcomes may be required. For example, one simple and feasible initiative is to include workbook exercises and educational activities along with the food parcels to ensure that children without access to online resources can engage with educational materials on a regular basis⁴⁹. Considerable thought, planning and consideration needs to be given to these matters over the coming weeks and months and especially so in light of recent reports that schools may not be able to re-open as normal in September thereby extending school disruption into a second academic year.

⁴⁶ Covid-19: Exacerbating Educational Inequalities? April 9, 2020 Dr Orla Doyle Associate Professor, UCD School of Economics & Geary Institute for Public Policy, Director of the UCD Childhood and Human Development (CHiD) Research Centre[\[a\]](#)

⁴⁷ Covid-19: Exacerbating Educational Inequalities? April 9, 2020 Dr Orla Doyle Associate Professor, UCD School of Economics & Geary Institute for Public Policy, Director of the UCD Childhood and Human Development (CHiD) Research Centre[\[a\]](#)

⁴⁸ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission/>

⁴⁹ Covid-19: Exacerbating Educational Inequalities? April 9, 2020 Dr Orla Doyle Associate Professor, UCD School of Economics & Geary Institute for Public Policy, Director of the UCD Childhood and Human Development (CHiD) Research Centre[\[a\]](#)

Low Paid Workers

Many of those who are low paid have either lost their job or found themselves in 'front line' employment, such as those who are involved in caring, cleaning and retail. Front-line medical staff are rightly praised and lauded, but there are many others in the front line, whose work has proved to be critical at this time. They include carers, cleaners, those in the food sector, from crop pickers, transport drivers to retail staff, the majority of whom are low paid and often women. Around the world, including here in Ireland, some of the lowest paid in society are now responsible for keeping communities fed, alive and cared for. These individuals are putting themselves at risk by continuing to work. Most can't afford to stop, even if they wanted to.

Relevant issues include:

- Caring has been privatised in the last number of years which has had a huge impact both on the older people receiving the care and on the carers who are under enormous pressure to provide care. Many women in inner city communities are working as carers, but they are struggling with a range of issues such as:
 - They do not have Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
 - They are struggling with childcare as their children are now out of school and crèches
 - The work is low paid, stressful and now dangerous

A significant source of employment for disadvantaged innercity women is childcare. Childcare also provides vital community support for employment, education and social engagement for parents, children and families. There is a need to ensure that childcare workers and childcare services are protected. Supports developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs are welcome, but there remain concerns that community childcare providers will remain under pressure to pay all their outgoings while closed with little or no budgets to do so.

There are also legacy issues. Childcare workers are low paid whose skills and role has not been adequately valued. Low paid workers in these valuable front-line jobs should be paid a living wage as a minimum. The current minimum wage is not a living wage. There is also a need to ensure that hospital support staff, including healthcare assistants and cleaners, are paid a living wage and are supported with their childcare and other care needs to ensure they can provide vital services during the pandemic. There is a need to ensure all workers have the required PPE to carry out their work safely.⁵⁰

The Roma Community

The Roma community is one of the most disadvantaged communities in the State. All of the barriers they experienced prior to the Covid-19 crisis have been exacerbated in recent weeks. The Co-op is particularly concerned about the Roma community in the inner city of Dublin. To note, the Roma community, along with Travellers, are included as priority groups for Covid-19 testing and this was both a necessary and welcome development.

Covid-19 is already having a disproportionate impact on Travelers and Roma throughout Europe.⁵¹ There have been numerous reports in Ireland that the Roma community has become disproportionately affected by the virus.

⁵⁰ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission/>

⁵¹ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/449668>; <https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2020/persistent-roma-inequality-increases-Covid-19-risk-human-rightsheads-say>

In Ireland we note the alarming number of Roma rapidly becoming infected with the virus, with many in critical condition. In the absence of an ethnic identifier on health systems it is impossible to ascertain the true impact of Covid-19 on the Roma population throughout the State⁵².

Those working on the front line have confirmed that Covid-19 is affecting people living in extreme poverty, such as the Roma community.

Frontline workers operating on the margins of Irish society are reporting a "very high proportion" of positive Covid-19 cases among people living in extreme poverty. The medical charity Safetynet has said the impact of coronavirus in the Roma community is of particular concern, with many Roma living in overcrowded settings, where following social distancing and self-isolation guidelines is impossible. "A very high proportion of the Roma community are testing positive, which is hugely concerning. They mostly live in congregated settings and it's very difficult for them to self-isolate," said Emma Coughlan, MHSU Clinical Nurse Manager. Safetynet CEO, Fiona O'Reilly said: "It's clear that those who are living in extreme poverty, without the luxury of suitable accommodation in which to self-isolate, are extremely vulnerable right now.

