



FAIR CLARE

**SECURING SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS
& A JUST TRANSITION IN COUNTY CLARE**

a report by
Róisín Greaney and Kieran Harrahill

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“how it might look if, in Clare, we sought to use all avenues of influence and all available resources to deliver a democratic, fair and fast transition to a low carbon society while improving the lives of those currently struggling”

Sarah Clancy ClarePPN coordinator

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the dedicated involvement of community members across Clare who took the time to meet with us and share their stories, challenges and hopes for the future. We are grateful to each person who took part, and we hope that this project contributes to the breadth of work already being done by dedicated community groups and residents across Clare to realise the socio-economic rights of those who experience disadvantage and marginalisation.

We are especially grateful to Kathryn McCabe, who took the time out of her busy schedule to travel across Clare with Kieran Harrahill and Róisín Greaney of TASC to deliver the training workshops and conduct focus groups that have been integral to this pilot project. Thanks also to Dr Shana Cohen, Rob Keogh, Emmie Voet and Manuela Rosso Brugnach of TASC for their valuable contributions.

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Executive Summary

This six-month pilot project was led by Clare Public Participation Network (Clare PPN) in collaboration with Clare County Council, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, and Clare Local Development Company and was funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development from the Dormant Accounts Fund. The research component of this project was conducted by the Thinktank for Action on Social Change (TASC). TASC, who with the valuable expertise of independent facilitator Kathryn McCabe and alongside Clare PPN, held nine focus groups and five public introductory training workshops across the county during the summer of 2023. The findings from this project have been submitted to the Draft Local Economic and Community Plan 2023-2029 (LECP). It is our hope that socio-economic rights and Just Transition principles will be incorporated and embedded into the actions and goals of the adopted LECP for Clare.

This report aims to examine the impact of the ongoing transition to zero emissions on groups who experience one or many forms of structural disadvantage in County Clare. Underpinned by a human rights-based approach, focusing specifically on realising the socio-economic rights of Clare residents, the report makes recommendations and contributes to the discussion of how Just Transition planning and policy in Clare can begin to address underlying inequalities and ensure that those who experience poverty, as well as the most marginalised in society, are protected and benefit from the transition.

Focus groups highlighted how participants from structurally vulnerable groups in Clare appear to be experiencing negative impacts related to the transition, affecting their enjoyment of socio-economic rights, such as energy poverty and transport deprivation. Community members expressed the view that current approaches to decarbonisation do not fully consider the realities of life for people experiencing socio-economic exclusion and felt that over the coming years, such measures would deepen poverty in Clare. In addition, several transition-related challenges, across a number of themes, that affect the realisation of one's socio-economic rights were raised during community consultations:

Employment

From the perspective of structurally vulnerable groups in Clare, there are several barriers to accessing decent and fair employment opportunities, including discrimination, a lack of access to caregiving services and public transport, the difficulties faced by migrant community members in being able to find employment suitable to their level of qualification, and the risk that taking a job would result in a loss of essential social welfare benefits, particularly for people with a disability.

The role of care

Care work was described as important and meaningful work as well as being essential to communities across Clare, but participants felt it is often

undervalued. For caregivers, a lack of public childcare services and non-commercial child-friendly spaces, such as playgrounds, were described as barriers to participating fully in the community.

Tourism

Participants discussed several concerns about the current approach to tourism in Clare and perceived it as more of an issue than an opportunity. It was described as contributing to the lack of housing supply and pricing young people out of recreational activities in Clare's towns and villages. The recent emphasis on directing Just Transition funding into the tourism sector to generate local employment, as seen in the midlands, could potentially exacerbate inequalities in Clare if replicated without careful consideration.

Energy

Across consultations, participants spoke about the difficulties they faced paying energy bills and for fuel and discussed several barriers to undertaking home energy upgrades. For most, investing in larger-scale energy efficiency measures, such as installing solar panels, was considered unattainable. For those struggling financially, solid fuels, albeit increasingly expensive, were described as important in providing a sense of personal energy security.

Transport

Consultations strongly underscored the need for improved community-based, accessible and flexible public transportation services across the county. The absence of a universally accessible public transport system in Clare appears to exacerbate issues such as car dependency, transport disadvantage and forced car ownership.

Agriculture

Beef farmers in Clare face an unjust transition due to the economically unsustainable nature of beef farming, coupled with the urgent need to reduce emissions. Low-income

farmers who participated in this project spoke about the difficulties they face trying to make a profit and expressed a feeling of lack of representation concerning decisions affecting their livelihoods and the impact of farming on the environment.

Service provision

Across consultations, a desire to return to localised service provision, particularly in the areas of healthcare and transport, was raised by participants. Access to suitable housing was considered a significant challenge for many involved in this project.

The recommendations put forward in this report aim to contribute to the discourse on how a fair and equitable transition rooted in human rights could be realised in Clare. They seek to illustrate how public spending on climate action could be channelled into communities through the creation of decent work, community wealth building initiatives and enhanced localised service provision to support the realisation of the socio-economic rights of structurally vulnerable groups in Clare.

There are 27 recommendations outlined in Chapter 5 of this report, including local and national-level proposals. Ten of these recommendations focused on local action are included here, but it is important to stress that local action alone will not compensate for State-led service provision and investment in housing and infrastructure in Clare.

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>1. We recommend that Clare County Council embed a community wealth building approach in its operations as well as into the upcoming County Climate Action Plan and Local Economic and Community Plan.</p> | <p>Disabled People’s Community Development Project for the county be established.</p> | <p>livelihoods is considered in a ‘circular’ context, taking into account what work is required, who is in need of work, what funding is available to pay for it and how it can be organised to benefit the local community. We recommend that the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and the Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee, who are tasked with developing and overseeing the Local Economic and Community Plan, take ownership of this action.</p> | <p>System Task Force as well as a Housing Taskforce at county level in Clare.</p> |
| <p>2. We recommend establishing a funded and staffed independent social enterprise and cooperative incubator in Clare, which uses a community development approach to support the creation of decent work for marginalised communities in the county.</p> | <p>4. We recommend that key funding streams available to communities are redesigned to allow for the recruitment of project managers or other key staff to deliver projects and oversee and report on funding.</p> | <p>7. We recommend that where public funding is allocated to tourism initiatives in Clare, community-led and owned models of tourism are prioritised.</p> | <p>9. A localised Just Transition plan is needed for beef farmers and low-income farmers in Clare. As a first step, we recommend extensive dialogue and engagement with beef farmers and low-income farmers across the county. We envisage that this work could be overseen by the Local Action Group that will be implementing LEADER and funded through that funding stream.</p> |
| <p>3. We recommend the continued establishment and re-establishment of sustainably funded Community Development Projects in Clare, which are based in areas of deprivation. In addition, we recommend that in consultation with people with disabilities in Clare and under their leadership, a funded</p> | <p>5. We recommend reconceptualising the definition of a ‘green job’ in the forthcoming Clare Climate Action Plan and Local Economic and Community Plan, with a commitment to promoting and supporting decent work in all areas where labour contributes to caring for others and/or the environment.</p> | <p>8. We recommend the establishment of a Universal Access Public Transport</p> | <p>10. We recommend the provision of help and information centres at a very local level in key locations to support community members with low levels of literacy, digital literacy or financial literacy in accessing services or information.</p> |
| <p>6. Further, in the context of the abundance of work that needs to be done in Clare, we recommend that planning for sustainable</p> | | | |



1. Introduction

This report aims to examine the impact of the transition to zero emissions on groups who experience one or many forms of structural disadvantage in County Clare. Underpinned by a human rights-based approach, focusing specifically on realising the socio-economic rights of Clare residents, the report makes recommendations and contributes to the discussion of how Just Transition planning and policy in Clare can begin to address underlying inequalities and thus ensure that those who experience poverty, as well as the most marginalised in society, are protected and benefit from the transition.

The impetus for the project which this report results from, was the necessity for Clare County Council's Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) and its Economic Strategic Policy Committee to prepare a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) for Clare, outlining plans and actions for the years 2023–2029. Such plans are a statutory requirement for each Local Authority area, aiming to foster collaboration between the Local Authority and various community groups, agencies, services and economic interests in planning for the best outcomes for Clare's residents.

Before commencing the LECP process, Clare County Council convened Clare Public Participation Network (Clare PPN), Clare Local Development Company (CLDC) and the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB). They jointly made an expression of interest for funding for a pilot project focused on 'Enshrining Socio-Economic Rights and Just Transition in County Clare's LECP'. Subsequently, the group was awarded funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund, administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, and appointed Clare PPN to lead the project. Clare PPN contracted TASC, the Think-tank for Action

on Social Change, to conduct and oversee the research and reporting aspects of this project. We are grateful to have had their valuable collaboration on this pilot project.

This project sought to gather the views, lived experiences and suggestions of some of the communities in Clare that experience poverty, deprivation or other forms of exclusion. Using the twin lenses of socio-economic rights and Just Transition, a key objective of this pilot project was to enshrine goals and actions within the LECP that would address some of the pressing social and environmental issues in the county.

During the summer of 2023, TASC and Clare PPN held nine focus groups with structurally vulnerable community members. Focus groups were held during May in Ennis, Ennistymon, Killaloe, Kilrush and Shannon. Participants included low-income farmers, refugees from Ukraine, people seeking International Protection in Ireland, members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities, single parents, caregivers, people with a history of addiction, people experiencing mental and

physical health problems, LGBTQI+ people and Family Resource Centre workers.

In addition, five public introductory training workshops on the topic of a Just Transition and socio-economic rights were held in Ennis, Ennistymon, Scariff and Shannon. Participants at these sessions included community representatives and activists, county councillors, caregivers, people experiencing socio-economic marginalisation and exclusion, volunteers and staff members working in local service provision organisations.

The key findings from this report have already been fed into the Draft LECP and have been discussed and debated at length with the various institutional stakeholders. We remain confident that we will also see the findings from this report reflected in the final version of the LECP when it is adopted and that we will have delivered the key aim of the project – an LECP that enshrines socio-economic rights and Just Transition in all its actions.

The report presented here recognises the following: firstly, not all of the issues that arose during the focus groups can be solved through the existing local structures and the framework

that links them to national-level plans and budgets. Secondly, a good LECP on its own will not deliver the type of transformative change sought in this report.

The aim of presenting this report is to ensure that a wide audience – including policymakers, elected representatives, civil servants, planners and community organisations – can access this information and assess for themselves how it might look if, in Clare, we sought to use all avenues of influence and all available resources to deliver a democratic, fair and fast transition to a low-carbon society while improving the lives of those currently struggling and protecting those on the margins by ensuring that their socio-economic needs are met.

We welcome comments and input and further discussion on this report. We are grateful also to community artist Kate O'Shea for her creative contributions and insights to this report which have added additional depth for our consideration.



disproportionate burden

2. Context and policy framework

2.1. The unequal impact of climate change and climate measures

People, groups and communities who experience various forms of inequality bear a disproportionate burden of the negative impacts of climatic hazards and adaptation measures (Lee and Romero, 2023) and so are more likely to be disadvantaged by the transition to zero emissions. Islam and Winkel (2017, p.2), in a United Nations paper on climate change and social inequality, refer to these interconnected disparities within a country as 'social inequalities'. These include demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity and age, as well as income and asset inequality, in addition to uneven access to decision-making and services. The authors argue that:

there exists a vicious cycle between climate change and inequality. In this cycle, initial inequality leads to disproportionately severe consequences of climate change for disadvantaged communities, resulting in even greater inequality.

Ireland's 2023 Climate Action Plan, in a chapter on international climate action, acknowledges that the impacts of climate change will be uneven, stating that 'climate change impacts, both direct and indirect, continue to disproportionately harm those who have contributed the least to the problem' (Government of Ireland, 2022a, p.262).

In their policy statement on a Just Transition, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2023) recommends the Government of Ireland to direct Just Transition resources towards the advancement and realisation of human rights and equality. They emphasise the importance of placing a specific focus on structurally vulnerable groups that are more likely to be disadvantaged by the transition. In Ireland, these groups include person(s) with disabilities, migrants, refugees, Travellers, the elderly, minority ethnic communities, women and people living in poverty (O'Neill et al., 2022; IHREC, 2023).

Ireland's 2023 Climate Action Plan, in a chapter on international climate action, acknowledges that the impacts of climate change will be uneven, stating that 'climate change impacts, both direct and indirect, continue to disproportionately harm those who have contributed the least to the problem' (Government of Ireland, 2022a, p.262). Furthermore, in relation to a Just Transition, the Plan stresses that achieving a Just Transition hinges on recognising the transformational scale of change required to meet Ireland's climate targets, and states that climate policymaking in Ireland should 'seek to protect the most vulnerable' (p.68).

2.2. Just Transition: Exploring the term

There is no universally accepted definition of a Just Transition. Originating within the US trade union movement, earlier understandings of a Just Transition focused primarily on workers' rights and the necessity to support those whose livelihoods would be impacted by the shift away from a fossil fuel-based economy (Eisenberg, 2019).

Over time, the term Just Transition has evolved, progressing from its original focus on 'worker transitions' to embrace a broader 'societal transition' perspective (Sweeney and Treat, 2018).

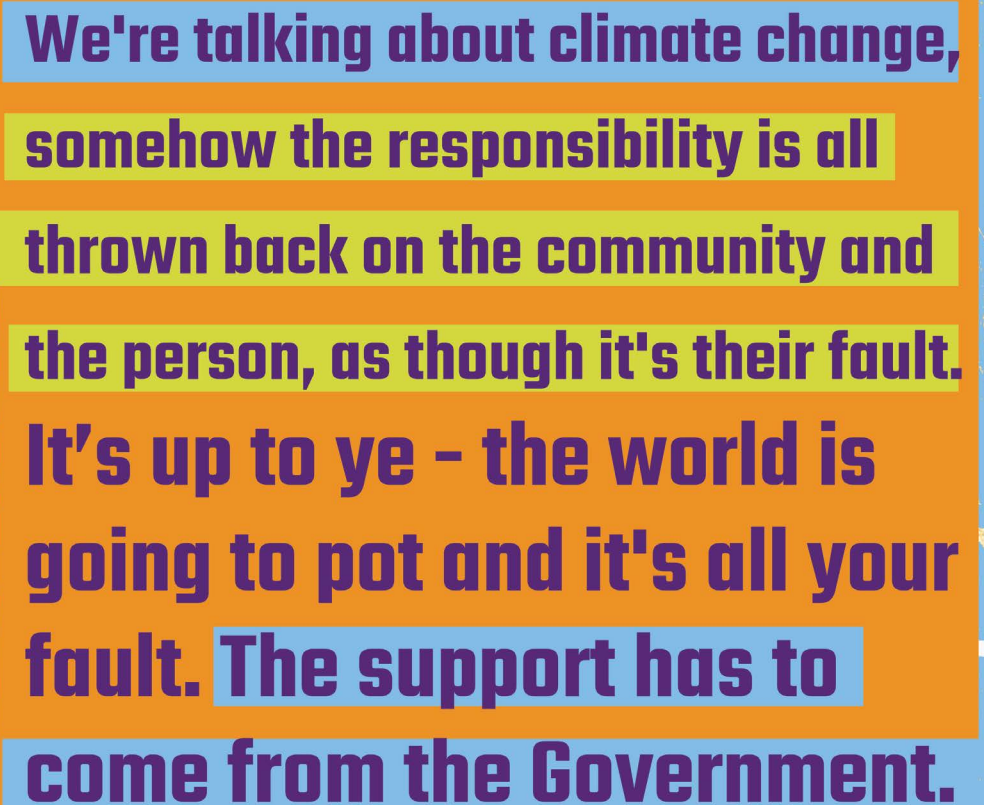
This broader understanding of Just Transition encompasses a wider range of societal considerations and emphasises the need for justice for all groups affected by the transition, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable populations (Eisenberg, 2019; Velicu and Barca, 2020). Increasingly, the term Just Transition is understood as a vision for transforming society itself, aiming

to create a fairer economy and a more equitable society by tackling inequality and injustice, with a commitment to leave no one behind (Climate Justice Alliance, 2018; McCabe, 2020; Klein, 2022; Just Transition Alliance, 2022; Scottish Government, no date).

Studies that call for a more transformative approach to Just Transition emphasise the need to consider questions relating to the ownership of assets, as well as who has control over decision-making processes (Clarke and Lipsig-Mummé, 2020). The transformative potential of a Just Transition can be considered to make possible new types of economies that shift existing power dynamics towards democratic ownership and control over resources (Mercier et al., 2020). Practical expressions of this shift away from a market-based approach can include community-owned renewable energy infrastructure, worker-owned co-operatives and public ownership over the assets of the transition (Mercier et al., 2020; McCabe,

2020). In rural counties like Clare, there are opportunities to respond to the transformational scale of change required by expanding democratic ownership and control over such activities as food growing and production,

energy generation, nature restoration, tourism, care work and waste management, by creating the conditions to enable and support sustainable, community-run enterprises.



We're talking about climate change, somehow the responsibility is all thrown back on the community and the person, as though it's their fault. It's up to ye - the world is going to pot and it's all your fault. The support has to come from the Government.