We have seen that it's possible to overcome barriers by working together and adapting the care provided to suit the person's need. Now services are working to provide appropriate care for the marginalised of the marginalised. This includes very vulnerable Traveller families and many Roma families living in extreme poverty, who have until now been invisible to the system.⁵³

There was also a high level of infection in one cluster of people from the Roma ethnic group, with 64% of those tested proving positive for the virus. Dr Jack Lambert, an infectious diseases consultant at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Dublin, said: "This means we need to target special support for the Roma community in the north Dublin cluster, to make sure they are all tested, treated and isolated, and contact traced, to prevent onward spread.⁵⁴

The establishment in early May of a community testing hub at the Mater Hospital specifically for members of vulnerable communities, including the Roma, was a welcome development following weeks of advocacy work highlighting this need.

It should be noted that here are a range of socio-economic factors that specifically affect the Roma community.⁵⁵

- Roma disproportionately experience chronic health conditions such as respiratory conditions, asthma, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases that put them at greater risk of contracting Covid-19.
- Roma often experience poor living conditions including overcrowding, limited access to basic facilities such as toilets and running water thereby limiting possibilities to maintain good hygiene during an infection outbreak.
- The Roma community experiences significant barriers in accessing basic health services due to a lack of access to GP's and medical cards, limited income, access to PPS numbers and lack

⁵² <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission/>

⁵³ <https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/0421/1132926-covid-19-affecting-people-living-in-extreme-poverty/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.independent.ie/world-news/coronavirus/clusters-of-covid-19-found-in-homeless-and-roma-communities-39157431.html>

⁵⁵ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission/>

of interpretation and translation services. Currently it is taking significantly longer than normal to obtain PPS numbers due to the additional pressures on the Department of Employment and Social Protection (DEASP). These delays are further exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.

- Mainstream health promotion materials can often fail the Roma community. Targeted health promotion materials are crucial for materials to reach one of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in Irish society. HSE health promotion material and messaging in multiple languages including Romanian are helping address these challenges.
- School closures and suspension of educational supports will widen the educational inequality gap already present within the Roma community. Entrenched intergenerational educational inequalities mean that Roma parents are often not equipped with the literacy skills or curriculum knowledge required to provide home-schooling. Most Roma parents the Co-op interacts with have little or no English while many are illiterate in their own native language as well.
- Those who don't qualify for DEASP supports due to Habitual Residency Condition (HRC)- and would rely on begging as their only source of income are in very precarious situation, specially within the Roma Community who may be living in overcrowded accommodation and not as visible as those in homeless services.

The Co-op has identified other specific issues that the Roma community is facing, many of which the Co-op Roma Programme⁵⁶ works to try to address. Issues include:

- The lack of English language skills is a barrier that most of our Roma service users encounter in their everyday life in Ireland. The situation has been made worse as the availability of translators has been reduced and the capacity of friends who had some English language skills to translate does not exist anymore in the context of social distancing.
- Accompanying service users to various services that they need to avail of which was a practice used to both advocate and translate for them has now become impossible.
- Supports in relation to accessing documentation such as PPS numbers, obtaining birth certificates, bank accounts, Revenue registration or any other required official documentation has become significantly more difficult, as has the actual opening of a bank account. Particular challenges include:
 - Public administration has moved to email/online based systems and our service users are excluded from these systems by their own poor literacy and/or English skills which means they often cannot understand the forms they have to complete and/or have no IT skills/tools to complete them. In order to alleviate these issues, we have been supporting individuals in applying for documents/accounts but obviously doing so in the current environment is very challenging.

⁵⁶ Roma Employment and Training Programme (REaT) The programme provides:

- Access to Education – formal and informal; it is widely recognised that literacy and English language issues are widespread in the Roma community and we aim to offer at least basic tools in that area. We can assist in accessing specific grants for students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Access to Training – possible job opportunities (skilled and unskilled) are dependent on relatively short timed courses that we can facilitate access to (i.e. manual handling, safe pass, etc);
- Access to Social Welfare (Social Welfare applications) – where necessary to improve the condition of our service users in order to progress towards employment;
- Access to Health Services – again, as a support in improving the general situation of our service users;
- Guidance and Support in developing and managing Social Enterprise Activities (where the need arises);
- Signposting towards other specific support organisations when the need arises;
- **Tailored Supports** for members of the Roma community for specific needs, such as Applications for Personal Public Service numbers (PPS), identification of translation/interpretation services, habitual residence paperwork/evidence, or any other support relevant to the programme;
- **Access to Employment** – through strategic partnerships with employers and through active supports both pre employment (CV writing, interview skills) and during employment.