Quote taken from consultation notes

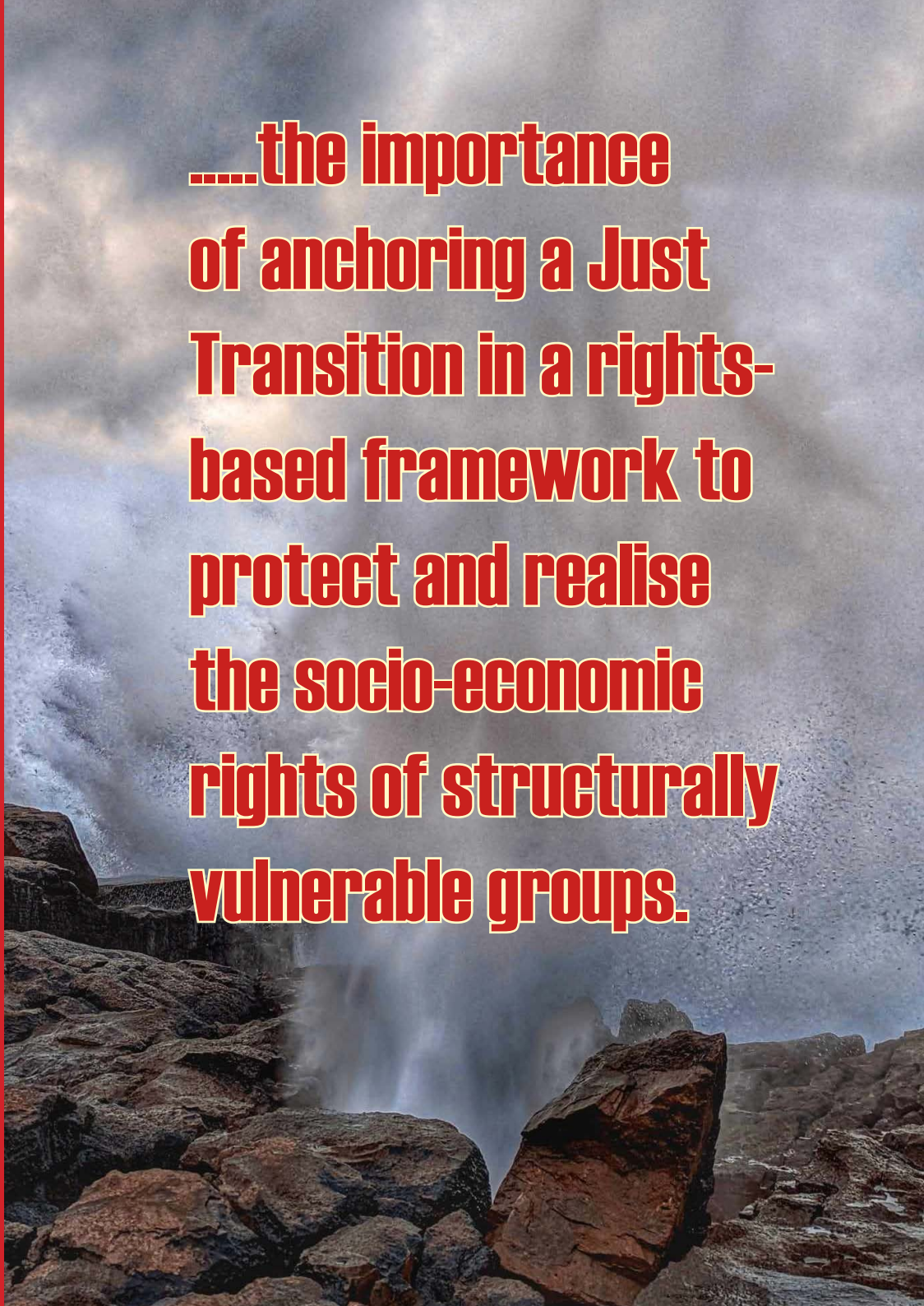
2.3. A rights-based approach to Just Transition

The Paris Agreement, the international treaty adopted in 2015 whose primary aim is to keep global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and preferably at a limit of 1.5°C, highlights the interconnected nature of climate action and the protection of human rights. The preamble of the treaty calls on states to 'respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity' when taking action to address climate change (United Nations, 2015, p.2).

In a first-of-its-kind publication by the UN, a report establishing the link between Just Transition and human rights entitled, 'The "just transition" in the economic recovery: eradicating poverty within planetary boundaries',

explores how poverty eradication efforts can be combined with models of development that adhere to planetary boundaries (United Nations, 2020). The report underlines the need for a broad understanding of a Just Transition that strengthens the rights of those living in poverty and sees a Just Transition as an opportunity to generate employment opportunities for people with lower levels of qualifications, thereby enhancing their access to the goods and services that are crucial for the enjoyment of human rights. The report further recommends that a new development model prioritising the eradication of inequality over an exclusive focus on economic growth is needed.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), in their Policy Statement on a Just Transition published in April 2023, underscores the importance of anchoring a Just Transition in a rights-based framework to protect and realise the socio-economic rights of structurally vulnerable groups.



....the importance
of anchoring a Just
Transition in a rights-
based framework to
protect and realise
the socio-economic
rights of structurally
vulnerable groups.

2.4. Socio-economic rights

Socio-economic rights, also formally referred to as Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, are basic human rights designed to safeguard a person's dignity, freedom and wellbeing by ensuring state-supported entitlements to education, public healthcare, housing, decent working conditions and wages, as well as other essential social services and goods (The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2017). Socio-economic rights include the following interdependent and interlinked human rights (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2008, p.2):

“ Workers’ rights, including freedom from forced labour, the rights to decide freely to accept or choose work, to fair wages and equal pay for equal work, to leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours, to safe and healthy working conditions, to join and form trade unions, and to strike;

The right to social security and social protection, including the right not to be denied social security coverage arbitrarily or unreasonably, and the right to equal enjoyment of adequate protection in the event of unemployment, sickness, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond one’s control;

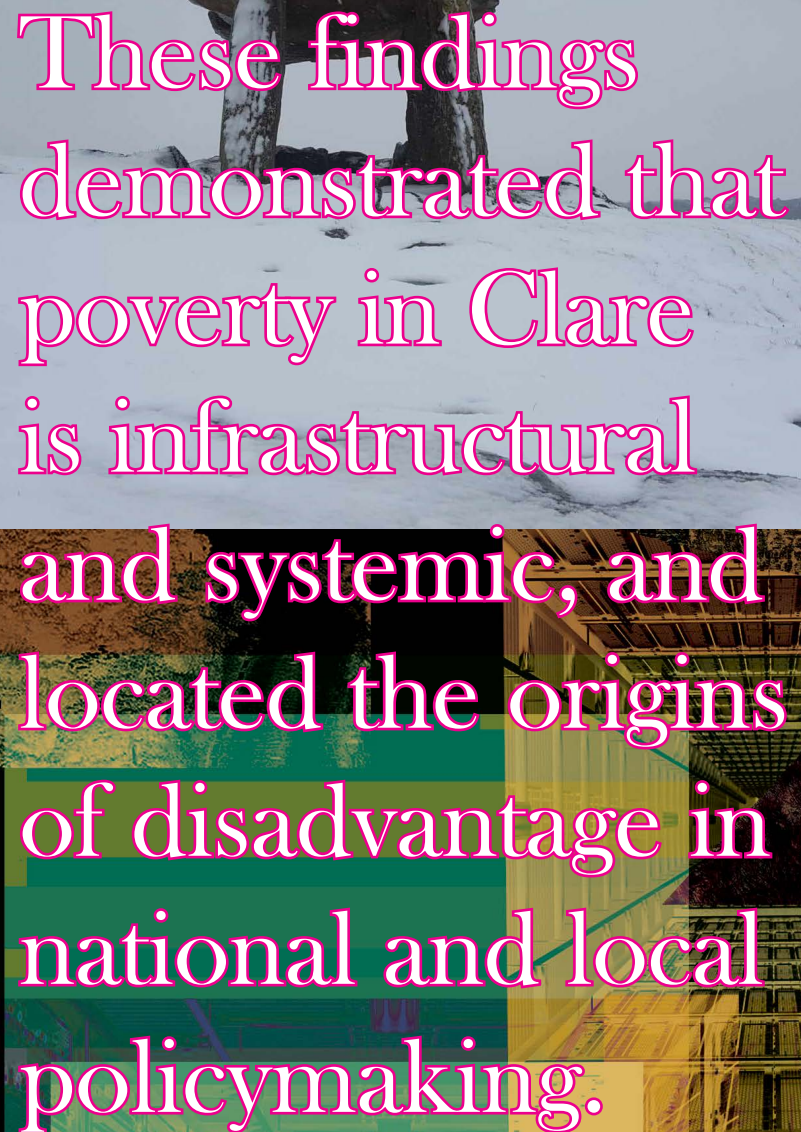
Protection of and assistance to the family, including the rights to marriage by free consent, to maternity and paternity protection, and to protection of children from economic and social exploitation;

The right to an adequate standard of living, including the rights to food and to be free from hunger, to adequate housing, to water and to clothing;

The right to health, including the right to access to health facilities, goods and services, to healthy occupational and environmental conditions, and protection against epidemic diseases, and rights relevant to sexual and reproductive health;

The right to education, including the right to free and compulsory primary education and to available and accessible secondary and higher education, progressively made free of charge; and the liberty of parents to choose schools for their children;

Cultural rights, ncluding the right to participate in cultural life and to share in and benefit from scientific advancement, and protection of authors’ moral and material interests from scientific, literary or artistic production.”



These findings demonstrated that poverty in Clare is infrastructural and systemic, and located the origins of disadvantage in national and local policymaking.

McCabe (2022, p.40), in 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare' describes socio-economic rights in Ireland as existing 'in a kind of legislative purgatory'. During a research project carried out in 2022 in Clare with groups experiencing disadvantage or poverty, it became evident that many of the issues raised by individuals could be most aptly characterised as stemming from either location-based or policy-related obstacles to accessing their social and economic rights. In some instances, the barrier to realising socio-economic rights was caused by the distance a person lived from essential services, while in others, it was caused by the absence of these services.

These findings demonstrated that poverty in Clare is infrastructural and systemic, and located the origins of disadvantage in national and local policymaking. In other words, many of the challenges experienced by individuals enduring disadvantage, exclusion or poverty were beyond their capacity to address. Many of the issues identified in the report have their solutions in infrastructural projects – such as providing sufficient localised healthcare services, provision of

an accessible and effective public transport system across the country, providing a social care system and childcare system designed to meet the needs of the whole community, investing in social and public housing, and ensuring local access to basic services.

Building upon the findings of 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare', we chose to use the twin 'lenses' of socio-economic rights and Just Transition for this pilot project. The first lens, socio-economic rights, informs us about people's fundamental needs and rights, while the second, Just Transition, helps us to identify a process for mitigating and adapting to climate change in a way that is equitable, fast and fair, and shares the benefits and burdens equally.

2.5. Planks and principles of a Just Transition

The principles underpinning different interpretations of a Just Transition vary across countries, publications and policies. Taking a broader understanding of the term Just Transition, this research applies specific areas of consensus found in key Just Transition publications (McCabe, 2020; Mercier, 2020; Mercier et al., 2020; Moore-Cherry et al., 2022) in the Irish context to guide its exploration of what should constitute a Just Transition in practice.

They are summarised here as follows:

- i. **A Just Transition should be viewed as a long-term process rather than as a series of one-off projects;**
- ii. **Groups that are likely to experience disadvantage or poverty-exacerbating effects of the transition must be supported to shape both the processes and the outcomes of the transition;**
- iii. **A place-based approach is integral to the success of a transition;**
- iv. **Just Transition plans should focus on local and regional development rather than having a sole focus on impacted workers;**
- v. **Public investment will play a key role in achieving a Just Transition;**
- vi. **Decent work and quality jobs remain a crucial outcome of a truly Just Transition.**

McCabe (2020) and Mercier et al., (2020), in alignment with understandings of a Just Transition within the climate justice movement (Climate Justice Alliance, 2018) underline additional planks that could unlock the transformative potential of achieving climate justice and a Just Transition.

They are summarised and incorporated into this work as follows:

- vii. **Prioritising the realisation of human rights in Just Transition approaches is essential for driving transformative change and achieving better results in terms of emissions reductions. This perspective is echoed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Lee and Romero, 2023, p.31).**
- viii. **For a transition to be just, underlying inequalities should be tackled during the process of decarbonisation, to fully harness the transformative potential of the transition.**
- ix. **Enabling public, social and community ownership of the assets of transition presents practical ways in which communities can be meaningfully engaged in and benefit from climate action, as well as supporting the shift from an extractive economy to one that is regenerative.**

2.6. Just Transition in Irish policymaking

In Irish policymaking, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act was signed into law in 2021 committing Ireland to reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 and achieving a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030. The Act has the 'purpose of pursuing the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity-rich, and climate-neutral economy by no later than the end of the year 2050 and to thereby promote climate justice, and just transition' (Government of Ireland, 2021, p.5). It further states that under the Climate Action Plan and National Long Term Climate Action Strategy, the government should have regard for a Just Transition in so far as is practicable and defines a Just Transition as (i) maximising employment opportunities, and (ii) supporting persons and communities that may be negatively affected by the transition (Government of Ireland, 2021a, p.11).

This definition of Just Transition incorporated into the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act has been described as lacking just transition principles such as the need for inclusion and engagement in the processes and outcomes of the transition, and the necessity for employment opportunities to provide decent work (Kelleher, 2021).

The 2023 Climate Action Plan offers the definition of Just Transition put forward by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act in addition to a definition developed by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in 2020 which describes Just Transition as 'one which seeks to ensure transition is fair, equitable and inclusive in terms of processes and outcomes' (Government of Ireland, 2022a).

Many of the issues identified in the report have their solutions in infrastructural projects – such as providing sufficient localised healthcare services, provision of an accessible and effective public transport system across the country, providing a social care system and childcare system designed to meet the needs of the whole community, investing in social and public housing, and ensuring local access to basic services.

2.7. The risk of an unjust transition

The introduction of climate policy has the potential to reduce Ireland's dependence on fossil fuels and create employment, particularly in rural communities. However, if it is implemented in a one-size-fits-all manner, it will likely fail to address underlying inequalities and disadvantage, and may cause more hardship to those involved in particularly affected sectors and regions. In Ireland and the Climate Crisis, a thorough exploration of Ireland's response to climate change, Mercier et al., (2020, p.252), pose the idea that while a transition is, to some uneven extent, already happening, the question remains as to whether that transition will be just or not.

In their research analysing solar development in East Germany, Brock, Sovacool and Hook (2021) emphasise that green development is not automatically fair, and that without attempting to move away from economic models based on extraction and exploitation, or transform existing power relations and inequalities, we run the risk of creating 'sacrifice zones' (Brock, Sovacool and Hook, 2021, p.1756).

This sentiment is echoed by McCabe (2022 26) who paints a picture of a possible unjust transition plan for Clare that 'simply eliminates 89% of agricultural holdings, depopulates large swathes of the county through economic emigration, and replaces those communities with privately-owned, for-profit windfarms that will export energy to the continent via the soon to be completed Celtic Interconnector'. Furthermore, (Brock, Sovacool and Hook, 2021) warn that the effect of dispossessing communities living near renewable energy sites risks contributing to the rise of 'the far right'. The Hope and Courage Collective in Ireland describes the far right as 'extreme nationalistic viewpoints, including fascism and oppressive ideologies' that work against an inclusive and just society. They outline how the far right builds support by exploiting feelings of disaffection and resentment (Community Work Ireland, 2022).

If it is implemented in a one-size-fits-all manner, it will likely fail to address underlying inequalities and disadvantage, and may cause more hardship to those involved in particularly affected sectors.

The case study of the yellow vest protests in France serves as an example of the potential outcomes of implementing climate policy in an unjust way. The introduction of a flat carbon tax led to low-paid workers being disproportionately impacted by the tax, resulting in widespread protests in opposition to the introduction of the tax (Anderson, 2019). In more recent times, there have been widespread farmer protests against the introduction of environmental policy in the Netherlands (Harrhill, 2022). A potential consequence of applying environmental policy in a top-down fashion, which fails to address immediate needs facing communities, is increased support for political figures and groups who are opposed to climate action or hold climate-sceptic views. In addition, if transition processes fail to address pre-existing inequalities, it is likely that the move to a greener economy will benefit only groups who have the capacity to influence decision-making processes (Anderson, 2019). In contrast to the flawed approaches, Emmet-Booth et al. (2019) describe how the move away from fossil fuel production in Alberta, Canada has been relatively successful.

Including workers from the very beginning of the transition processes resulted in minimal opposition to the decarbonisation process, as their concerns were included within the transition.

Taking an inclusive approach, whereby the voices of groups who are marginalised are placed at the centre of decision-making, could bolster support for climate action by addressing immediate concerns facing groups, while also supporting decarbonisation. This is underlined by the statement within the People's Transition report that: 'If climate action is to be fast, it must be fair. If it is to be enduring, it must be inclusive. If it is to benefit from widespread public support, it must share benefits and burdens equitably and fairly' (McCabe, 2020, p.14).

This sentiment is echoed by McCabe (2022 p.26) who paints a picture of a possible unjust transition plan for Clare that 'simply eliminates 89% of agricultural holdings, depopulates large swathes of the county through economic emigration, and replaces those communities with privately-owned, for-profit windfarms that will export energy to the continent via the soon to be completed Celtic Interconnector'.

2.8. Community wealth building as a framework for transition

Community wealth building (CWB) is a people-centred, place-based approach to local economic development that aims to build local economies that are collaborative, inclusive, sustainable, democratically controlled and where the wealth that is created is retained locally and shared equitably (Guinan and O'Neill, 2020). Developed as an alternative to 'extractive neoliberalism' (Guinan and O'Neill, 2019, p.383), community wealth building can be understood as a model that views the expansion of democracy, combined with the power of local government, as a vehicle for addressing poverty and inequality. Expanded democratic expression allows for the people living in a place to have better control over local development and the economic future of that place by realising alternative models of ownership, such as worker-owned co-operatives, social enterprises, municipal enterprises, community land trusts, community development and financial

institutions, community-owned energy generation, community-supported agriculture initiatives and community-led tourism projects.

In addition, under a community wealth building framework, expanded democratic influence over the economy allows for the people in a place to shape their economy more equitably, for example through the creation of well-paid, decent jobs (Guinan and O'Neill, 2019). The model can also work on a much larger scale by leveraging the spending of anchor institutions – locally-rooted organisations with significant spending power such as universities, hospitals or local authorities – and designing socially just enterprises such as co-operatives to meet the needs of those anchor institutions and the communities they serve, thus developing localised supply chains (Dubb, 2016). The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) describes community wealth building as having five key principles (CLES, no date):

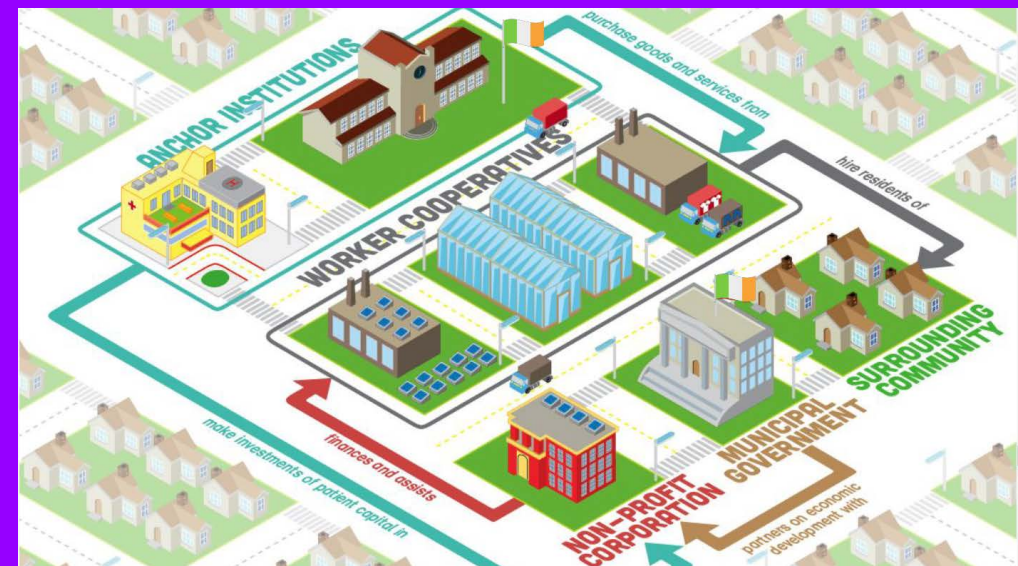


Image 1: The community wealth building model (Source: The Democracy Collaborative, 2023)

- Plural ownership of the economy
- Making financial power work for local places
- Fair employment and just labour markets
- Progressive procurement of goods and services and
- Socially productive use of land and property

Implementation of the community wealth building model has been gaining momentum across the world in recent years, with examples in the US, the UK, Canada, Italy and Tanzania, to name a few. The cities of Cleveland (US) and Preston (UK) are seen as trailblazers in this space, but more recently, in the UK, local and regional authorities across Scotland, Wales and England are adopting community wealth building frameworks (Lacey-Barnacle, Smith and Foxon, 2023, p.2).