- Specifically, a locally based system that the Co-op had been operating successfully with the Kings Inn Social Welfare office to obtain PPS numbers has come to an abrupt halt as that operation has been centralised. The new centralised operation is working to the letter of the requirements to which the Roma community cannot adhere, such as proof of address. Therefore, the local system which we had worked hard to develop has been ignored and the most vulnerable are suffering. We are advocating with the Department to try and improve the operation of the centralised system for members of the Roma community. Currently it is taking significantly longer to obtain PPS numbers due to the backlog. Officials in the Kings Inn Social Welfare office continue to be very supportive of the Co-op's work and efforts to assist members of the Roma community.
- The Co-op has been unable to advocate for Roma community members with banks as banks do not allow over the phone or written advocacy, and direct in person advocacy is not possible at present. This is creating significant challenges for Roma in opening bank accounts which are necessary for both the payment of wages and social welfare payments.
- Housing issues create a potentially disastrous situation as most of our Roma service users live in Emergency Accommodation where there is no physical space to allow for social distancing. Access to personal cleaning facilities is difficult and presents a challenge for the members of the Roma community. There is an urgent need to address the accommodation needs of some Roma families in emergency accommodation to provide them with enough space to live safely and allow them to self-isolate if required.
- Those that are living in the private rented sector are often living in overcrowded accommodation where members of the community are doubling up in accommodation (where families and individuals are living with other families and individuals as they have nowhere else to go). Again, this impacts on the ability to social distance, isolate or manage basic needs such as education of the children.
- Members of the Roma community have been impacted financially due to loss of employment. This has impacted on their ability to access basic needs such as food. In some cases, migrants, including members of the Roma community, do not meet the requirements for social welfare due to not having enough time worked (stamps) or not fulfilling or able to prove the habitual residence condition⁵⁷ in Ireland. There is a need to ensure that the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection respond in a humanitarian manner to the destitution that some Roma find themselves in when dealing with social welfare applications.
- The Roma community we work with has a range of medical conditions, including a high level of diabetes, pulmonary issues and obesity, which makes them particularly vulnerable to Covid-19.
- Many younger members of the Roma community are struggling to access their school's online work as they do not have the necessary IT technology and are living in emergency accommodation with little or no space to study. This has caused extreme stress for these young people as many are very keen to pursue their education. Some local schools are

⁵⁷ The Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) is a condition that you must satisfy in order to be eligible for most means tested social welfare payments in Ireland. It came into effect from May 1st 2004 following the enlargement of the European Union.

<https://www.migrantproject.ie/returning-to-ireland/social-welfare-habitual-residence/>

When deciding if you are habitually resident, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection considers 5 factors:

1. Your 'main centre of interest'. This is based on things like: whether you own or lease a home here, where your close family members live, whether you belong to social or professional associations here, and any other evidence or activities indicating a settled residence in Ireland
2. The length and continuity of your residence in Ireland and in any other country
3. The length and purpose of any absences from Ireland
4. The nature and pattern of your employment
5. Your future intention to live in the Republic of Ireland for the foreseeable future

engaging very well with these young people giving them technology and additional supports but there is a need to proactively support Roma students given they are already very educationally disadvantaged.

Enterprise

The majority of Co-op clientele who have established self-employment in the last 12 months were previously long term unemployed. An estimated one third come from migrant communities (both European and non-European), as well as some who are ex-offenders and/or homeless/emerging from homelessness. Under the current restrictions there is no way many of them can work, even those in IT, Graphic Art/Design services have been impacted as their customers are not in a position to contract work to others due to their own businesses contracting.

Therefore, the Covid-19 crisis is having a devastating impact on both newly established and existing micro businesses and sadly the Co-op envisages that many of them will be forced to close for good. It will take others a long time to recover. In addition, there is a devastating emotional and mental health impact of not being able to work at a new or existing business that they have work hard to establish.

There will be a need to support those trying to establish/re-establish self-employment and to examine the current social welfare rules such as expanding the criteria of the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (e.g. timeframes for payments).

Social Welfare and Employment

New social welfare payments, the Covid-19 unemployment and illness payments⁵⁸ and the Temporary Wage Subsidy⁵⁹, a scheme available to employers whose business has been adversely affected by the pandemic, are very welcome. The Co-op is aware that as of April 29th in the Dublin 1 area alone 9,000 people are on Covid-19 welfare payments.