Here in Ireland, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies is already working with Dublin City Council to embed a CWB approach in the work of the Council and set out an initial implementation plan in 2022 (CLES, 2022). The plan includes actions such as establishing a social value framework for the Council, enhancing

the understanding of CWB within the Council, breaking up contracts to facilitate smaller organisations to apply, providing support for local social enterprises, as well as new pilot activities such as conducting a spend analysis and a mapping of property and land assets to understand how increased social value can be delivered.

Community wealth building as a framework is well suited to the concept of a Just Transition, aiming to meet people's needs and support access to sustainable livelihoods, in alignment with realising socio-economic rights. It is a place-based approach that gives greater agency to workers and communities to reduce inequality and poverty, as well as being guided by fair employment models. Further to this, because it can help to secure plural and just forms of ownership over the assets of transition, it can provide avenues through which we can include workers, communities and the most marginalised in both the processes and the outcomes of transition, as well as seeking to address underlying inequalities (Lacey-Barnacle, Smith and Foxon, 2023).

Examples of community wealth building in practice

North Ayrshire Council

A community wealth building approach to Just Transition has been pioneered by North Ayrshire Council in Scotland, who in 2020 launched a green recovery strategy, underpinned by Community wealth building frameworks (North Ayrshire Council, 2020):

- Ensure an inclusive economic recovery by delivering our community wealth building mission; and
- Ensure a green economic recovery focused on achieving our net-zero carbon ambitions through the creation of sustainable infrastructure and regeneration projects and creating fair jobs.

As part of the £8.8 million investment package included in the green recovery strategy, the construction of two Council-owned solar farms set to generate two-thirds of the Council's energy needs is underway. The Council aims

to promote progressive procurement by creating opportunities for local suppliers, ensure the socially just use of land by building solar farms on former council-owned landfill sites, and support plural ownership of the economy by developing publicly-owned renewable energy (North Ayrshire Council, 2023).

Across the wider Ayrshire region, comprising the three council areas of North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire and South Ayrshire, a community wealth building commission made up of local anchor institutions, such as Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Ayrshire Community Trust, is in place to ensure a collaborative approach to CWB across the region. In addition, the Scottish Government has allocated £3 million towards the development of Community Wealth Building across Ayrshire, providing funding for: 1) Dedicated community wealth building officers to provide support to

community organisations and local enterprises, 2) A community wealth building fund and 3) A 'Fair Work' team that will work with anchor organisations across the region (Scottish Government, 2023a).

A similar commission or anchor institution network in Clare could bring together locally rooted institutions across the county such as Clare County Council, TUS Ennis, the LCETB, the College of Further Education and Training Ennis Campus, libraries, Shannon Industrial Estate, Approved Housing Bodies, Credit Unions and community-based organisations such as Clarecare, Clare PPN, CLDC, Obair, Seedsavers, Clare Bus, and Common Knowledge to name a few.

The Great Care Co-op

Closer to home, The Great Care Co-op is Ireland's first care workers co-operative and is governed by a group of migrant women (Doyle, 2022). Formed in 2017 through the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI), carer members have collective ownership over the co-op dedicated to providing quality caregiving services, as well as combating the low wages, discrimination and exploitation that are prevalent in the sector.

The Great Care Co-op pays €14.50 an hour (MRCI, no date, para. 3) which the co-op describes as higher than average. At the time of writing this report, the living wage in 2023 as recommended by the Low Pay Commission is €13.10 (Government of Ireland, 2022b, with the figure from the Living Wage Technical Group currently set at €14.80 (Living Wage, 2023). From the 1st of January 2024, as announced in Budget 2024, the new minimum wage in Ireland will increase by €1.40 to €12.70 (Citizens Information, 2023a).

Fintry community-owned wind turbine

Taking a different approach, in 2006 the small community of Fintry, 20 miles north of Glasgow, secured a community-owned wind turbine as part of a larger, developer-led project. This came about through negotiations with the developer and the County Council, along with extensive local community consultation. Instead of accepting a traditional community benefit fund, the community-led organisation Fintry Renewable Energy Enterprise (FREE) opted for an agreement with the developer, where the community trust

would receive one 15th of the total income from the wind farm (Fintry Development Trust, no date; Development Trusts Association Scotland, no date).

Since its installation in 2008, the wind turbine has generated an annual profit of more than £50,000 while also paying off the loan used for its construction. Fintry Development Trust, the umbrella charitable organisation that includes FREE, anticipates that once the turbine is fully paid off, it will generate almost £500,000 a year. The profits generated have been reinvested into energy efficiency projects within Fintry. One notable initiative is a doorstep insulation service that has provided free insulation for nearly half of the households in Fintry, significantly improving energy efficiency in the community.

Bohemian FC Climate Cooperative

The Bohemian Climate Cooperative, established by the Bohemian Football Club, which is itself a co-operative, in Phibsborough, Dublin, was awarded funding under the national Community Climate Action Programme in 2022. This project, named 'The

Spark', brings together anchor institutions in Phibsborough, including the football club itself, Mountjoy Prison and Grangegorman Development Agency, in partnership with several community groups and organisations such as Neighbourhood Networks and Phibsborough Village Climate Club. The goal of this partnership is to develop training programmes in solar installation and retrofitting in the Dublin 7 area where energy poverty and a lack of apprenticeship opportunities have previously been identified as local development needs (TASC, 2023).

Ultimately, the Spark, through its diverse local partnership, aims to establish a self-sufficient climate co-operative by the end of the project.

Since its inception, the Bohemian Climate Cooperative has been developing a number of community-led climate initiatives alongside the Spark, including a Community Supported Agriculture scheme that supports sustainable farming practices and local food production in north Dublin.



3. Clare



3.1. Clare today

Census data provides a picture of the population of the State and, among other applications, is used by Government to plan for the provision of public services (Central Statistics Office [CSO], no date). At the time of writing this report, limited results from the 2022 Census were available. The full dataset is expected to be available in 2024.

2022

The current population of Clare is 127,938 (CSO, 2023a). Since 2016 the population has increased by 7.7% or 9,121 people. This represents the largest absolute increase in the population of Clare since 2006. Over the past 20 years, the population of Clare has increased by 24,661 people. As of 2022, 48.4% were under the age of 40, while 51.6% were aged 40 or above (CSO, 2023b). In addition, the average age in Clare has increased from 38.5 years in 2016 to 40.1 years in 2022, indicating an ageing population (Clare County Council, 2023a).

Examining birthplace, 18% of the population were born outside of Ireland (CSO, 2023c).

Notably, the number of unpaid carers in Clare has increased since 2016 to 8,200 people or 6% of the county's population, 4,899 of whom are women. In 2022, the number of carers providing more than 42 hours of unpaid care work a week has doubled since 2016 to total 2,306 people (CSO, 2023b).

With regard to disability and health, 21% of Clare's population had a disability or a long-lasting condition in 2022 (CSO, 2023b). The percentage of people that stated their health was very good or good has decreased across the last three Census to 83% in 2022, in line again with the national average (CSO, 2023b).

The population of Clare is diverse, ageing and growing, while the percentage of the population carrying out unpaid care is increasing. As the average age trends upwards, net inward migration to the county could support the expansion of services that will be needed to care for an increasingly elderly population and ensure that Clare is a great place to grow old.

“ The population of Clare is diverse, ageing and growing, while the percentage of the population carrying out unpaid care is increasing.”

Concerning labour and employment, 2022 Census results show that unemployment in the county has decreased from 12.4% in 2016 to 8.1% in 2022 (CSO, 2023d). Male unemployment is slightly higher than the average for Clare at 8.5% while female unemployment is lower at 7.7%.

It is important to note that the national Census includes only two options for gender. LGBTQ+ groups in Ireland have been campaigning for the inclusion of new gender-related questions

in the Census (LGBT Ireland, 2023). LGBT Ireland discusses how making this hidden population of Ireland visible will allow for improvements in how specialist gender and sexual health services are planned and provided for in Ireland. A survey conducted by Clare PPN in 2021, with 50 members of the LGBTQ+ community living in Clare, found that there is a need for improved access to physical and mental healthcare support for the LGBTQ+ community in Clare (Clare PPN, 2022).

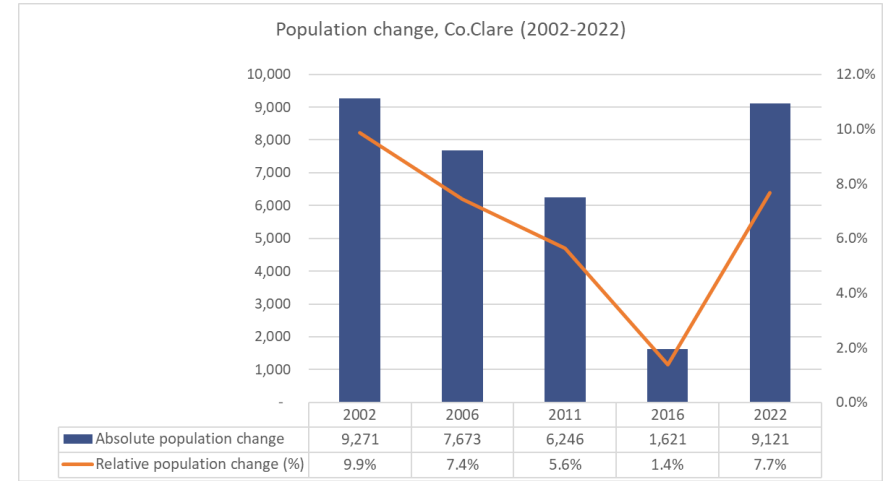


Figure 1: Population change in Clare, 2022 v 2016 (Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023a)

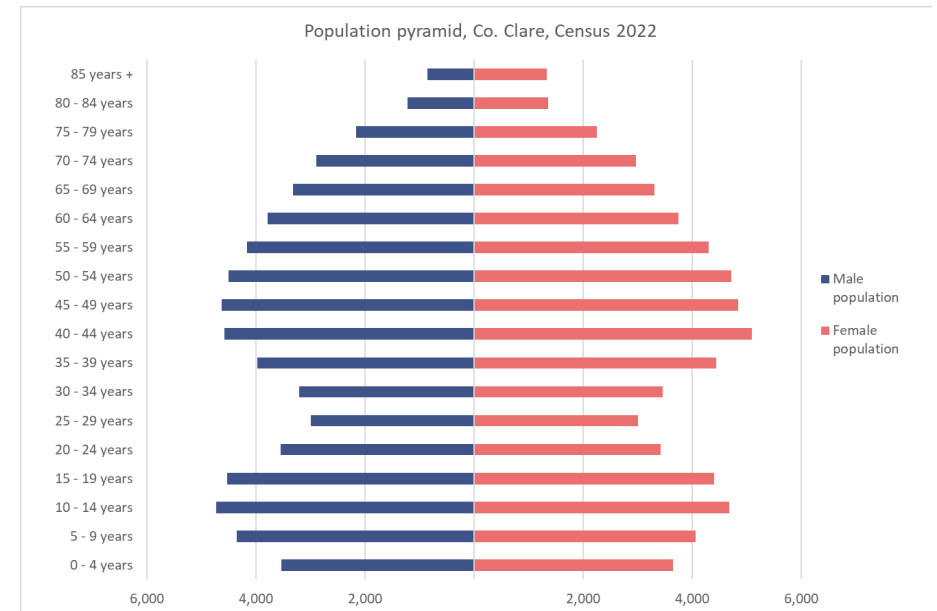


Figure 2: Population pyramid for Clare, 2022 (Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023b)

'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare', a comprehensive analysis of socio-economic exclusion in Clare undertaken in 2022 on behalf of Clare PPN, included the following key findings (McCabe, 2022, pp.6-7):

Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare: key findings

- The population in almost all areas of Clare is growing but policy-making in relation to Clare does not yet reflect this.
- There is a lack of information on, and future planning for, the sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing of the people of Clare as apart from the 'mid-west region' or 'southern assembly region'.
- From the perspective of those who experience socio-economic exclusion, County Clare is being poorly served by policy-makers at national and, as a result, at local level.
- A person's socio-economic rights in Ireland are affected by their location in the country – with basic services, infrastructure and opportunities unavailable in some locations and available unequally in others.
- There is a crisis in all types of housing in Clare – social, rental and privately owned.
- There is a particular crisis for the Traveller community who face added discrimination in accessing services, housing and supports.

- There is no national, regional or local policy for achieving a real Just Transition as Ireland navigates its way towards lower carbon emissions, and Clare is one of the counties most likely to experience poverty-exacerbating effects from this transition.
- There is an inequality in provision of health services between Clare and other regions, with 33% more GPs and 50% more dentists needed even to put Clare on a par with the national average.
- There are stark differences in how health and care services are delivered in Clare and other counties.
- There is no evidence that the gendered nature of poverty in Clare receives special attention in policy-making.
- People with disabilities in Clare are at particular disadvantage because of failures in national policy to guarantee their rights – in particular as regards accessible public transport and transport funding supports.
- In many areas of Clare there has been a diminishment in and centralisation of services and supports available to marginalised groups with negative consequences.
- There are key failures at national and local level in measuring poverty and, as the adage goes, what you can't measure you can't address.

3.2. Just Transition in local policymaking

The Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029, which outlines the development objectives for Clare, took effect in April 2023. Outside of references to national policies, the term 'Just Transition' is specifically mentioned in the context of Moneypoint Power Station (Clare County Council, 2023b). Additionally, the plan highlights Clare County Council's support for the 'Green Atlantic' project, which aims to transform the coal-burning station into a renewable energy development site, 'while also ensuring a Just Transition for all' (Clare County Council, 2023b, p.138).

While the transition from a coal burning power station to a site for renewable energy generation at Moneypoint is a positive step towards decarbonisation, there is a need for clarity with regard to how the Green Atlantic project, along with similar green infrastructure projects, will ensure a Just Transition for all. To initiate the conversation, the following questions can serve as a starting point for considering how a Just Transition approach can be embedded into large-scale renewable energy infrastructure projects:

- What will the employment landscape look like? Will it align with the principles of decent work as advocated by a Just Transition?
- How can the Green Atlantic project benefit the surrounding communities, support access to services, and advance the realisation of their socio-economic rights?
- What mechanisms will support community groups in participating in relevant decision-making processes?
- Have models of public and community ownership been considered and explored?

Key findings from 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare' underscore several points related to Just Transition (McCabe, 2020). Firstly, the report highlighted the absence of and the necessity for Just Transition planning at the national, county and local levels. The report also discussed how Clare is likely to experience concentrated poverty-exacerbating negative impacts from the transition due to factors such as high car dependency, flood risks, continued reliance on fossil fuels for home heating, and a farming profile comprising mainly beef and dairy farming.

3.3. Just Transition, decent work and planning for sustainable livelihoods

Reimagining 'green jobs'

While applications of the term Just Transition have expanded in recent years, and a focus on local and regional development over an exclusive emphasis on affected workers is recommended (McCabe, 2020; Mercier, 2020; Moore-Cherry et al., 2022), a core principle of a Just Transition is the development of long-term quality employment. To date, such discussions have tended to centre on jobs in sectors such as energy, transport and agriculture, where the majority of workers are male (Wiese and Culot, 2022). This narrow focus runs the risk of perpetuating gender inequalities during the Transition by neglecting other essential areas of work. Wiese and Culot (2022), as well as Klein (2022, pp.392-393) urge us to rethink the concept of a 'green job'. Klein recommends that various forms of care work such as teaching, childcare and caring for the sick have a low carbon impact and should be understood as 'green labour' in addition to their contribution to

health, wellbeing and inequality reduction. Currently, care work is largely provided by women, much of it unpaid, diminishing their ability to participate fully in political, economic and socio-cultural life. In addition, the unequal distribution of care responsibilities is a significant contributor to inequality between men and women (Sweeney, 2020). Further, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) cites the undervaluation of paid and unpaid care work as an aggravator of substandard working conditions for women.

The focus groups carried out for this project and as part of 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare' identified a lack of access to reliable childcare and a lack of sufficient and consistent home care for disabled or elderly people as key barriers to wellbeing in Clare. Childcare and care workers expressed concern about their conditions of employment.

Across the European Union, women account for more than 75% of formal care workers, and more than one in two working in home-based care have a migrant background (Wiese and Culot, 2022). Expanding the understanding of a 'green job' to incorporate informal and formal care work, which is essential to building sustainable communities, could support enhanced recognition and appreciation of women's labour and in turn strengthen the realisation of socioeconomic rights and a Just Transition (Klein, 2022). This is a key area of opportunity in Clare.

3.3.1. Employment and livelihoods in Clare

Initial Census 2022 employment data examining labour force participation and unemployment in Clare highlights a drop in unemployment from 12.4% in 2016 to 8.1% in 2022 (CSO, 2023f). A breakdown of unemployment statistics by electoral division, by occupation and by the number of people looking after the home/family is not yet available. Outside of the Census, 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare' highlighted a lack of regularly reported employment statistics for Clare across all sectors (McCabe, 2022). In addition, a key finding from the research

was the degree to which statistical information relating to employment, wellbeing and planning for future livelihoods is regionalised, obscuring the differences between the needs of people living in Clare, Limerick and Tipperary when they are reported as the Mid-West (McCabe, 2022). Considering the Green Atlantic project mentioned in the previous section, it is stated that a wind turbine construction hub at Moneypoint will create a significant number of employment opportunities in the 'Mid-West region' (ESB, no date, para. 3). A localised approach to renewable energy expansion and sustainable livelihood planning in Clare could support local development and the creation of decent work in line with the needs and priorities of the communities in the surrounding area.