Many of those who have been laid off in recent weeks need support. Co-op members are providing support and have encountered some of the following issues:

- There is some confusion and uncertainty about the new rules in relations to social welfare payments. The Co-op and our member organisations are attempting to address these issues and provide clarity and guidance.
- Many of the Co-op's clients trying to apply for payments have limited English language/literacy/digital skills and are struggling with English forms and their own literacy.
- There are concerns that undocumented migrants are lost and unable to access the system. Such communities are particularly vulnerable in the current situation.

On the 24th of April, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection announced a Labour Market Advisory Council to consider the post-pandemic labour market⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ On the 20th March 2020, the Health (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act 2020 (the 2020 Health Act) was passed into law. Part 2 of the 2020 Act introduced amendments to the Social Welfare Acts, 2005 to expedite the processing of Covid-19 unemployment and illness payments, ensuring that these payments could be made immediately to those affected, rather than disregarding the first three days of non-employment, as is usually the case. It is also payable to the self-employed.

⁵⁹ In order to be eligible for the scheme employers must be experiencing "significant economic disruption" from the crisis; have a demonstrated decline in turnover of at least 25 per cent; be unable to pay normal wages and outgoings; and be retaining their employees on the payroll. The subsidy will account for up to 70 per cent of an employee's wages (increased to 85 per cent for employees with an average wage of less than €412 per week, and €350 for employees previously earning between €412 and €586 per week

⁶⁰ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/a2f298-minister-doherty-meets-with-new-labour-market-advisory-council-to-co/>

The Council has been set up to provide advice to the Minister and the Government with regard to the labour force participation rates, minimising unemployment levels and reducing average unemployment durations. The Council will publish its findings on a periodic basis and, crucially, against the ongoing backdrop of the Covid-19 emergency will now also advise on the wider labour market and employment policy challenges that face the Irish economy in the post-pandemic recovery period.

Speaking after the meeting, Minister Doherty said: "Today, we live in unprecedented times with over a million people reliant on the state for some form of income support and we face unparalleled demand for supports by businesses, workers and their families..., now is the time to start planning for the post-pandemic recovery. We must ensure that the Irish economy and labour market can reposition itself as quickly and effectively as possible"⁶¹.

What is critical is that this new structure takes account of the most disadvantaged in our society when it comes to considering the post pandemic labour market. It is vital the issues and vulnerable areas which have been exposed in the labour market are examined and addressed. These include:

- The poor wages and/or working conditions of those who are in positions which have proved vital in this pandemic, including carers, retail staff, cleaners, those in the gig economies⁶², those with zero-hour equivalent contracts⁶³ and childcare workers.
 - There is a need to endorse the living wage.
 - There is a need to improve employees' rights in terms of zero-hour/ gig economy contracts
- Discrimination in the labour market. Non-Irish communities are fearful of discrimination in the labour market and are concerned that as rates of unemployment increase migrants are soft targets for job losses.
- Consideration should be given to expanding the membership of the Labour Market Advisory Council to include the Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)⁶⁴, the representative body of 49 not-for-profit Local Development Companies, many of which hold Local Employment Service (LES) contracts with the DEASP. These 49 organisations have decades of experience dealing with unemployment and moving individuals from unemployment into skilled training and paid employment. Their wisdom, knowledge and guidance should be sought.

The UN has argued that in the aftermath of this pandemic economic policy and entitlements must be consistent with public health and human rights⁶⁵. What we do know is that marginalised groups become increasingly vulnerable during emergencies and as such it is vital that their experiences are considered as part of the responses that are developed. Therefore, marginalised groups must be included in all fora such as the *Labour Market Advisory Council* and be included in developing both short and long term responses.

⁶¹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/a2f298-minister-doherty-meets-with-new-labour-market-advisory-council-to-co/>

⁶² The Gig Economy According to one definition, is "a labour market characterised by the prevalence of short-term contracts or freelance work, as opposed to permanent jobs".

And - taking opposing partisan viewpoints - it is either a working environment that offers flexibility with regard to employment hours, or... it is a form of exploitation with very little workplace protection. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-38930048>

⁶³ A **zero-hours contract** is a contract where the employer does not have to provide regular work for the employee, but the employee has to be on call in case they are needed to work. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/zero-hours-contract>

⁶⁴ The Irish Local Development Network CLG (ILDN) is the representative body for Ireland's Local Development Companies (LDCs). These 49 not-for-profit groups are building inclusive, vibrant communities and better life chances for people in every part of Ireland. They assist communities and disadvantaged persons/groups with personal development and well-being, social inclusion, employment training and placement, enterprise and social enterprise, community development, environment and climate action. The Co-op is a member organisation of the ILDN.

⁶⁵ UN Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/un-calls-human-rights-response-impending-recession>

Conclusion

If there was ever a time or reason for an increased investment in health, education, social welfare, employment supports, and accommodation now is the time. Covid-19 has exposed deep inequalities in our society that have left many communities extremely vulnerable and even more marginalised than heretofore.

In planning for the recovery, we must, first and foremost, consider the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. If they are cared for and protected all will benefit. Going back to *normal* is not good enough as normal was not working for many in society. *Normal* was characterised by a two tier society, one of wealth, influence and privilege and the other of disadvantage, poverty and inequality. We need to take this opportunity to develop a *new normal*. As noted by Professor Sam McConkey⁶⁶:

By far the longest predictor of long life expectancy or good health outcomes is having a wealthy economy. The second most important one is equity - so my view is we need to consider also values - like to what extent do we want to rebuild our world in Ireland in a sustainable way that is ongoing sustainable for the next 50 or 100 years, to what extent do we want to have social equity, financial equity, wealth equity. We've gotten more divergent in Ireland, we've gotten more inequitable in Ireland over the last 20 years, as have other countries. I am uncomfortable with this and I feel we need to look at social equity as a social value.

Therefore, we must ensure that the aftermath or recovery does not punish those most affected by the pandemic. In planning for that recovery, we must consider basic needs first, such as the need to survive, and build from there to develop a resilient and strong society.

One of the key priorities in the aftermath of the crisis must be to address the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on children and young people in the inner city and elsewhere. In particular the crisis is demonstrating the need to combat the damaging consequences for these children of inequalities in access to essential services and an adequate standard of living. Addressing these inequalities will link well to the increased priority that is now being given at European Union level to tackling child poverty. The new President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in response to a proposal from the European Parliament, has committed to create a **European Child Guarantee**. The Parliament's proposal is that such a guarantee would ensure that 'every child in Europe at risk of poverty (including refugee children) has access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition'. Implementing such a guarantee needs to be a key element in the next period here in Ireland, especially for children in the inner city and other deprived areas nationwide.

We must also support community development organisations and community workers to support the resilience of communities during and after this crisis⁶⁷.

As Conor Skehan noted in his Sunday Independent article (10th May 2020):

⁶⁶ As reported on Morning Ireland 29th April 2020. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/there-will-be-casualties-decisions-facing-govt-most-difficult-in-100-years-996651.html> Samuel J. McConkey is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of International Health and Tropical Medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. He is also a Consultant in General Medicine, Tropical Medicine and Infectious Diseases at Beaumont Hospital Dublin, and Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Drogheda both in Ireland

⁶⁷ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission>

In reimagining our future, it will also be important to understand and sustain the role of important but less visible sectors-such as not-for-profit services that have an aggregate annual turnover in excess of €14bn, employing 165,000 people. These sustain the sinews of society by providing education, healthcare, culture, housing, international aid, local development and social care. These are the types of sectors, often overlooked by economists and which increase social capital, while also improving quality of life - that core success factor for sustaining international competitiveness

Irish governments made egregious policy mistakes in tackling the 2008/2009 financial crisis, the consequences of which are in full glare during the Covid-19 crisis. These mistakes must not be repeated. The harsh lessons learned from implementing counter-productive austerity measures must be absorbed and reflected in future policy making decisions.

The United Nations has called for a human rights response to the recession that is likely to emerge as a consequence of the international Covid-19 crisis. Juan Pablo Bohoslavsky, a United Nations Independent Expert⁶⁸, published a report on Covid-19 outlining an urgent appeal for a human rights response to the current pandemic and the impending economic recession⁶⁹. Below is a summary of some of the key points and recommendations developed by Social Justice Ireland, as they might relate to Ireland⁷⁰:

- **Austerity cannot be an option:** Austerity, as a policy to face the consequences of an economic crisis, does not contribute to economic recovery but rather entrenches inequalities, hits the vulnerable the hardest and weakens States' public safety nets, dangerously jeopardising the ability to adequately respond to immediate human rights obligations.
- **The coming economic crisis is likely to hit women harder:** The current economic system is, for the most part, sustained by gender inequality and discrimination against women in the labour market. Around the world, unpaid and paid care work is too often and mostly performed by women. Economic crises also hit women harder than men because they are often overrepresented in the informal sector and low paid work.
- **There must be an immediate emergency response for the vulnerable:** An immediate emergency human rights and humanitarian response in areas and for groups at heightened risks of the pandemic should be urgently deployed. In particular, humanitarian efforts must urgently provide relief to all individuals including those living in informal settlements and in situations of homelessness, informal workers including refugees and migrants, persons with disabilities, older persons, children, women who are victims of violence, and persons under detention and in State custody.
- **That response should include emergency basic income, housing and essential services:** Any initiatives to soften the economic fall-out must be designed to urgently reach those in need and benefit all those financially struggling without any discrimination, including those who are self-employed, informal workers and unpaid care workers who are largely women.
- **Economic policies and entitlements must be consistent with public health and human rights**
- **There should be some relief of both private and sovereign debt:** Private debt-servicing should be suspended for individuals who would otherwise be unable to cope with the public health crisis and be without income. During this period these loans should not bear interest. Those in need should benefit from individual and certain corporate tax cuts or delays. It is also crucial to suspend for at least six months debt payments and services to the financial