A localised approach to planning for sustainable livelihoods and service provision that realises the socio-economic rights of all who live in Clare is consistent with the notion that a place-based approach is critical to achieving a Just Transition (Moore-Cherry, et al., 2022, p.v). An all-encompassing approach to transition conceals the unequal history of development across Ireland, the socio-

This recommendation to consider 'place' is particularly relevant in small towns and rural areas, where the transitions may be more difficult due to limited access to services and amenities as well as car dependency

(Moore-Cherry, et al., 2022, p.19).

economic, cultural, historical and ecological context of a place, as well as the differences in the capabilities, priorities, needs and wants of the people that make up the place. Furthermore, if applied indiscriminately, it risks not only deepening inequality and producing unjust outcomes, but also creating resistance to climate policy, thus reducing the capacity for community-led processes and outcomes (Moore-Cherry, et al., 2022). This recommendation to consider 'place' is particularly relevant in small towns and rural areas, where the transitions may be more difficult due to limited access to services and amenities as well as car dependency (Moore-Cherry, et al., 2022, p.19).

Decent work and quality job creation are fundamental components of achieving a Just Transition while realising socio-economic rights in Clare. Examining the employment landscape in Clare, 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare' pointed out the prevalence of low-paid jobs in the tourism sector in Clare, which was estimated to account for approximately 4,400 jobs, or 9%-10% of total employment in the county (McCabe, 2022). During focus group discussions for this project, participants raised concerns related to tourism, portraying

it as more of an issue than an opportunity. Participants spoke about issues such as displacement from housing by short-term lettings, low wages, descriptions of exploitative work practices, out-pricing of locals in activities and amenities, and traffic and road hazards. A Just Transition approach to tourism should ensure community benefits, involvement in decision-making, sustainable models that create decent work, and access to local amenities and activities.

Although tourism has been identified as a sector for employment creation in line with a Just Transition in the midlands, the concerns mentioned above indicate that it must be managed carefully in line with each community's capacity to support it. Under the EU Just Transition Fund (JTF), made available to support areas of the European Union most affected by the energy transition, €169 million has been allocated to the wider Midlands region of Ireland (Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly, 2022).



The EU JTF Programme in Ireland specifies three priority areas (Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly, 2022, para. 5):

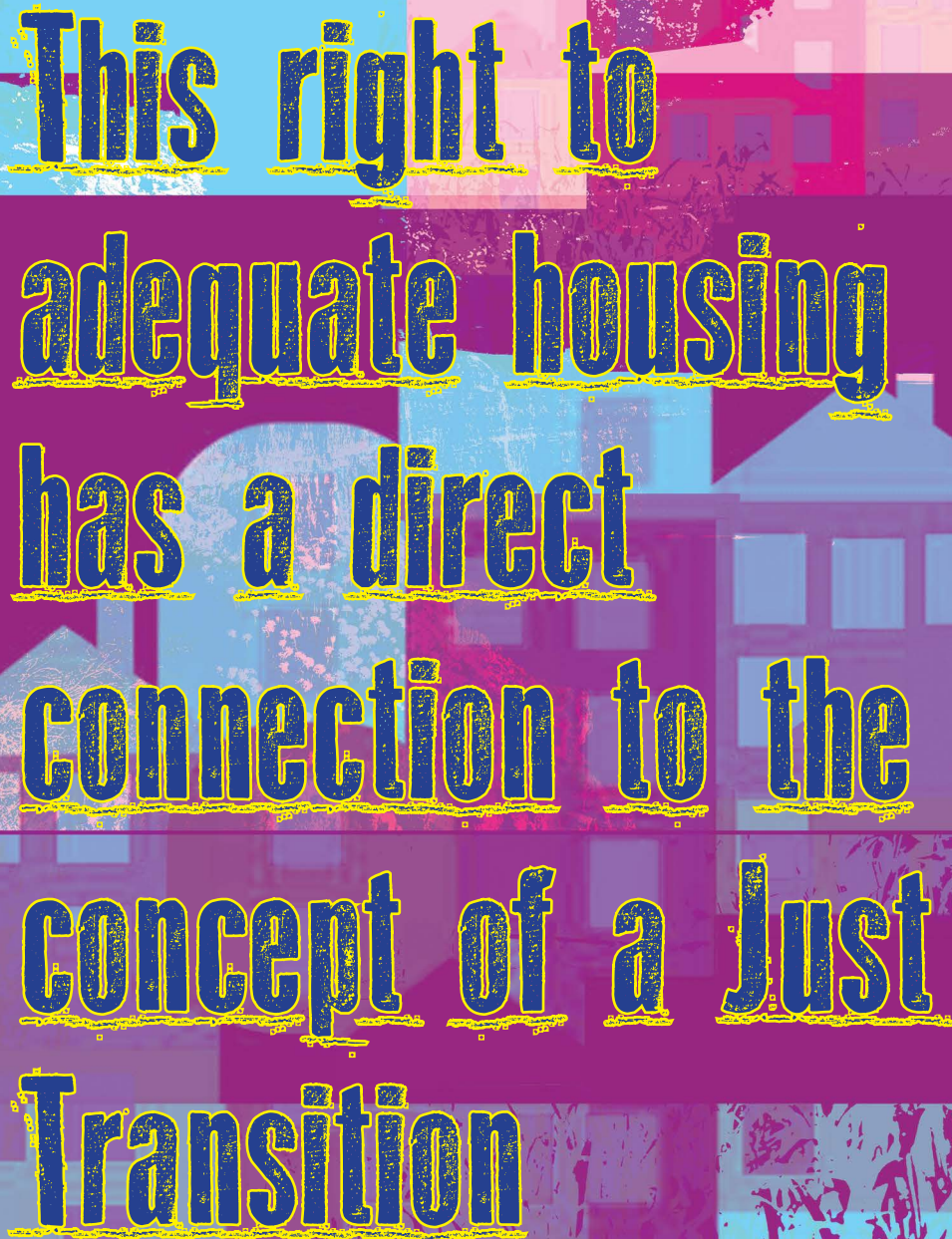
1. Generating employment for former peat communities by investing in the diversification of the local economy
2. Supporting the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded peatlands and regeneration and repurposing of industrial heritage assets
3. Providing former peat communities with smart and sustainable mobility options to enable them to benefit directly from the green transition

€87 million has been allocated to priority 1: Generating employment (Eastern & Midland Regional Assembly, no date, p.10), €68 million of which, or 78%, has been allocated to Fáilte Ireland to develop the tourism sector in the Midlands (Fáilte Ireland, 2022a). While Fáilte Ireland describes the proposed model of tourism as regenerative and underlines the aim of job creation, it is not yet clear whether these jobs will translate into long-term decent employment. As a sector, tourism faces decent work challenges such as informal employment arrangements, lower-than-average wages, seasonality and long working hours (ILO, 2017). Fáilte Ireland's survey of workers in the tourism sector in 2022 found that while people generally enjoy working in tourism, pay is a concern, with 64% being paid by the hour and more than half earning between €10 and €12 per hour (Fáilte Ireland, 2022b). In light of the urgent need to reduce our carbon emissions, Just Transition tourism projects must also seek ways to move from serving flight-dependent international visitors towards more sustainable models.

Community participation and ownership of tourism-related enterprises offer opportunities for diversified livelihoods within

a Just Transition framework that enshrines socio-economic rights. The Sliabh Beagh Hotel in County Monaghan serves as a positive example. It is Ireland's only community-owned hotel and has operated successfully for more than 20 years, while reinvesting its profits back into the community, generating local employment and supporting access to amenities and facilities through its bowling club, women's group and by organising dancing for elderly community members (Grisewood, 2021).

While community-led tourism holds promise for Clare, it's important to consider the broader implications of an excessive emphasis on tourism expansion, as evidenced by the negative impact of Airbnb on the private rental sector in Clare (McCabe, 2022). Just Transition funding should seek to prioritise job creation in sectors such as energy, buildings, food and transport, which have the potential to deliver a 'triple dividend' by reducing the environmental footprint of these sectors while creating decent work opportunities for people living in poverty, thereby enhancing their access to the goods and services crucial to the realisation of their socio-economic rights (United Nations, 2020, p.10).



This right to adequate housing has a direct connection to the concept of a Just Transition

The right to adequate housing and a Just Transition

International human rights law recognises the right to adequate housing as an integral component of the broader right to an adequate standard of living (OHCHR, 2009). According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the right to adequate housing encompasses several key principles. It should ensure that housing is secure, affordable, habitable, accessible for all, including marginalised groups and people with specific needs, and facilitate access to education, employment, care and other services, while being culturally appropriate (OHCHR, 2009).

This right to adequate housing has a direct connection to the concept of a Just Transition, as highlighted in the report, 'Towards a just transformation: climate crisis and the right to housing', published by the OHCHR (United Nations, 2022). The report outlines how climate change is having a negative impact on the right to adequate housing, particularly due to the increased frequency of extreme weather events, which disproportionately affect structurally vulnerable groups. These groups, including low-

income families in rental housing, elderly individuals, and persons with disabilities, are more likely to reside in poorly insulated homes, exacerbating energy poverty. The report also identifies adverse consequences of the climate crisis on housing, such as 'green gentrification', where energy efficiency improvements risk inflating house prices, reducing affordability. Additionally, it highlights 'green grabbing', which refers to land appropriation in the name of a zero-emissions transition.

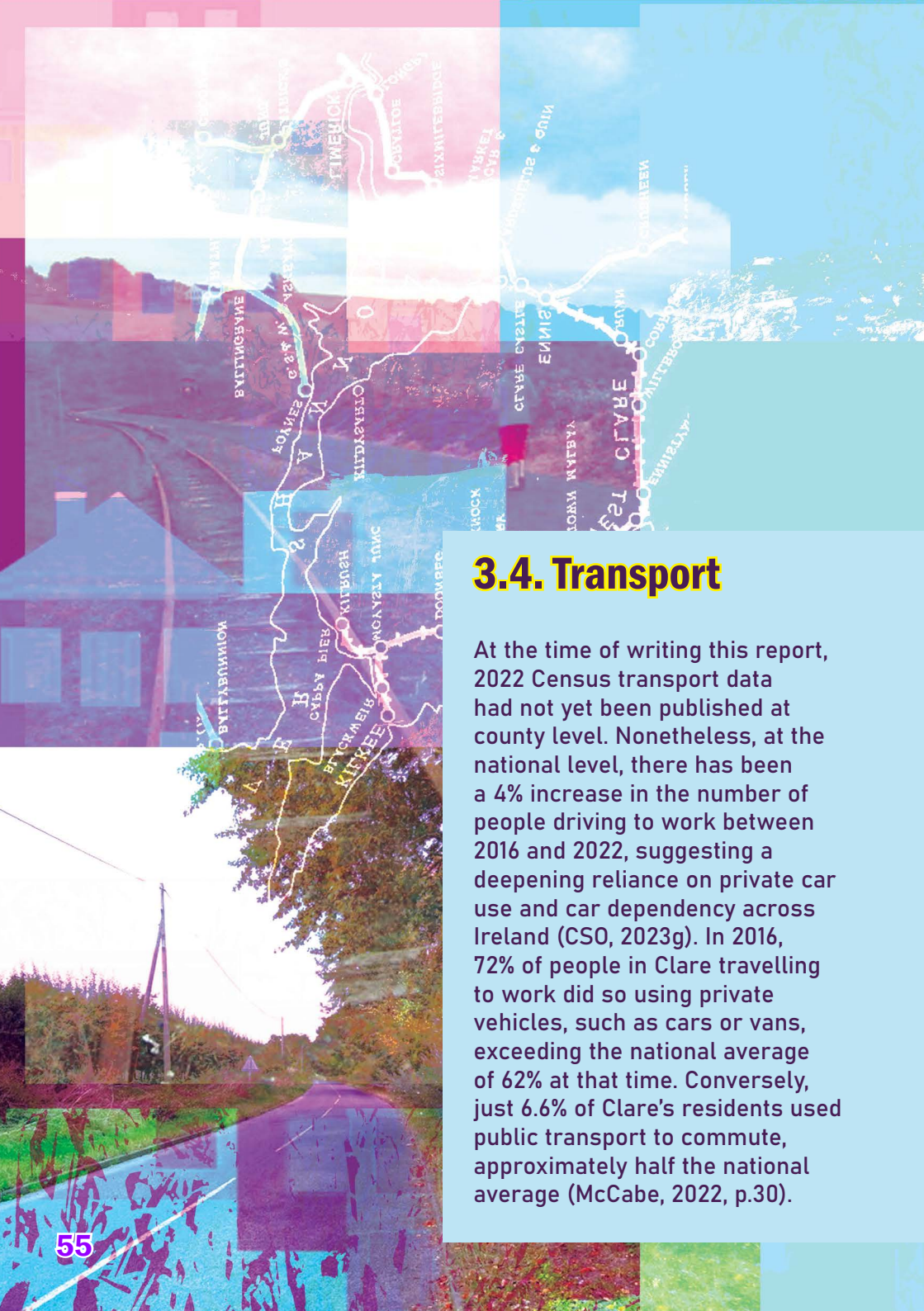
Moreover, the housing sector itself contributes significantly to carbon emissions, including as a result of the process of construction, and continued energy consumption. Marginalised groups are disproportionately exposed to these impacts, emphasising the need to include them in decision-making processes at all levels of climate action. The report recommends that states incorporate the right to adequate housing into their national climate mitigation and adaptation plans. It also urges states to intensify efforts to enhance the energy efficiency of housing stock while investing in social housing that is accessible to all.



'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare' identified that the county is experiencing a housing crisis in relation to social, rental and privately-owned property. Using a combination of available data sources, including Census 2022 preliminary results, 2016 Census data, reports made available by Clare County Council, and data from the Housing Agency and Regulation office from 2020, the research highlights several factors related to the housing crisis in Clare such as:

- The provision of social housing in Clare falls below the national average
- Clare has a vacancy rate of 17.68% (excluding derelict buildings)
- There are 4,912 unoccupied holiday homes
- Airbnb is negatively impacting on the availability of rental properties
- 2,847 households are on the social housing waiting list
- There has been a significant increase in the number of people listed as homeless in 2022
- A disproportionate number of the Travelling community were presenting as homeless

Calling attention to the impact of Airbnb on the private rental market, the author noted that out of the 935 vacant rental properties published under the Census 2022 preliminary results, just 10 were available for rent on Daft.ie.



3.4. Transport

At the time of writing this report, 2022 Census transport data had not yet been published at county level. Nonetheless, at the national level, there has been a 4% increase in the number of people driving to work between 2016 and 2022, suggesting a deepening reliance on private car use and car dependency across Ireland (CSO, 2023g). In 2016, 72% of people in Clare travelling to work did so using private vehicles, such as cars or vans, exceeding the national average of 62% at that time. Conversely, just 6.6% of Clare's residents used public transport to commute, approximately half the national average (McCabe, 2022, p.30).

A recent report by the OECD, examining planned and implemented transport policies aimed at reducing emissions, pointed out that Ireland's transport system, due to its design and structure, encourages growing car use (OECD, 2022). While measures have been taken to bolster services in many areas in Clare, there is still a considerable gap to bridge before achieving a functional public transport system capable of replacing a significant number of car journeys.

Policies aimed at curbing transportation-related emissions, particularly those targeting reduced car use, disproportionately affect rural areas (Moore-Cherry, et al., 2022). This is because people living in rural Ireland often have to travel longer distances to access essential services, amenities, social events and employment opportunities. This situation puts those who can afford to buy and maintain a car at a distinct advantage in accessing the services, amenities and opportunities necessary for active participation in society (Carroll, Benevenuto and Caulfield, 2021).

The term 'transport disadvantage' refers to the barriers or limitations, stemming from

reduced access to essential services and opportunities, that hinder a person's participation in socio-economic, cultural and political aspects of life (Xiao, Wang and Wang, 2018). Research published in 2021 examining transport disadvantage and car dependency in Ireland found that many areas at risk of transport disadvantage were also experiencing socio-economic deprivation (Carroll, Benevenuto and Caulfield, 2021). This has significant implications for understanding socio-economic exclusion in the context of transport in Clare and was resoundingly reflected in focus group discussions undertaken for this project.

Emphasising the need for a transport system that actively tackles socio-economic exclusion, the Just Transition Commission in Scotland, an independent advisory body to the Scottish government, made several recommendations at the close of its first term (Scottish Government, 2023b). These recommendations underscore the opportunity to rebuild the transport system in a way that addresses inequities, enhances social inclusion, provides decent work and respects the rights of those with specific needs, including person(s) with disabilities.

As highlighted in The People's Transition report, for a Just Transition to be achieved in the agriculture sector, changes are needed to the structural conditions of the sector in terms of the relative influences of retailers, processors and primary producers (McCabe, 2020).



3.5. Agriculture

As well as accounting for the largest portion of Ireland's emissions profile (Environmental Protection Agency, 2023), agriculture is a sector that suffers from inequality (McCabe, 2020). As put forward by McCabe (2022), farming communities are at risk of an unjust transition in Clare. At the core of this is the high proportion of beef farmers in Clare, with 81% of farms in the county being used for beef production. As Teagasc's National Farm Survey highlighted in 2019, the average beef farmer 'lost over €4,700 of direct payments over the course of the year' due to the differences between the prices farmers pay for their inputs compared with the prices they receive for their produce (Dillon et al., 2019, p.12). A further driver of inequality is the lack of power farmers hold over the price they receive for their produce (McCabe, 2020). As highlighted in The People's Transition report, for a Just Transition to be achieved in the agriculture sector, changes are needed to the structural conditions of the sector in terms of the relative influences of retailers, processors and primary producers (McCabe, 2020).

In response to the pressures facing the agriculture sector, the Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029 emphasises opportunities for diversification. The plan outlines how agricultural diversification can supplement farm incomes while also creating new employment opportunities but notably does not include the opportunity for farmers to diversify into producing other forms of food (Clare County Council, 2023b). Options for farm diversification referenced in the plan include alternative farm enterprises and a move towards artisan food and beverage production, alongside the provision of energy and tourism. Emphasising tourism, the plan references developments such as outdoor pursuit centres, farmhouse guest accommodation, pet farms and small-scale craft centres as examples of agri-tourism initiatives that could be developed.

While investments in diversification may lead to financial and environmental benefits (Government of Ireland 2021), current income inequality means it is unlikely that beef farmers will have the required capital needed to make large investments (Houser, Gunderson and Stuart 2019). Furthermore, without addressing the underlying

drivers of income inequality in the agricultural sector, there is a risk that business-as-usual diversification could contribute to the growing bifurcation of agriculture, whereby dairy farm incomes grow while those in other sectors decline.

Regarding diversification into energy generation, the County Development Plan outlines its support for the development of solar farms on agricultural land as well as underscoring the economic benefits that the bio-energy industry could bring for people involved in agriculture and forestry. Bio-energy could play a role in facilitating a transition away from fossil fuels, but there is a risk that the move towards using land for energy could reduce the amount of land available for food (Scarlat et al., 2015; Issa; Murphy and McDonnell, 2017; Delbrück and Hamm, 2019). Furthermore, land use development for bio-energy could take place in an unsustainable manner focusing on maximising output via the use of synthetic fertilisers, negatively impacting soil quality and biodiversity (Schmid, Padel and Levidow, 2012). There must be consideration for how bio-energy value chains will be structured. There is the potential that

developing the bio-energy sector could replicate the inequality that currently permeates the agricultural sector. It could also lead to increased competition for land, grass and where anaerobic digestion (AD) is proposed, possibly serving to forestall necessary reductions in livestock levels (O'Brien et al., 2017; Emmet-Booth et al., 2019).

Although bio-energy, and in particular gas produced by bio-digestion, may create the opportunity to generate carbon-neutral energy in theory, in practice the production of such gases have their own environmental impacts. The excessive use of digestate, a by-product from anaerobic digestion that presents an alternative to chemical fertilisers, can severely impact biodiversity, land capacity and water courses (Malhotra et al., 2022). In Northern Ireland, an increase in anaerobic digestion (AD) units has also resulted in increases in ammonia, a source of carbon emissions. This has resulted in local communities being impacted by air pollution and foul odours with potentially harmful impacts on human health (Archer, 2019). In an article in the Ballymena Guardian in North Antrim, residents noted the presence of a 'nauseating' and 'gassy' smell caused by a nearby AD facility (McNabb, 2019).

In the 2023 Budget, the Irish Government allocated €3 million to support the target of developing between 150 and 200 operational anaerobic digestion plants in the Republic by 2030 (Agri Insider, 2023). Experiences from Northern Ireland highlight the imperative need for factors such as biodiversity protection, soil and water quality and human health to be placed centrally within decision-making processes relating to the growth of the bio-energy sector in Clare and around the country.

Alongside, or as part of putting in place a Just Transition Strategy to support Clare's farming communities, it is important to consider the development of schemes that can address issues relating to social isolation, community and family wellbeing, and farmers' mental health. In a study conducted by researchers in the School of Agriculture and Food Science and the School of Psychology at University College Dublin, the primary factors identified as causing stress among farmers were 'Government policies designed to reduce climate change', followed by 'concern over the future of the farm' and then 'outsiders not understanding the nature of farming' (Stapleton et al., 2022, para. 1). The findings of this study further underline the importance

of rooting agricultural policy in Just Transition principles and a rights-based approach.

Applying climate policy in a manner that does not consider the views, experiences and needs of farmers and their role within the identity and culture of their communities could exacerbate challenges relating to mental health among farmers and spur opposition to the introduction of climate policy. For this reason, the development of schemes that reduce financial worries among farmers and provide outlets to support mental health could assist in addressing the immediate needs facing farmers.

Alongside challenges relating to a lack of support for farmers, the question of farmer representation is also relevant. In the research for this report, the group of low-income farmers consulted did not feel their needs were effectively represented by the major farming organisations, specifically in relation to generating incomes from their farms. In a report on Just Transition for the Irish agriculture sector, Reeves-Long (2019) described how the agricultural lobby in Ireland, led by the IFA, has vehemently opposed climate action that might impact beef or dairy farms.



....the six pillars of food sovereignty

.....but there is a risk that the move towards using land for energy could reduce the amount of land available for food

(Scarlat et al., 2015 Issa; Murphy and McDonnell, 2017; Delbrück and Hamm, 2019).

Low-income farmers highlighted the perception that farming organisations only benefit 'the big boys'. In the context of planning a Just Transition, it is important to question who has the ability to influence the planning of Just Transition processes and the need to interrogate instances when someone is seen to be speaking on behalf of someone else (Harrahill et al. 2023). In previous discussion groups organised by Clare PPN, young farmers in particular felt they benefitted strongly from Macra Na Feirme, and from its social and support activities.

In contrast to farm organisations that perceive climate action to be a threat to the future of agriculture in Ireland, the organisation Talamh Beo emphasises the coming together of farmers to create a better food system in Ireland while also restoring ecosystems. It seeks to ensure that farmers can make a living from and with the land. Talamh Beo has 300 members in Ireland. Central principles of Talamh Beo include Farmer to Farmer Learning, Exploring Diversity of Practices and Agroecological Approaches, alongside Making Organic Farming the Norm, not the Exception (Talamh Beo, 2022b). This includes ensuring everyone

has access to organic (chemical-free) food, embracing biological and regenerative systems and supporting good animal welfare.

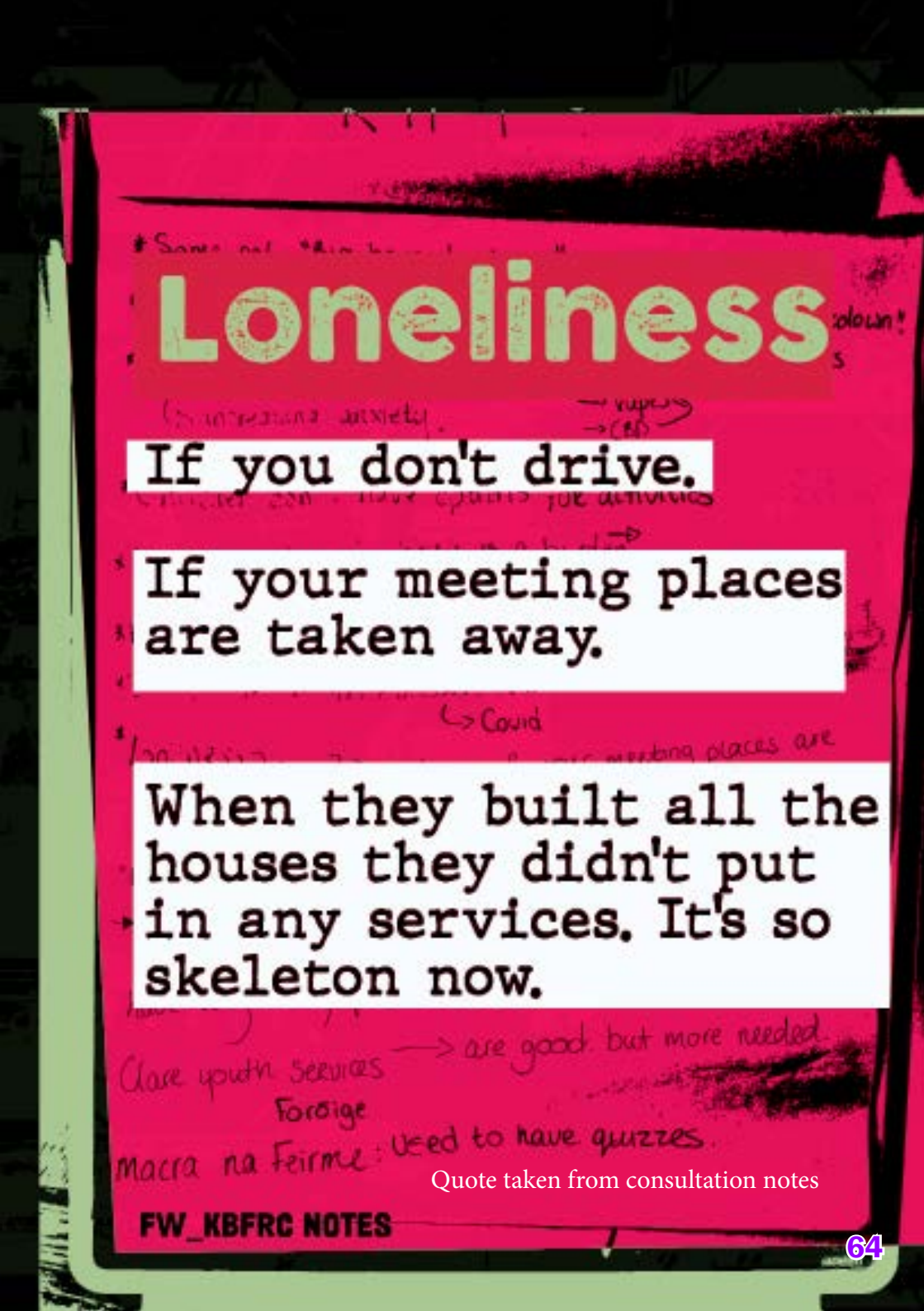
Talamh Beo promotes the six pillars of food sovereignty (Talamh Beo, 2022a). These principles align with Just Transition, community wealth building and socio-economic rights. The principles underline the need to focus on food for people, whereby food is a human right rather than a commodity. It emphasises the need for food providers to be valued. This includes small-scale farmers and the people contributing to food production, such as migrants and indigenous peoples. Talamh Beo also promotes the recognition of women's important role in food systems and the need for greater representation of women in agriculture (Talamh Beo, 2022c). The third and fourth pillars of food sovereignty are local in nature as they focus on localised food systems and putting control in the hands of local people. These principles include ending the current dependence on remote and unaccountable corporations and rejecting the privatisation of natural resources. The final pillars of food sovereignty highlight the need to build upon farmers' knowledge and skills, and working with nature.

“ communities in rural areas must be able to influence Just Transition processes to ensure they are not negatively impacted.

Given the concentration of beef farming in County Clare, the call by Talamh Beo for a more equal, just and sustainable beef industry is highly relevant (Meredith, 2023). It argues for greater collective action among beef farmers via co-operative or producer groups and more robust regulation to ensure fairness and transparency within the beef sector. This includes stricter competition relating to the mergers or takeovers of beef processing companies and support for smaller-scale processors and retailers through local food procurement policies.

Alongside initiatives that seek to alter current farming practices towards more sustainable

models, there are also examples of developments that seek to promote conservation within agriculture. Within Clare, one example of this is the BurrenLife Farming for Conservation Programme. This programme aimed to develop a new model for sustainable agriculture in the Burren to conserve the habitats designated under the European Habitats Directive (Burrenbeo Trust, 2023). The project paid farmers of the Burren to deliver defined environmental objectives: maintaining their traditional system of seasonal cattle grazing while protecting the region's unique plant life. Actions undertaken by farmers across the 2,000-hectare area



Loneliness

If you don't drive.

If your meeting places are taken away.

When they built all the houses they didn't put in any services. It's so skeleton now.

Quote taken from consultation notes

FW_KBFRG NOTES

of the Burren as part of the Burren Life Programme include scrub control, stone wall repair, enhancing water provision and access paths alongside developing new animal feeding systems to reduce the risk of pollution (Burrenbeo Trust, 2023).

A testament to the actions taken by farmers in the Burren, alongside project co-ordinators, was the awarding of the prestigious European Diploma for Protected Areas to the Burren. The Burren was the first Irish landscape to receive this award (Freiburg, 2022). In line with the principles of a Just Transition, the Burren project has provided suckler farmers in the Burren with financial support, which allows farmers to continue farming in a manner that sustains the Burren's important environment. Alongside the immediate financial benefit farmers receive, this High Nature Value Farming model can also lead to other benefits for the local economy, potentially assisting in supporting community wealth building. Some farmers have developed small-scale tourism enterprises from the work conducted in the BurrenLife project (Burren Programme, no date). It also provides farmers with an opportunity to come together by participating in annual

training events alongside peer-to-peer learning and allows farmers to tell their story to visiting study groups.

Despite the positive impacts of the Burren Life Programme on farmers and the environment, it has been impacted by changes in Government policies. Following the introduction of the Agri Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES), the average farmer in the Burren would lose between €7,000 and €8,000 (Freiburg, 2022). This example illustrates the critical role of national decision-makers over schemes that seek to alter farming practices. Given that a central tenet of a Just Transition is to ensure that no group is left worse off by changes introduced by environmental policy, farmers and communities in rural areas must be able to influence Just Transition processes to ensure they are not negatively impacted.



4. Consultations

4.1. Employment, employment industries and education

4.1.1. Access to employment and education

Barriers to accessing employment arose repeatedly during consultations with structurally vulnerable community members in Clare, particularly in relation to transport, discrimination, immigration status and accessing opportunities that are compatible with care responsibilities. Transport, and more specifically the need to own a private car to access employment and education opportunities, arose repeatedly during consultations and is discussed in the following section of this report.

Discrimination

Discrimination was raised as a barrier by numerous participants, particularly those experiencing disadvantage as a result of their

social class and/or ethnicity. Members of the newly formed Clare Traveller Men's Group, set up by the Clare Traveller Community Development Project at a session in Ennis, discussed the difficulties they face in accessing employment and being adequately supported through education. Participants spoke about how they felt that employers discriminate against Travellers making it harder for them to find work. As a result of this discrimination, participants shared their experiences of having to change their accent regularly when looking for work. This discrimination extends well past access to employment. The group spoke about their wish to be treated equally in society and to be given a chance to 'show what they can do'. When asked what areas the group would like to work in, there was a focus on jobs that align well with the green transition, such as skilled

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As a result of this discrimination, participants shared their experiences of having to change their accent regularly when looking for work.

trades and construction trades. However, participants felt that even with these skills, there was a fear that people would not want to have Travellers working in their homes.

Class-based discrimination was also evident during discussions with community members in Kilrush who experience multiple forms of disadvantage. Participants spoke about the impact of employment discrimination on their mental health and discussed how it is largely low-paid work, if you can find work.

A significant barrier faced by people reliant on social welfare in pursuing employment is the potential loss of access to State benefits, including medical cards and disability benefits. This situation can create a poverty trap, as participants described how social welfare payments were not enough to lift a family or individual out of poverty. Moreover, accepting available low-paid and often precarious employment opportunities in rural areas will likely not offer a viable solution, especially for those who are responsible for dependents, whether they are children or individuals with care needs.

To address this challenge, clear plans and State investments are essential to develop sustainable livelihoods that align with people's lives, as well as the work and services needed in communities. Additionally, measures that allow social welfare recipients to maintain essential support while transitioning to the workforce could support structurally vulnerable people in Clare to access employment. Examples of such schemes include the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance which permits people receiving jobseeker's benefits to receive 100% of that payment during their first year when starting their own business and 75% in the second year (Citizens Information, 2023b).

Migrants accessing employment in Clare

In a session attended by more than 40 adult participants, all of whom were seeking International Protection in Ireland and were based in Clare, seven had been living in Ireland for more than six months and were eligible to work. However, none of these seven had been able to access paid employment. Participants shared their difficulties in obtaining work permits, which

“

Give us a chance
to show what we
can do....

End

discrimination

Quote taken from consultation notes



hindered their ability to engage in socio-economic life in Ireland. In addition to difficulty accessing work permits, challenges faced by the larger group included boredom, institutional living, the remoteness/small size of the settlements in which they had been located in, a lack of public transport and difficulties in getting a driving licence, as well as the challenges of navigating life in a new language, opening a bank account and accessing healthcare.

Participants shared their frustrations at waiting for work permits, which hindered their ability to contribute to socio-economic life in Ireland. When asked about their desired occupations in Ireland, participants expressed eagerness to work in sectors well aligned to a Just Transition such as construction, healthcare, caregiving, skilled trades and education. Beyond employment, participants shared their hopes to feel safe in Ireland, to further their education, to make friends and to 'give back to the community'. This sentiment was affirmed during a consultation with Ukrainian refugees in Ennis, where the significance of providing employment and education opportunities for migrants in Ireland to facilitate

integration with the wider community was highlighted.

The perception of having to take jobs that do not align with one's qualifications also emerged as a significant challenge during the focus group with Ukrainian community members who have been living in Clare since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. One participant described how they had been an English teacher in Ukraine but were working as a waitress in Ireland, with others including journalists having taken jobs as cleaners. Another participant spoke about how work permit delays for Ukrainian doctors in Ireland represent a missed opportunity to support issues of understaffing and provide multilingual healthcare in Ireland.

This experience of migrants working at jobs that are lower paid and that require fewer qualifications than they have is not restricted to Ukrainians and International Protection Applicants. A study conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) published in 2020, which analysed 2016 Census data to assess the skills and labour market outcomes of first-generation migrants in Ireland,

How long in Clare

Citynest first → 17
Belseskin → 0

More than 6 months, how months 0
- work permits

What would you like to work at?

- everything
- sales
- driving
- shaving + beauty
- kitchen making
- construction!!!
- healthcare
- painter
- electrician - forklift driver
- butcher
- mechanic
- carpenter
- nursing
- tourism
- I.T.
- teaching
- kitchen work
- gypsum board

Notes taken during consultation

“ Participants also voiced difficulties in having their existing qualifications recognised in Ireland.”

found that many migrant groups have higher levels of education but most groups also experience higher levels of unemployment than people born in Ireland, with migrants born in African countries particularly affected. Additionally, when examining the labour outcomes of migrants arriving in Ireland through the International Protection system, it was found that this particular group tends to face elevated unemployment rates and encounters greater challenges in accessing highly skilled jobs (McGinnity et al., 2020). Migrant support organisations such as the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland have been campaigning on this issue for more than two decades. Not only does this mean that migrants in Clare may suffer poorer incomes, wellbeing and job satisfaction throughout their lives, but also that communities across the county are at the loss of the benefit of their full talents and ability in the sphere of work.

Within both focus groups, the issue of rurality was a prominent topic of discussion. The majority of participants indicated that in their countries of origin, they had lived in urban areas, often in large cities. They felt that their experience, skills and self-reliance were hindered by the locations in which they now lived within County Clare. For instance, one female participant joked that she had specialised in event management and public relations in Ukraine but would need to learn to drive a tractor to become self-sufficient in Lisdoonvarna.

The demographic profile of County Clare indicates an ageing population, which could benefit from net inward migration to maintain and balance the age distribution in the county. In line with this, participants were asked whether they would consider staying in Clare. Despite many of the International Protection Applicants being very recent

arrivals to the county, almost all expressed their willingness to stay in Clare, preferably in the towns rather than in rural areas, and that the criteria that would influence this decision would be their ability to find secure homes and to access good employment, as well as the prevailing situations in their country of origin.