⁶⁸ UN Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights

⁶⁹ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Development/IEDebt/20200414_IEDebt_urgent_appeal_COVID19_EN.pdf

⁷⁰ <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/policy-issues/un-calls-human-rights-response-impending-recession>

sector by low-income families and poor households. A moratorium on sovereign debt repayments for debt-distressed developing countries, should be immediately implemented.

- **Fiscal policies should finance social justice:** States need to reconsider their fiscal policies to finance social policies and ensure that monetary policy is consistent with both of them.
- **This is an opportunity for a real global green change:** We cannot afford to go back to business as usual. The Covid-19 pandemic calls for re-thinking the economic, financial and social system we are living in to reduce inequalities among and within countries, as well as between men and women.

The Covid-19 NGO Group⁷¹ calls for all community supports provided to tackle and address the social and economic consequences of this crisis to be based on the following values. These values underpin the State's international and regional human rights commitments (UN and Council of Europe), our commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), and the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) as well as our EU responsibilities, including under the Fundamental Rights Charter:

- **Social Justice and Human Rights** – i.e. putting in place measures to ensure that human rights are protected during this crisis and that those who were already marginalised pre-Covid are not further disadvantaged during the crisis and in post-Covid Ireland. Any temporary restrictions on rights must be necessary and proportionate. Human rights also provide a framework that should be used by the Government to frame its response to this public health crisis. The most vulnerable in the population must be prioritised and given special protections, as outlined throughout this document.
- **Collectivity and Community Empowerment** – i.e. supporting groups, networks and organisations working directly with and representing marginalised communities to plan and work together to mitigate the worst effects of this crisis and develop collective, resilient and empowering actions for the future.
- **Participation** - i.e. ensuring the active participation of groups representing marginalised communities in local and national decision-making in relation to strategies to mitigate the worst effects of this crisis and develop collective, resilient and empowering actions for the future.

Dublin City Community Co-op wishes to take this opportunity to acknowledge and commend the Trojan work of our colleagues across the Community & Voluntary sector and in statutory agencies such as DCC, HSE, An Garda Síochána and Tusla as well as staff in multiple Government Departments who have worked around the clock since February. Our deep gratitude is extended to all frontline staff, whether working in hospitals, nursing homes, factories, supermarkets, essential retail outlets, warehouses, refuse collection and public transport. In tackling Covid-19 a united, shared and collegial national effort has been undertaken. We in the Co-op are proud to stand alongside our Community, Voluntary and Statutory Agency colleagues as we continue the battle against this most formidable of foes.

For questions or clarifications on the contents of this document please contact:

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⁷¹ <https://www.communityworkireland.ie/covid-19-ngo-group-marginalised-groups-and-promoting-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-in-the-covid-crisis-a-joint-submission/>. The ILDN, of which the Co-op is a member, is part of the Covid-19 NGO Group.

Appendix: Dublin City Community Co-operative (The Co-op)

The Co-op is a legally established co-operative with 13 grassroots community development organisations as members, all based in Dublin's inner city.

The Co-op and its 13 members are partially funded by the national Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018 – 2022, and operate in the most disadvantaged areas of Dublin's inner city, i.e. in all of or parts of Dublin 1, 3, 7, and 8 as well as disadvantaged areas in Dublin 2 and 4. Please see further details below.

Co-op Website: www.dublincitycommunitycoop.ie

Co-op Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/DublinCityCommunityCo-op/>

The Co-op's members are involved in a range of programmes and activities which can broadly be categorised as follows:

- **Community Development**
- **Life Long Learning & Education**
- **Children, Childcare & Families**
- **Enterprise & Employment**

Our Approach

The Co-op operates to community development principles and a social inclusion ethos forms the basis for all communication with stakeholders.

The following principles are key to our way of working:

- **Collective Action:** Community work is based on working with and supporting groups of people. It enables them to develop knowledge; skills and confidence so that they can develop an analysis, identify priority needs and issues and address these through collective action.
- **Empowerment:** Community work is about the empowerment of individuals and communities and addressing the unequal distribution of power.
- **Social Justice:** Community work is based on a belief that every person and every community can play an active role in creating conditions for a just and equal society where human rights are promoted, and all forms of oppression and discrimination are challenged.
- **Equality & Anti-Discrimination:** Community work challenges the oppression and exclusion of individuals and groups by institutions and society that leads to discrimination against people based on ability, age, culture, gender, marital status, socioeconomic status, nationality, skin colour, racial or ethnic group, and sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs.
- **Participation:** Participation is about the involvement of groups who experience social exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination in decision making, planning and action at all levels, from the local to the global. Participation can be viewed as a continuum of activity that can start from information sharing through capacity building and empowerment to active engagement and meaningful participation in democratic processes.

The Co-op Members are⁷²:



LYCS

Lourdes Youth and Community Services (LYCS) is an integrated community development organisation based in Dublin's North East inner city. Through its four programmes, LYCS works with approximately 250 children, young people and adults every week, in the areas of education and training, social, cultural and recreational activity.



SICCDA

Founded in 1982, South Inner City Community Development Association (SICCDA) is a community development organisation based in The Liberties in Dublin's South Inner City. SICCDA, working with a board made up of local residents, along with volunteers from the local community, is committed to and actively involved in tackling the social, educational, health, economic, and environmental problems facing the community.



North West Inner City Network

The North West Inner City Network (NWICN) is an independent member-based forum of Community and Voluntary Groups in the North West Inner City of Dublin. Established in 1997 by a group of local community activists, people living and working in the area, the Network seeks to ensure that the community has an active say in how their community is developed. It has a particular remit in relation to social inclusion.



South West Inner City Network (SWICN)

South West Inner City Network (SWICN) is a community organization, providing a wide range of services for adults and young people living in Dublin 8.



New Communities Partnership (NCP)

New Communities Partnership (NCP) is an independent national network of 175 immigrant led groups comprising of 65 nationalities with offices in Dublin's inner city and Cork with outreach to other cities.



Inner City Organisations Network (ICON)

ICON has its roots in over twenty years of community organisation in the north east inner city. It was formed to bring together all the local projects to fight against increasing local disadvantage and long-term unemployment and to make sure that local voices were heard.

⁷² See map on page 37 for locations of Co-op member organisations.



Daughters of Charity Community Services

Daughters of Charity Community Services is a community based organisation providing a range of educational, training and social care services for children, young people and adults in Dublin's North Inner City.



Inner City Enterprise (ICE)

Inner City Enterprise (ICE) is a not-for-profit charity established to advise and assist unemployed people in Dublin's inner city to set up their own businesses, create their own self-employment and establish social enterprises.



North Wall CDP

The North Wall Community Development Project (CDP) is a not-for-profit community development organisation based in Lower Sheriff Street and Seville Place, Dublin 1.



Robert Emmet CDP

The Robert Emmet Community Development Project works in Dublin's South West Inner City. It is a grassroots organisation with a local independent board of directors. There are 3 members of staff and over 20 volunteers.



C.A.S.P.r

Community After Schools Project (CASPr) provides educational services and childcare in the North East Inner City, to enable people to escape poverty and access employment. The project's childcare services aim to provide a fun, safe learning environment for children.



An Siol CDP

An Siol CDP is a Community Development Project that has been based in the Stoneybatter area for over 10 years.



Nascadh

NASCADH is a Community Development Project operating in the East Wall area of Dublin's inner city

North West Inner City Network

117-118 North King Street, Dublin 7, Ireland.
NWICN is a member-based community organisation comprised of community and voluntary organisations located in the north-west inner city. It conducts door-to-door consultations on a quarterly basis to identify the issues faced by residents living in the local authority flat complexes to ascertain the issues that they are encountering. The NWICN provides a range of support to member groups, such as men's groups. It provides a range of educational and training programmes for all age groups.

An Siol CDP

19 Manor Street, Dublin, Ireland.
An Siol CDP delivers services and provides support to meet the needs of the residents of North West Inner City. For over 25 years it has been providing homework clubs, one to one tuition, early literacy supports and educational supports to children with special educational needs, meals and mini bus service, activities and a friendship service to senior citizens; advocacy for local residents and supports to tenants and residents groups; a free and confidential Welfare to Work Information Service.

Daughters of Charity Community Services

8/9 Henrietta Street, Dublin 1, Ireland.
DoCCS are a community based organisation providing a range of educational, training and social care services for children, young people and adults in Dublin's North West Inner City area. They strengthen communities by encouraging individuals and families most marginalised to reach their full potential.