Regarding the Ukrainian community, who are beneficiaries of a Temporary Protection Scheme, their right to remain in Ireland has, to date, been renewed on a one-year basis. Several participants in the focus group expressed concerns about settling or establishing businesses in Clare due to the uncertainty surrounding the right to remain in the country long-term.

People with disabilities

For participants with disabilities, beyond the transportation barriers hindering their participation in education and the workforce, they shared concerns about how taking a job can force people to give up some or most of their disability allowance. A more in-depth exploration of employment barriers for individuals with disabilities was conducted during the research for 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare' in 2022.

This research shone a light on widespread discrimination, ableism and a prevailing sense that 'improvement' or 'education' of the disabled person is the primary solution put forward, rather than addressing changes to the work environment, cultures or practices that would ensure the realisation of people with disabilities's socio-economic right to access decent work. The study also delved into the details of how the loss of Government support upon gaining employment can create a poverty trap for people with disabilities. Participants in that study shared their experiences of how taking a job can lead to the loss of their medical card, which is often indispensable for people with disabilities who may require more frequent access to medical services, treatments and equipment than others.

Further efforts at a national level should be made to reduce the obstacles to education and employment encountered by people with disabilities. Particular attention should be given to reforming the situation where people with disabilities risk losing the essential benefits they rely heavily on when seeking employment.

4.1.2. Low-paid and precarious work

For those experiencing multiple forms of deprivation who have found work in Clare, discussions focused on the low pay received for their labour. Concern for migrant community members, apprenticeships, the care sector and tourism took centre stage in the discussions.

At community consultations in Shannon, Ennistymon and Killaloe, participants expressed concern for migrant community members, discussing the perception that migrant workers in Clare are being underpaid and are poorly treated but don't look for better conditions because of a fear of losing their jobs.

Participants in two focus groups reported that, despite a national campaign aimed at encouraging people to start apprenticeships, they felt that those who embark on apprenticeships encounter challenges. Specifically, they find that employers are often willing to host them during their first and second years when the costs are relatively low, but become reluctant to continue the apprenticeship for its full duration as the costs increase. This issue underscores the need for more comprehensive

support for apprentices to ensure they can complete their training and secure long-term employment in their chosen trades.

4.1.3. Care

Across consultations and topics, issues surrounding childcare represented challenges for almost every mother and caregiver that participated. A lack of public childcare services and non-commercial child-friendly spaces, such as playgrounds, represented barriers to social and economic participation for many. Community members spoke about a lack of support for children with additional needs, waiting lists for crèches, and feeling 'lucky' if they were able to access childcare.

At the Family Resource Centre in Kilrush, a participant shared her experience as a single mother and described how the prohibitive cost of childcare puts employment out of reach for single mothers living on low incomes. She described this as being especially difficult if you had to pay for transport to get to a job.

A family resource centre worker described the link between care, employment and underinvestment in public services:

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE IF WE SIMPLY "GREENED" CLARE WITHOUT PURSUING FAIRNESS?

- * Jobs affected by greening → e.g. blacksmith needs coal for their work
 - ↳ No exception for crafts people (heritage crafts)
 - ↳ producing long life local craft (products)
- * (Room: The wheel → "supplied energy once, can it be done again?"
- * Large corporations profit over wind energy.
- * Fuel > cultural aspect of solid fuels.
- Transport - mismatch between needing a car.
- * Rewilding: We must work with nature > ~~don't~~ it can benefit people + planet?
- * If there was a ban on cows → impact on tourism for example
- * Carbon sequestration > ^{appetite for} Forest coverage > sitka space
- The land given over for forestry might be better ~~used~~ saved by native trees + wetlands.

Notes taken during consultation

Water Quality

Water Issues

Quote taken from consultation notes

- * Mounshannon > ~~Fat~~ Water quality & waste is
- * Fish dying in the water →
- * Cruisers going up & down the Shannon

'They aren't creating better pay or better staff conditions... we need more State-funded community creches. The staff are very undervalued. I have an early year's degree but working in a creche wouldn't be enough to pay the bills for me. It was minimum wage. Your early years are the most important part of anyone's life, to get that foundation.'

Echoing this sentiment, participants spoke about the unpaid nature of many forms of care work, discussed how that labour is largely borne by women and described how 'care for people and care for the environment is all voluntary'.

Despite the low-paid nature of care work and the challenges that many face accessing it, across three separate consultations with low-income families in Kilrush and Ennistymon, as well as with International Protection Applicants in Ennis, participants expressed a wish to work in care and saw it as important, meaningful and necessary work.

4.1.4. The tourism sector in Clare

Employment in tourism was cited as a form of low-paid, precarious work by participants at various

sessions, consultations and workshops. Participants at a community workshop in Shannon discussed this point in detail and highlighted issues relating to the seasonal nature of tourism work in Clare, leading to a lack of secure employment for people working in the sector. A participant in one session, who herself experiences multiple forms of disadvantage, described her experience of working in the tourism sector in Clare:

'There is a lack of opportunity for decent paying jobs. I was cleaning holiday homes up in [name of town] and you would clean a full house. There would be two people inside in the one house, and you would get €12.50 for cleaning the house, between two people. So, you are scrubbing a house for €6.25 each. When people come to holiday homes, they trash them sometimes and it's horrible. They are the kind of jobs that I can get. As I said, I'm a recovering addict and there isn't much work out there.'

Across numerous consultations, participants felt there has been an overemphasis on the tourism sector in Clare and were eager to recognise the full breadth of livelihoods across the county.

Across numerous consultations, participants felt there has been an overemphasis on the tourism sector in Clare and were eager to recognise the full breadth of livelihoods across the county.



As one participant stressed:

'Rural counties are [more than tourism and farming] they are made up of carers, health workers, IT workers...'

A topic that arose repeatedly across consultations was the perception that the current model of tourism 'is not delivering fairness' and was described as deepening inequality in Clare. One focus group participant with expertise in the field expressed how areas of Ireland reliant on tourism as a core sector of their local economy correlate to areas that experience disadvantage. Referring to the Pobal Deprivation Index, which uses 2016 Census data, a participant remarked: 'You can see the tourism map [Wild Atlantic Way] on the Pobal Deprivation map'.

The connection between tourism and inequality arose several times during consultations with structurally vulnerable community members in Ennistymon, Kilrush, Killaloe, Ennis and Shannon. Capturing this sentiment, a participant in Killaloe discussed the links between extractive tourism models and inequality in Clare:

'When you have water running through the centre of the town.

It's bringing a lot of money, it should be, to the town. But it's only [some people] that can afford boats and all that. There's nothing for the locals like. [Killaloe] is just a place for wealthy people who have boats.'

4.1.4.1. Tourism and housing

To the forefront of discussions surrounding the impact of tourism on deprivation and inequality in Clare, is the impact of holiday homes and short-term lets on the availability of housing. Community members in Kilrush, Killaloe and Ennistymon spoke about the difficulties they face accessing housing, described Airbnb as a 'huge challenge' and felt that it 'must be regulated and should not have a monopoly on housing'. One participant, who also shared their experience of receiving low pay for cleaning holiday homes in Clare, responded to this point by asking what Airbnb is, highlighting a situation where a person experiencing deprivation in Clare is not only unable to access this type of tourism themselves for leisure but are also being impacted by the kind of precarious work that it creates.

Competition for housing between long-term community members trying to buy or rent their first

Killaloe

* HOUSING - ~~SOME~~ NOT GIVEN TO THE COMMUNITY

YOUNG PEOPLE

WHO AREN'T

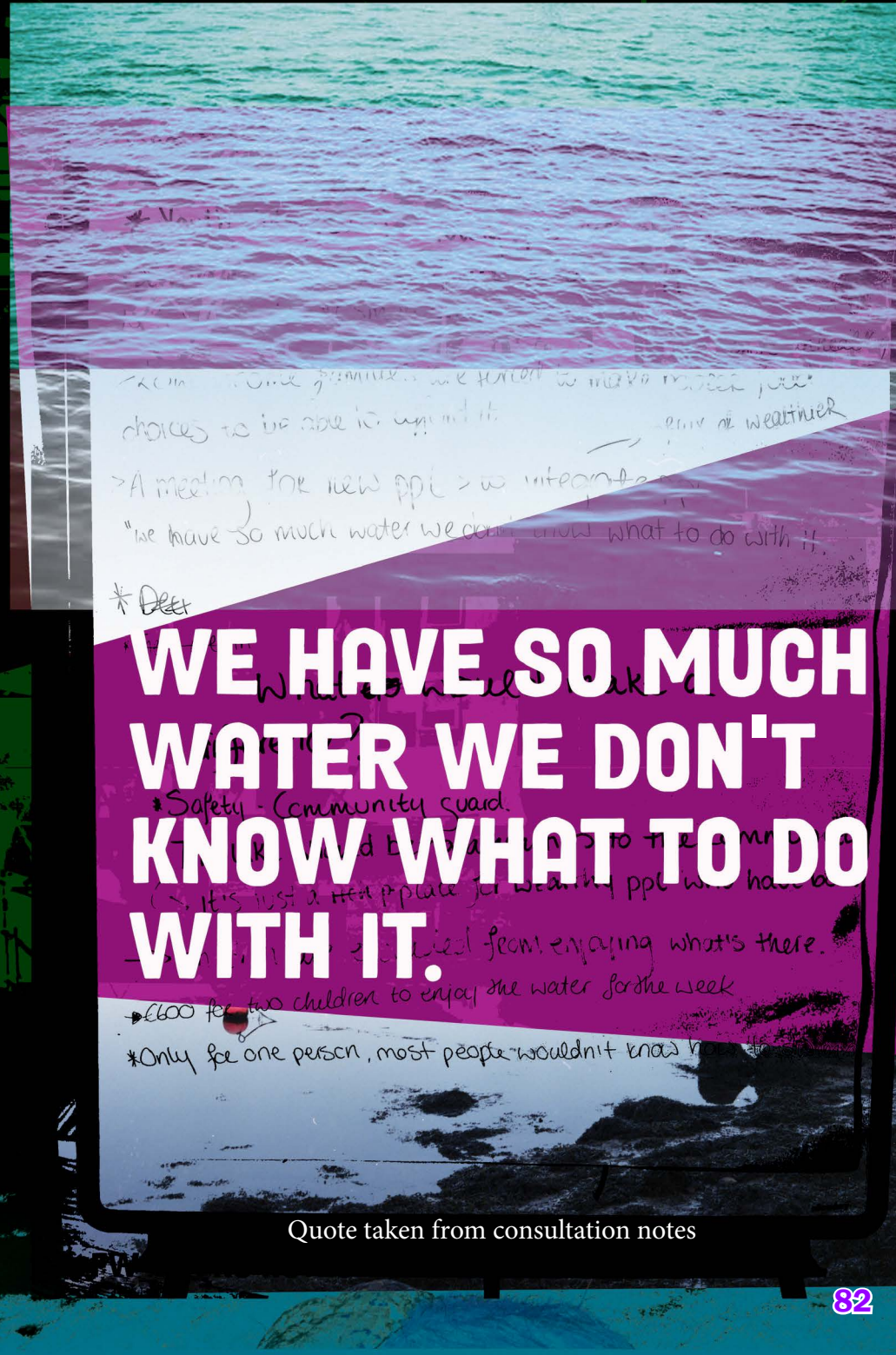
INTO SPORT

HAVE

NOTHING TO DO

young ppl - you have to
Community volunteering
- Lack
- Parents w/ children going to school. > Back to school allowance. Used to be wider
Community Welfare Officer is in Limerick
Mental Health - Suicide ideation > you have to travel : pre-book
* In young ppl. -> Depression, panic attack

Quote taken from consultation notes



... choices to be able to...
> A meeting for the new ppl > w/ integrate...
"we have so much water we don't know what to do with it."

* Deer

WE HAVE SO MUCH WATER WE DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT.

* Safety - Community guard.
... it's just a heap place for wealthy ppl who have a...
... £600 for two children to enjoy the water for the week
* Only for one person, most people wouldn't know how to

Quote taken from consultation notes

home and people living in other parts of Ireland or overseas buying holiday homes in Clare was described as an issue for many. Participants felt that their basic right to adequate housing was going unmet while others were buying their second, third or fourth home, placing substantial upward pressure on house prices. Sharing their experience of trying to find a suitable home in Clare, one participant in Kilrush described how:

'There is no control over the house prices. In my own case, I'm living in a holiday home with two bedrooms and two children, and we're looking for a three-bedroom house. The initial price is okay and then suddenly you're in competition with people in Dublin and Limerick who are looking to buy their holiday home here. They have the wages and I can't afford a house because I'm in competition with these people. I've just stopped looking.'

4.1.4.2. Tourism and young people

In addition to the impacts of tourism on housing supply, a second frequently discussed factor across consultations with groups experiencing multiple forms of deprivation was the perceived adverse effect of tourism on access to recreation for young people living in Clare. In Killaloe, Kilrush and Ennistymon, older participants expressed a deep concern for the future of young people in Clare. Several participants from low-income households described how their children – teenage boys for the most part – and their friends are struggling with their mental health, impacting their ability to participate fully in society. Parents felt that there was nothing to do for young people in Clare's towns and villages and were concerned that this was increasing the likelihood of young people getting into trouble. When the discussion turned to the activities that are available for young people in Killaloe, Kilrush and Ennistymon, there was a common theme that many recreational activities are geared towards tourists or families with significant disposable income and thus out of reach for children and teenagers from low-income households and those without access to personal transport.

there was a common theme that many recreational activities are geared towards tourists or families with significant disposable income and thus out of reach for children and teenagers from low-income households and those without access to personal transport.

'There are evenings where youth club isn't on. Young people would be knocking at the door looking for something to do. It would be lovely to have a permanent youth cafe.'

In Killaloe:

'Everything here is around the cost of 'joining' and the cost of maintaining, and for families that don't have it, it actually excludes their children from joining, and it shouldn't.'

'A friend of mine used to mind kids and she used to bring the two of them out there [to the lake in Killaloe to do a water sport activity] and it was €300. That's €600, for two kids to be entertained on water that is outside our door.'

In (and around) Kilrush:

'There is nothing for young people. There are no alternatives for young people. We keep feeding that back but people aren't listening to what it's like, the actual reality of living here in Kilrush in West Clare. There isn't anything for kids to do so they are going smoking vapes in the woods.'

'It's really expensive if they want to join the gym, and access that kind of thing. There is a sailing camp but that's very expensive. Football camps should be subsidised.'

'We have a swimming pool in Kilkee, and the cost is outrageous. We live on an island and our children can't learn how to swim.'

One participant felt that summer camps were not financially accessible for her family: 'Why can't they run cheap summer camps for the kids for people on low incomes or no incomes at all? [For] children that live in families like our families, that are on small money that can't afford to bring our children over to singing lessons every week.'

In Ennistymon:

'There are evenings where youth club isn't on, and young people would be knocking at the door looking for something to do. It would be lovely to have a permanent youth cafe.'

'You need serious money behind you to do anything. I reckon [attractions] are only that expensive because they know the amount of people that come over in the summer months because Clare is such a touristy place.'



- * We need forests. > We need a more nuanced solutions.
- * "No joined up thinking" e.g. mining
- * "We're fiddling while Rome burns"

* Green business is unrealistic: a cycle-long
 ↳ how do these things generate income?

* 2nd biggest pollutant of our waterways is
 fumes from trucks

* Poor are going to get poorer. Rich are
 going to get richer"

⊗ I'm an environmentalist "I don't want to be using
 oil"

* How do we get a "green" in this transit.

* Right, national and other ways of doing things?

*

How do we take care of each other?

Shannon

* There's no clear communication on what's planned,
 for who, when" "They are not informed on how to help"

"People are frustrated not to be involved in something"

* There are no non-religious & non-commercial spaces
 for community to use"

* People can't travel to Intreo, there's no CWO locally now"

* Local industry need to invest their profits
 to benefit locals; paid internships & training for
 employment"

lack of transport, child care, no GPs, no dentists
 Lack of human centred care & support
 no housing







CLARE SAYS WELCOME

solidarity shindig PARTY

UNIT 7 TRACKLANDS BUSINESS PARK, ENNIS V95K6F6

Join us for an afternoon of multicultural craic with drumming, music & food. Come meet members of MASI (Movement of Asylum Seekers Ireland), and international protection applicants living in Clare.

BRING FOOD TO SHARE AT THE PARTY – POT LUCK!

AUGUST 5th 4-7pm

Supported by Clare Solidarity Network, Clare PPN, Women's Collective Ireland Clare, MASI, Fáilte Isteach Clare, Mna Ag Gaire, Quare Clare LGBTQ+, Clare Traveller CDP, Clare Leader Forum, Catu Clare, Clare Immigrant Support Centre and CLDC. For more info: 086 3840973

Clare Solidarity Network logo: **Clare Solidarity Network** (with a fist icon and 'Clare Solidarity Network' text)

Justice-MASI-Asylum logo: **Justice-MASI-Asylum** (with a fist icon and 'Justice-MASI-Asylum' text)





4.2. Housing and energy poverty

4.2.1. Housing

The ongoing housing crisis personally affected participants at every consultation with structurally vulnerable groups in Clare. This includes consultations at family resource centres in Killaloe, Kilrush, Ennistymon and Shannon, as well as at specific community consultations held with Ukrainian migrants, International Protection Applicants and Traveller men.

As was well documented in 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare', housing needs are going unmet across Clare and participants were aware of the link between housing, tourism, mental health, transport and fundamentally their socio-economic right to housing. Housing was one of the biggest issues facing participants. They spoke about challenges related to affordability, inadequate housing conditions, including for those living with disabilities, cultural adequacy and a sense of having to compete against each other for social housing. The ramifications of tourism in Clare and how it contributes to the housing crisis are also mentioned in the section on Employment, employment industries and education.

At a focus group with Traveller men in Ennis, housing was a priority. The group discussed the mental health impact of trying to rent in Clare. Overcrowding was cited as a barrier to wellbeing, and participants felt that culturally appropriate housing was not being provided. Speaking about competition between groups that experience various forms of deprivation, it was noted that 'Ireland is the best country if you're not from it', but participants also expressed a keen awareness that the provision of housing in

Ireland is a longer-term issue. Describing the particular severity of the housing crisis on Travellers, participants discussed how most of the group have lived in emergency accommodation at some point in their lives. In another town, a female participant whose husband is a Traveller, echoed the issue of overcrowding across the Traveller community in Clare, decade-long wait lists, and spoke about the brewing resentment between marginalised groups who are looking for homes in Clare. Frustration about the culturally inappropriate nature of housing in Clare for Travellers was also raised specifically, as well as a lack of input from Travellers into Traveller-related policymaking.