New Communities Partnership

53 Dorset Street Upper, Rotunda, Dublin 1, Ireland.
NCP is a migrant-led organisation which supports groups and individuals in the area of social inclusion and empowerment, assisting them to increase their capacity to meet their needs through the provision of training and mentoring support. NCP delivers a number of specific services such as Citizenship Application Support Service, Migrant Family Support Service, English Homework Support Service, English classes for adults, active citizenship training, the provision and support in maintaining an office space for migrant-led organisations. The partnership provides a range of specific employment access supports tailored to the needs of new community members, such as lifelong learning related activities, CV preparation, career guidance and signposting services. NCP also has a close working relationship with State agencies to support the engagement of new communities in local and national decision making policies and forums.

Inner City Enterprise

Unit F4, Spade Enterprise Centre, North King Street, Dublin 7, Ireland.
ICE is a not-for-profit organisation established to advise and assist unemployed people in Dublin's inner city to set up their own businesses and create their own employment. ICE provides a range of supports to individuals who are members of disadvantaged target groups to establish their own businesses. ICE also supports community groups to establish social enterprises.

Community After Schools Project

1, Portland Square, Campbells Row, Ballybough, Dublin 1, Ireland.
CASPr combines the delivery of after-school, homework club and crèche activities for children with the provision of education and training for parents. The project aims to solve child poverty issues within the north inner city. The theme of the CASPr's work is to counter educational disadvantage in order to support children to remain in school, and adults to enter or re-enter training and employment, particularly those who have left school early, including long-term unemployed adults, lone parents and people recovering from addiction problems.

Lourdes Youth and Community Services

Rutland Street Lower, Mountjoy, Dublin, Ireland.
LYCS is a community development organisation which provides accredited and non-accredited training, educational and social programmes for local children, young people and adults each week in the north-east inner city. It operates the following programmes of work: childcare, youth work, Community Training Centre for early school leavers, adult education, development education and employment.

Dublin City Community CO-OP

Unit 1 Killamey Court, Buckingham St, Dublin 1, Ireland.
We are an alliance of 13 grassroots, Dublin inner city, community development organisations which have come together to ensure the much needed development and delivery of social, economic and cultural services continues within our communities. All 13 Coop members are partially funded by the national Social Inclusion Community Activation (SICAP) Programme and operate in the most disadvantaged areas of the inner city. The Coop's members are operational in all of or parts of Dublin 1, 3, 7, 8 as well as disadvantaged city areas in Dublin 2 and 4.

Inner City Organisations Network

22 Buckingham Street Lower, Mountjoy, Dublin 1, Ireland.
ICON is a forum of community and voluntary organisations and individuals living and working in the north-east inner city. ICON seeks to ensure the community has an active role in local developments and access to support, training, education and employment. The broad functions of ICON include campaigning and lobbying around issues identified within the community; encouraging local policy-making through debate and discussion forums; promoting a partnership approach and providing a catalyst to initiate relevant service responses.

North Wall CDP

1 Sheriff Street Lower, North Wall, Dublin 1, Ireland.
NWCDP assists residents to collectively address issues facing their community. The project delivers a number of accredited training and educational programmes aimed at enhancing participants' employability. The project also runs a number of personal development programmes as well as a community crèche for over 80 children.

NASCADH CDP

75 Teeling Way, East Road, East Wall, Dublin 3, Ireland.
NASCADH organises a number of inter-generational activities, delivers a range of accredited non-accredited educational and training programmes for all age groups and health initiatives. It offers an over 55s club for both women and men. It played a lead role in initiating a men's shed and a community garden. It also offers a number of activation programmes to enhance East Wall residents' employability.

Citywide Coverage

Co-op • ICE • NCP

Robert Emmet CDP

Usher St, Merchants Quay, Dublin, Ireland.
RECDP is most identified with Oliver Bond flat complex, but also works with people from surrounding flat complexes and people living in Watergate House (families going through the asylum process). The core of the work is building close relationships with other family members, while improving educational outcomes for the children. The project also has a senior citizens' programme, environmental programme, heritage programme, youth programme and also delivers informal and introductory training in these areas.

South West Inner City Network

Digital Court, Rainsford St, Ushers, Dublin 8, Ireland.
SWICN delivers a range of accredited and non-accredited IT and other educational programmes for young people and adults. It provides conversational English language classes for migrants. The organisation also delivers a digital film-making course for adults. SWICN also supports residents to collectively address issues and meet needs in their communities.

South Inner City Community Development Association

90 Meath St, Merchants Quay, Dublin 8, Ireland.
SICCDA assists residents in the Liberties area to participate in locally based social and cultural events, voter participation programmes and a range of educational and training programmes (which it delivers). It works with residents to access a range of services. SICCDA also signposts individuals to participate in formal education.