At a session with International Protection Applicants, participants spoke about their wishes for a safe place to live outside of Ireland's Direct Provision system and reported issues such as a lack of privacy for children and space for them to play in addition to lacking access to cooking facilities. When participants at this session were asked what their hopes for the future are, one participant responded, 'I hope they end Direct



Provision', and all adults at the session expressed a wish to live independently.

Participants on low incomes looking to buy homes in Clare, discussed their experiences of competing with those who are purchasing holiday homes, being unable to save while paying high prices for rent, renting homes that are not adequately maintained and being consistently priced out of housing:

'If I'm paying rent, how can I save? I am happy, I don't want social housing, there are other people that need that but it's so hard to buy a house. I live in a two-bed apartment with my 11-year-old boy, my three-year-old child and my husband. It's a damp apartment and it's not only me in this situation. There are many like that.'

In the discussions with low-income farmers, they mentioned the difficulties in getting planning permission for family members to build homes on their land, leading to discontinuity in their family traditions. They contrasted this to the ease at which larger farmers could expand their farm buildings or build large new ones within the same landscapes.

4.2.2. Rising energy costs

A key link between housing and a Just Transition is the twin need for the eradication of energy poverty alongside the decarbonisation of Ireland's housing stock. During various sessions, participants spoke about the challenges they faced paying for energy bills and fuel as a result of the repeated price hikes during 2022 and early 2023. Participants spoke about their realisation of the significant shift in energy costs compared to previous years and how this had impacted their living standards as well as their ability to comfortably heat their homes. One woman with young children in Ennistymon described how, due to financial pressures, her pre-paid home heating had been cut off multiple times. Another participant in Killaloe described how:

'From my own point of view at home, we noticed that our gas bills and electricity were starting to become unmanageable. There in February or March, we got a bill for €500 just for electricity and I would ring up Electric Ireland to try and figure out why it was how it was so high...I couldn't figure it out. We were going around the house trying to turn off everything but we have to have some quality of life as well.'

There has to be some sort of medium.'

Participants discussed how rising energy prices during the winter of 2022 overlapped with several other long-term and immediate challenges such as access to decent housing and physical and mental health. Illustrating the interconnected nature of the issues facing people who experience multiple forms of deprivation in Clare, an economically vulnerable elderly participant, who is renting from a private landlord under the Housing Assistant Payment (HAP) scheme, spoke about how these interconnected issues, exacerbated by rising energy costs, have undermined his basic human rights and have affected his mental health:

'I lived with a girl for years, but we split up. I moved into a flat and I've no hot water. I have to carry a kettle up every morning to have a shave; I have a shower upstairs. I've spoken to the Council and do you know what they said? "Don't rock the boat." I said I've no hot water. Do you know I'd be better off in a tent? I know I don't deserve it, I've worked hard all my life, it's not my fault. It got the more of me at Christmas, I was after nine days in hospital, and I had no heat in the house. I bought a... heater, and I nearly

died [when I saw the] bill... €450, and I hadn't enough money in my bank account so I cancelled the direct debit. The next day, or two days after, I had a bill for €750. €300 they were charging me for cancelling. I was very afraid that I wouldn't have enough to pay out the [bill]. I have money like, now, I'm just saying but at that time I was kind of struggling, I was after paying out to rent the place.'

Discussing the severe impact on his mental health:

'I went out before Christmas... down to the [water], and was sitting down in the village because you know me, I'm optimistic, I wouldn't lie down for no one, but I'm thinking I can't see the end, I'm jumping into the water. I just could see no way out. I could see no way out. A friend rang me ... who I used to work with, and he said what's wrong with you and I said, I'm in a bad place now. So, he said to me, walk away from the [water].'

In relation to accessing secure housing, a participant also said that the Council had told him that he would not get a house until somebody else in a one-bedroomed house died.



4.2.3. Solid fuels and energy security

The topic of solid fuels was raised by participants in Ennistymon, Killaloe and Kilrush. In line with general discussions about energy, participants spoke about the challenges they faced due to the rising prices of solid fuels. Across these three locations, interviewees dependent on solid fuels for home heating displayed a keen awareness of exactly how long a specific quantity of solid fuel, such as a bag of coal, would heat their home. There was a distinct sense that participants were continuing to use solid fuels to retain control over their energy expenses and to be able to cut back during periods of financial uncertainty. Illustrating this reliance on solid fuels for personal energy security, one participant described how: 'I know how many bags of turf will keep me going and for a bad week. Five bags of turf would last me two to three weeks.'

Similarly, the need for participants to monitor and manage their energy usage for financial reasons was a recurring theme during discussions of the obstacles to retrofitting. One participant described their situation:

'If solar panels cost €10,000, how much solid fuels are you going to be able to buy for that? If you are on a lower income, to invest that much in your house, first of all, it's not possible, but second of all, you compare it to the amount of solid fuel you can buy to keep you warm for 5 years...If you get oil or gas, you can't monitor your usage but if you were to buy solid fuels, at least you can monitor your usage and when it's gone it's gone. You have no gigantic bill.'

Throughout the focus groups, participants expressed their awareness of existing grant schemes for retrofitting but found these schemes unattractive for various reasons. Firstly, the prohibitive cost deterred many. Secondly, participants who were renting felt they lacked the means to convince private landlords to undertake such retrofitting work, and some feared potential displacement if landlords decided to carry out renovations. Thirdly, some individuals who might qualify for the Local Authority's own retrofitting programme for social housing raised concerns about issues such as the energy usage of heat pumps, the removal of open fireplaces, and the lack of control over energy bills.

Lastly, some participants living in older, one-off farmhouses or cottages do not qualify for the grant schemes because of the building's age.

Further concerns were raised about the administrative aspects of the grant schemes. Some anecdotes suggested builders might provide better value to those who did not wish to avail of the schemes.



Let's not rely one more time
on the goodwill of people
when **We need
resources.**



Quote taken from consultation notes

4.3. Transport and access to services

4.3.1. Transport disadvantage in Clare

Consultations with structurally disadvantaged community members in Kilrush, Killaloe, Ennistymon, Shannon and Ennis shed light on the challenges faced by these communities in accessing health services, employment and education opportunities, amenities and social events in Clare. It became apparent that transport disadvantage is rooted in the lack of accessible and reliable public transport provision in Clare, leading to car dependency, as well as an uneven ability to participate in socio-economic and cultural life. Cutting across these themes was the reliance on others for transportation due to the absence of adequate public transport options. Furthermore, the impact of diminishing and increasingly centralised service provision appears to deepen transport disadvantage for marginalised groups in Clare.

4.3.2. Transport as a barrier to accessing healthcare

The difficulties faced by people trying to access essential healthcare services arose repeatedly. While this topic is better examined from the perspective of the need for localised healthcare services within communities, it is clear that even with such provisions, transport to major hospitals will be necessary on occasion to provide appropriate levels of treatment.

Several participants spoke about resorting to taxis to reach medical appointments, which placed a disproportionate financial burden on those without cars. The absence of regular schedules, infrequent public transport, and 'last mile' challenges that arise when taking public transport to medical facilities in Ennis, Limerick or Kerry further compounded the issue. One woman in Kilrush spoke about the extreme impact of transport disadvantage and the disproportionate financial strain

borne by those without cars who have to use taxis:

'My mother was dying of cancer, she had to get a taxi to her treatment. Sometimes she had to miss an appointment [because] she couldn't afford it.'

In another location, a parent recounted a situation in which a young family member was experiencing a severe mental health issue. The child had been allocated four appointments per week with CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) in Limerick City. However, in this case, the parent was unable to afford the bus fares for both herself and her child, which would have amounted to €70 per week. Additionally, they noted how making these trips would have necessitated arranging care for her other children.

4.3.3. Transport as a barrier to accessing employment and education opportunities

Across several conversations, it was felt that car ownership is a necessity for accessing education and employment opportunities, highlighting an issue known as "forced car ownership" (Carroll, Benevenuto and Caulfield, 2021, pp.46-47). This concept relates to the idea that car ownership isn't

always a preference but a result of inadequate alternatives. Forced car ownership is discussed as being intensified by the need to earn a living.

Describing the link between the ongoing housing crisis, access to further education opportunities, and forced car ownership for young people:

'Another aspect that I see is around college students. They can't get houses to live in Limerick or Galway. So now they're looking at travelling from home to college... so, then they have to get a car. Then they have to work and work and work just to afford [the car]. We all know how expensive insurance is and all that. And there are a number of people I know who are in that position. It's a problem causing a problem, because in the past everyone would move to college, but that's not an option anymore because of the housing crisis.'

Participants emphasised the need for more frequent public transport to accommodate commuting needs to employment centres such as Ennis or the Shannon Industrial Estate. Existing timetables were criticised, and participants discussed how if you took public

Studies that call for a more transformative approach to Just Transition emphasise the need to consider questions relating to the ownership of assets as well as who has control over decision-making processes (Clarke and Lipsig-Mummé, 2020).



We're a remote community and they pay us lip service...

Quote taken from consultation notes

transport to work, you would be either too early or too late, making it challenging for people to use public transport for commuting. One participant spoke about how they felt that current public transport provision in West Clare contributes to social exclusion and forces people to leave to access work and education opportunities:

'The NTA should sit up and take more notice of the first letter in their name because right now they're not. We're a remote community and they pay us lip service... If you want to work in Ennis and you live in Kilrush, or you want to work in the Shannon Industrial Zone – which is the biggest employer in the region – you can't get there from here. So, you are excluded straight away. [There are] 600 kids over at the post-primary school, what's their future? It's agriculture, it's the dole, or it's leaving.'

In Shannon town, participants highlighted how a lack of adequate public transport further disadvantages people with disabilities, acting as one of several barriers to accessing employment opportunities.

Insufficient public transport was also described as a hindrance to participating in social and cultural activities. Describing their

experience of living without a car in West Clare, one participant described how:

'I don't have a car; I live in a rural part of Clare. I cycle everywhere around where I live but I do rely on lifts. You sacrifice a lot. I don't have much of a social life. I had to get a lift to come to this workshop. You get used to it.'

4.3.4. Transport and accessibility

Accessibility emerged as a significant issue contributing to transport disadvantage, especially for people with disabilities and women or caregivers with young children. Women expressed concerns about the challenges of using public transport and having to navigate with a buggy on narrow or non-existent footpaths. The 'last mile' was discussed as being particularly problematic for those with children, buggies or disabilities. Participants also mentioned the lack of non-commercial public spaces, such as playgrounds within walking distance which they described as contributors to social isolation. A mother in Ennistymon spoke about her experience: 'If there was a playground or some sort of something for kids. Even you know, it's something for people that don't drive, something

within walking distance. Something you don't have to pay for... Even for me like, with all the kids, I can't go in and have a cup of coffee with someone, if there was something there [a playground], you could get a takeaway coffee and sit down. I can't do that.'

Furthermore, the lack of accessibility for wheelchair users on public transport was raised as a critical concern. Booking accessible transport was reported to be time-consuming, with many routes not serviced with accessible vehicles or bus stops and instances of discrimination by some drivers on bigger coaches were recounted.

In contrast, participants praised the personal relationships they formed with Local Link drivers, which positively impacted their experience of using public transport.

'If the Local Link and the CIE bus were the same price, I wouldn't want the big bus most times... With the Local Links, you grow a relationship with [the driver]. Sometimes I get on the bus and once or twice it's happened where I didn't have the money but the driver knows me. The next time I got on I paid him.'

Local Link was also praised in other communities, and participants noted an increase in services and value for money in relation to ticket prices, with some however mentioning the new routes as 'Ukrainian buses'.

4.3.5. Transport: underlying issues

Participants highlighted the lack of community-based healthcare as a consequence of service centralisation, leading to increased travel to access healthcare services. This was emphasised in 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare' (McCabe, 2022). A participant in Ennistymon spoke about how, when she had a child before the pandemic, she could register the birth in the town but remarked that since the Covid-19 pandemic, she had to travel to Ennis to register the birth of her babies. In addition, participants in Shannon spoke about how Shannondoc, the out-of-hours medical service for the area, is based in Limerick City and not Shannon.

Describing the link between the viability of community-based care and the need for public transport provision, a participant in Kilrush described how:

'We had supported living, we had 18 places in Ennistymon. The HSE

shut it down because it wasn't used. But it wasn't used because you can't get there on public transport. The young people didn't want to leave Ennis or anywhere and be shut away without transport. So, we lost the only supported living we had two years ago.'

4.3.6. Transport that works

During discussions, some participants shared positive experiences of public transport and suggested various types of public transport provision that could address structural deprivation and uneven public transport provision in Clare to support everyone in the county to participate in socio-economic, political and cultural life.

Rural community-to-community bus services, such as Local Link were described as a form of public transport well-suited to rural areas by several participants, particularly around the town of Kilrush where there are several routes available. Participants living on, or close to these routes described the importance of community-based transport and valued the ability to be able to form a relationship with the driver. While largely positive, participants in a session in Ennis with refugees from Ukraine in Ennis noted that

they can also be a complex service to navigate.

To improve public transport, ideas such as enhanced accessibility as well as smaller buses and shuttle services with increased flexibility were proposed, particularly targeted at supporting people with disabilities, women, caregivers, older individuals, households with one car and younger people.

'What is needed are small buses that are more regular and off the main road. We're talking about getting around rural West Clare, particularly for older people, and for one-car families where the car is gone in the morning and it's back in the evening so households need it to be able to go and join anything – for social life, for community life, for mental health. A better Local Link.'

Car-sharing was considered a cost-effective and inclusive transport option, with potential benefits discussed in Shannon and Kilrush workshops. Expanding the rail network and developing safe infrastructure for active travel, such as cycling and walking and implementing reasonable speed limits on rural roads, were also identified as important improvements that could be made alongside the localisation of services, amenities and facilities.

4.4. Food and farming

4.4.1. Food security

A topic raised by participants in focus groups across Clare was food security and the future of farming in the county. Beginning with food security, several people spoke of how they have been impacted by increased prices for food. This was illustrated by one person in Ennistymon who described how:

'Every time you go into the shop, you go in one day, you go in the next day, it's gone up again.'

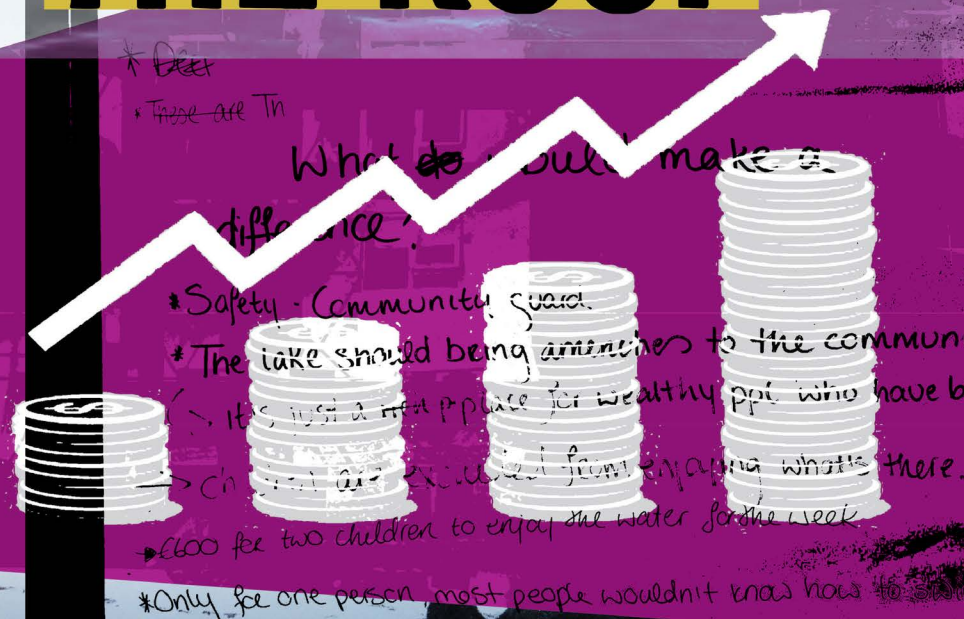
Aligned with the previous section on transport, groups discussed how the lack of transport options in rural areas can leave people dependent on expensive convenience shops. A participant in Shannon discussed how shops that are seen to be 'fairer' in price are harder to get to, highlighting how car dependency stems from the lack of accessible and affordable public transport in the county or local essential services in the county. Structurally disadvantaged groups were also highlighted as being particularly impacted when it comes to food security. Access to food banks and food supports were also described as uneven. Focusing on the impacts of food security

within families, one economically vulnerable parent in Kilrush spoke of how they have gone without eating to ensure that their children have enough to eat.

Related to the wider issue of food poverty, other issues highlighted by participants during workshops and focus groups included a lack of cooking and food storage facilities in institutional living environments, poor kitchen standards in rental accommodation, and a lack of access to affordable, locally-produced, healthy food. During the focus group with International Protection Applicants, the majority said they did not have access to cooking facilities in their accommodation.

While several participants expressed a desire to be able to access well-known discount supermarkets in their communities, a reliance on purely private operators for a social need may not be the best choice. Under a Just Transition, opportunities could be created to develop community-growing initiatives, community-supported agriculture schemes

COSTS ARE THROUGH THE ROOF



Quote taken from consultation notes

or community shops which could serve multiple other functions in addition to providing access to decent food.

Alongside the day-to-day challenges facing community members in Clare regarding the cost of living, a wider topic discussed was the lack of food security in Ireland. An example of this was discussed among community members in Shannon:

'We are importing potatoes for chippers... the system is broken.'

In terms of possible causes of food insecurity, groups in Ennis and Shannon spoke of the lack of vegetables being grown in Ireland. This led to the call for the provision of financial support for farmers to grow vegetables. Alongside subsidising the growing of vegetables, community members also spoke of how incentives should be put in place for solar panels that benefit local communities. This would reduce extraction and support community regeneration. Community members also suggested that such measures should support those who are worst affected by increases in the price of food. Obair, a community development organisation operating out of two locations in Newmarket-on-Fergus, is a local example of a

community-based response to food insecurity in Clare, operating Meals on Wheels in South Clare and supplying meals to approximately 185 people a day, five days a week. Highlighting how community-based organisations can provide a number of services in tandem, Obair also operates and manages remote working hubs, a community crèche and a park (Obair, no date).

A further topic of discussion was the sense that there is labour exploitation in the current food system and that there is no planning in place for sustainable food consumption. Aligned with this was the sense that food systems are not planned towards employment or consumption needs but towards a focus on profit. In terms of what could be done to address these issues, community members spoke of the benefits of having organic food that is cheaper and more available as well as investment into allotments. One community member in Kilrush spoke of how:

'There is a community garden [in Kilrush] but no allotments, no actual space for people to grow their own food... one thing Covid taught us is that if something happens, we're not self-sufficient and we should be'.

4.4.2. The experiences of Farmers in Clare

Among the various groups engaged throughout Clare, a topic that emerged was the uncertain financial future of farming. At the centre of this was the inability of farmers in many sectors to make a profit, an example being the view that the 'only profitable farming is dairy farming'. Despite the need for many farmers to work off-farm, one community member in Kilrush spoke of the importance of the sector to farmers.

'There are two types of farmers in West Clare. There are the farmers that are making money and there are the farmers that have to go out and get another job. We know they love it (farming), they love what they do.'

Within a focus group focusing solely on the views and experiences of farmers, one farmer spoke of how a benefit of farming is that you can be your own boss and how farming would be a 'lovely lifestyle if you could make something out of it'. The challenge of farming in Clare was the view that it is a constant struggle due to the challenges farmers face. One person spoke about her husband who works off-farm:

'He'd never full-time farm, ever, because it's just unsustainable. You couldn't rely on it.'

One of the main reasons for the challenging financial situation facing farmers was the prices they receive for their produce as well as the prices they pay for inputs. As described by one farmer, beef farming is the only sector in which 'You're producing [even though] you don't know what price you'll make'. One means of addressing this identified by farmers was the introduction of a fixed price or a minimum price per kilo which would provide greater certainty to farmers for the price they will receive. When asked whether a co-operative approach, whereby farmers come together to sell their produce, could benefit farmers, there was the view that farmers prefer to work independently, thereby limiting the potential of a co-operative approach. Farmers did however speak of the benefits of one group who have come together to reduce the price they pay for inputs.

Alongside the prices farmers receive, a further factor which was viewed as impacting the sustainability of farming was the type of policies being implemented as well as the

advice farmers have been receiving. This can be seen in the statement:

'Talking about the transition and climate change, regarding farming – a few years ago, farmers were told to expand, expand their herds... and now they are told to reduce their herds when they are still paying back for the buildings they built. There needs to be something there.'

The change in focus in Government policy from increasing milk production towards reducing it was also discussed within the focus group consisting of farmers. They described a move from a model of self-reliance towards one based on greed, due to advisors putting pressure on farmers to increase their herd size. Another factor discussed was the presence of discussion groups where there was a sense that 'one farmer has to be better than the next'. While dairy farming may be viewed as a profitable sector, participating farmers spoke of how this has also resulted in increased stress for farmers, which contributes to worsening mental health. The reasoning behind this was the level of debt that such farmers have taken on and the intensive nature of dairy farming itself.

The group of low-income farmers who participated in this project conveyed positive feelings about their own mental health. They also shared other positive signals, such as feeling assured that they had a support network to rely on in case of illness or emergencies that meant they couldn't farm. One participant expressed a view that pride plays a significant role in how farmers deal with challenges. They also spoke about the competitive element of farming, whereby a competitive farmer seeking to grow and expand can be faced with added pressure in comparison to those content with smaller enterprises.

One of the perceived factors contributing to worsening mental health was a sense of stigma that left farmers unable to talk about their mental health. A further aspect of policy discussed was the limitations of agri-environmental schemes. A reason for this was the need to move away from subsidies that are standardised towards a system that emphasises the local conditions of land, emphasising the need for a place-based approach. The finance that farmers receive from schemes was described

as being bad for the work that farmers undertake. Despite this, the importance of schemes for sustaining farms was highlighted in the comment that:

'If there were no schemes, there'd be no towns or villages.'

In terms of the connections between agriculture and the environment, farmers spoke of how agriculture is an easy target for the Government when it comes to reasons for the failure of the State to address climate change. The issue of farmers and the climate debate does however resonate with a wider topic discussed: the perceived lack of representation. As discussed by one individual in Shannon, 'people need to be engaged... talk to farmers and others most impacted before a policy is changed'. Within the group of low income farmers there was a view that 'there is no one shouting for the farmer' In terms of the role of farm organisations, the perspectives of farmers were split between the view that 'there are too many organisations'; that farm representative bodies 'don't want us'; and that these bodies were 'all for the dairymen'.

Beyond the challenges listed in this section, farmers also spoke of the increased dependence

on technology for applying for grants and other aspects of farming. They described the difficulties, particularly for farmers without young people around them to provide support. Almost all farmers at the focus group highlighted the need to enlist paid consulting services from 'planners' or 'advisors'. It was notable that none of the participants in the group described themselves as computer literate. 'WhatsApp and Done Deal,' one participant joked, 'that's all I can do.'

A further factor was the lack of access to decent broadband exacerbated by the impact of forestry on broadband quality. Highlighting an example of 'green grabbing', participants spoke about the impact of companies purchasing land to offset their carbon emissions. This has the impact of reducing the amount of land available to farmers as well as inflating the price of land.

4.5. Services

As was also evidenced in 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare', the uneven provision of, reduction in, and centralisation of services in Clare was a topic of discussion at every consultation with structurally vulnerable groups. The provision of services related to social housing, transport, decent employment and care has been discussed in some detail in previous sections of this chapter. In addition, the inadequate provision of mental and physical healthcare in Clare arose at every session involving people experiencing multiple forms of deprivation and, alongside housing, was described as a crisis. The link between the de-localisation of health services and public transport has been discussed in section 4.3 of this report. In addition, participants observed how services were becoming 'disconnected', harder to reach, and felt that there was a significant lack of non-commercial spaces for people to meet.

There was widespread demand across focus groups for the re-localisation of human-fronted services such as medical care, Government services, postal services, banking, tax assistance and welfare support. Many

participants expressed their frustrations when navigating phone systems and being directed to websites, especially when their digital literacy or overall literacy prevented them from accessing these services online. In some cases, individuals were unable to access services that were previously available in their communities.

These frustrations were most pronounced among marginalised and elderly people that participated in focus groups. From the discussions, it became clear that many participants lacked the financial and digital literacy necessary to manage tasks such as online banking or bill payment. These low levels of financial literacy were causing significant stress. It's important to note that participants said they felt much more in control when they still had access to traditional face-to-face services, such as those provided by post offices and credit unions.

During consultations with participants experiencing severe class-based and/or ethnic disadvantage in Clare, there was a recurring sentiment that marginalised groups are having to compete with each other for

access to basic services, leading to frustration and growing resentment. A participant in Ennistymon spoke about how parents from low-income households who have been asking the school to put on a bus for years without any success, have become frustrated by the swift introduction of school bus service for Ukrainian refugees in a short space of time. The participant also described how the bus now passes her door but is unavailable to her.

This sense of competing for access to public services also arose in other contexts such as when, during a consultation workshop in Kilrush, participants spoke about how wheelchair users and people with buggies are in automatic competition with each other when waiting for the bus. Providing additional space for wheelchairs, buggies and people who need additional space on the buses serving Clare's towns and villages could provide a solution to this problem.

A staff member in one Family Resource Centre highlighted how the issue of competition between groups stemming from a scarcity of services is starting to manifest among young people in Clare: 'There are tensions now in the

youth club, we're noticing it at that age.'

While uneven service provision was described as a significant frustration for several structurally vulnerable groups, it is important to note that, across consultations, community members expressed concern for the wellbeing of newcomers who are seeking safety and refuge in Clare. In addition, conversations that centred on the rising sense of frustration also discussed the long-term nature of these issues and how they predate the arrival of Ukrainian refugees and International Protection Applicants in Clare. As a participant at a session with Traveller men in Ennis put it:

'You could be on the housing list for 10 years, it's not the Ukrainians' fault.'

‘Every single thing they are bringing in costs a huge amount of money, and they have it. But it’s people with no money who are going to suffer.’

4.6. Perceptions of the transition

At consultations with structurally vulnerable groups and at Just Transition workshops open to members of the public held across Clare, there was a sense that the current approach to transition in Clare is not informed by social justice, socio-economic rights, nor the principles of Just Transition. Participants felt that green policymaking can be extractive, possibly exacerbating poverty in Clare, creating unjust outcomes by failing to account for local and rural contexts, and there are concerns that it is designed and planned for without engaging those most likely to experience adverse impacts from that policy.

Describing the sense that climate-related policymaking as it affects Clare is deepening inequality and contributing to and intensifying poverty and disadvantage:

In Killaloe:

‘The poor are going to get poorer, rich are going to get richer.’

In Ennis:

‘Net zero by 2050: what will the poverty rates be?’

In Kilrush:

‘Every single thing they are bringing in costs a huge amount of money, and they have it. But it’s people with no money who are going to suffer.’

In addition to exacerbating poverty, participants described a number of current measures as being out of touch with the reality of life for many. Participants felt that policies had been designed without taking into account the characteristics and context of the place. Referring to proposals to reintroduce wolves in Ireland, one participant in Shannon, stressed that ‘good ideas do not replace public services’.

Furthermore, participants felt that the Government was failing to take the necessary scale of action to avert the worst of the climate crisis. There was a shared sense that neoliberal and ‘green growth’ approaches will not deliver the scale of change required or a Just Transition rooted in human rights. In addition, some described a sense of hypocrisy stemming from current plans and approaches that deepen our reliance on fossil fuels and contribute to climate change such as those that allow for the rapid expansion of data centres. Plans in place for a new, large-scale data centre in Ennis were described as ‘demoralising’.

Participants in a community workshop in Ennis expressed their apprehensions regarding the plans to import Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) into Ireland.

However, it is a positive development that, between the time of conducting community consultations and the publication of this report, An Bord Pleanála has decided to reject the planning application for a €650 million LNG terminal proposed for the Shannon Estuary (O’Sullivan, 2023).

Discussions highlighted how participants felt that current approaches to climate action were not benefiting local communities. Much like perceptions relating to tourism and community benefit, participants described how they felt wealth was being extracted from communities instead of being kept within them. At the same time, participants expressed a sentiment that the burden of climate action as well as the blame is placed disproportionately on the individual and community groups:

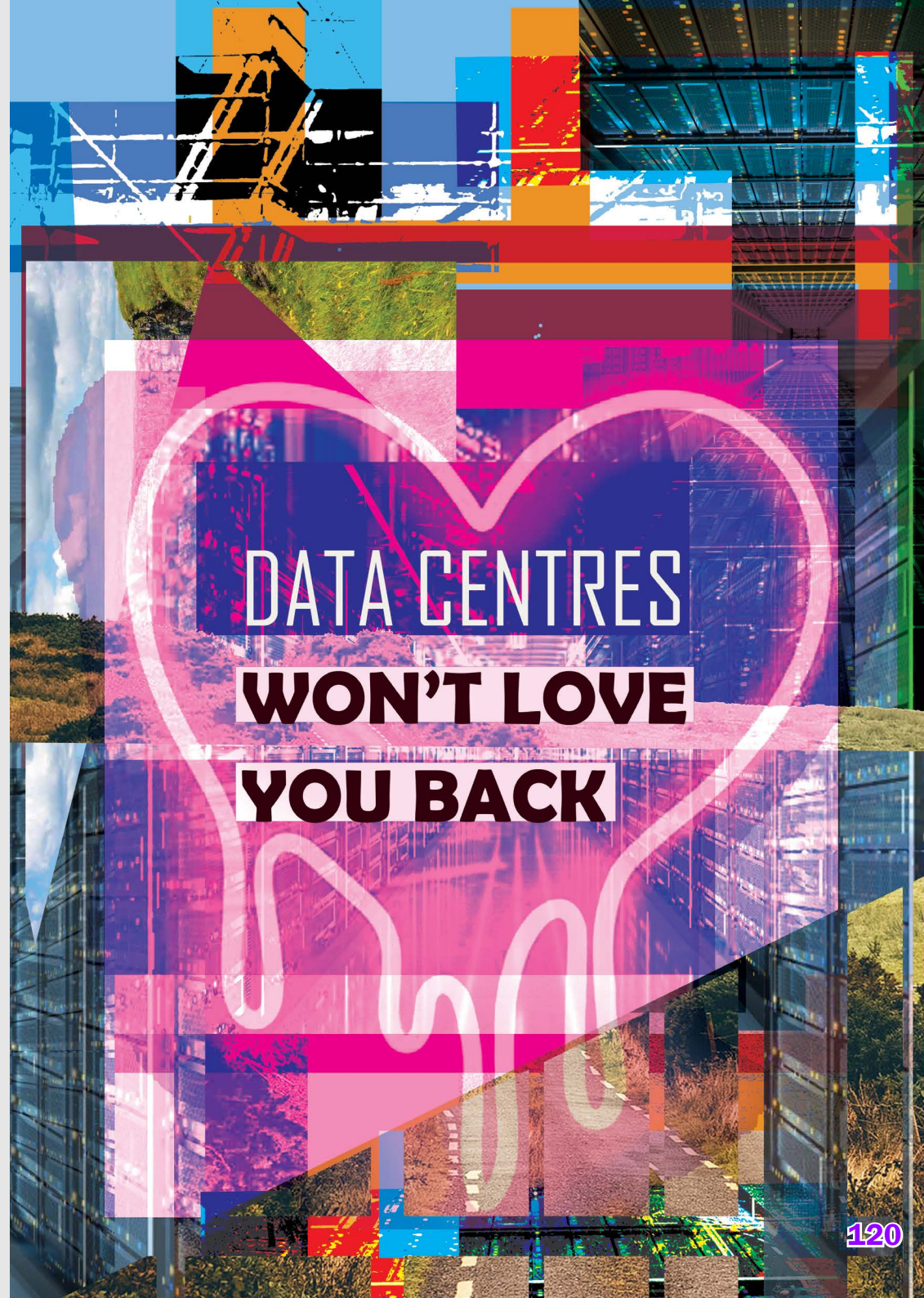
‘The responsibility for all of this, we’re talking about climate change, somehow the responsibility is all thrown back on the community and the person, as though it’s their fault. The world is going to pot and it’s all your fault. We can do small things but it has to come from the Government. The support has to come from the Government.’

Capturing a sense of the struggle faced by structurally vulnerable groups in Clare and underlining the importance of realising socio-economic rights as we transition to a safer and fairer future, a family resource centre worker in Kilrush received a round of applause from all session participants when she spoke about how:

'Our life not be based on [just seeking out] real necessities; we have a right to food, we have a right to a house, we have a right to education, we should have a right to decent paying jobs, and we should also have a right to a good quality of life, which means we should also have fun in our lives. But at the moment, there is a worry about everything. Our lives and how we live in West Clare, should include our needs and wants. It's not just about the basics, but the problem is that it takes up everything, we can't survive without them and there's a worry factor. We need to have a quality of life, and that means we have to have facilities. And they have to be accessible to everyone, and they have to be affordable. Those are the two big things. There are people living in West Clare that can well afford everything and they are fine but there are more that aren't.'

When participants in the Just Transition and socio-economic rights workshops were asked what is needed to deliver a Just Transition in Clare that realises socio-economic rights, community members put forward a broad array of suggestions closely aligned with the concept of community wealth building. These recommendations included increased rural development, the establishment of co-operatives, enhanced community decision-making processes, desire for funding to be localised and decoupled from national funding.

During separate sessions held in Ennis, one involving local decision-makers and another involving active community groups, it was felt that there should be people employed to work directly with communities. Their role would involve engagement, support and management of community-based projects in Clare, in addition to receiving support from both local and national governments.



5. Findings and recommendations

The need to transition our societies away from fossil fuels and move towards a regenerative economy capable of fulfilling human rights for all, while staying within planetary boundaries, has never been more urgent. If climate action is felt to be unfair, and if people are excluded from the decisions that shape their lives, or if they don't see a place for themselves in future plans, it appears unlikely that they would want to work towards that vision for the future. Furthermore, if the transition is perceived as unjust, progress will remain slow, and inequality will likely deepen.

As public investment ramps up to respond to the climate crisis, the success of fast and effective climate action will be delivered when it responds to the needs and priorities of the population, particularly those who are most vulnerable. There are a myriad of Government departments, organisations, State and semi-State agencies,

elected representatives, community groups, businesses and service providers who will need to be involved in realising a Just Transition and the socio-economic rights of Clare residents. It is not possible for a project of this scale to identify all the actions that will be necessary, nor to precisely specify who should carry them out and what resources to use.

With that in mind, the recommendations below aim to present a possible picture of how the necessary changes might be implemented. We hope that they can provoke discussion, debate and action. At the time of writing, Ireland is facing three election cycles: EU, national and local. This makes it an ideal time to propose and raise changes necessary to each level of policy or government and to seek changes in how funding streams are managed.

5.1. Local government and community action

Structurally vulnerable groups in Clare appear to be experiencing negative impacts related to the transition, which is affecting their enjoyment of socio-economic rights. Several examples have emerged from our consultations with people experiencing multiple forms of deprivation in Clare:

- For participants in precarious financial situations, investing in larger-scale energy efficiency measures, such as installing solar panels to avail of cheaper and cleaner energy, was described as unattainable. For those struggling financially, solid fuels, albeit increasingly expensive, were described as providing a sense of personal energy security, as cleaner alternatives were described as out of reach.
- Clare lacks a county-wide, accessible public transport system, and this contributes to car dependency across the county. Transport disadvantage appeared to be prevalent among structurally vulnerable groups, hindering their ability to access increasingly de-localised services and participate fully in political, economic and socio-

cultural life in Clare. Similar to barriers impeding energy efficiency improvements, the upfront costs associated with purchasing an electric vehicle were perceived as beyond the means of those living in or at risk of poverty.

- Transition-related inequalities, such as energy poverty and food insecurity, intersect and overlap with pre-existing issues, compounding inequality and negatively impacting mental health.
- Beef farmers in Clare discussed the mounting pressures farmers face due to the uncertain financial future of farming and the need to reduce emissions. They also described feeling underrepresented in decisions affecting their livelihoods.

Across focus groups and workshops, participants expressed significant concern about the current approach to climate policy, which was perceived as failing to benefit communities in Clare. There was a sentiment that this approach would deepen poverty in the county over the coming decades among groups experiencing deprivation. Furthermore, participants expressed that the existing approach to emissions reduction is not delivering the

necessary scale of change to avert the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

Fast and effective climate action hinges on tangible improvements in living standards for people and communities (McCabe, 2020). Consequently, Just Transition planning processes should not be separated from broader community development but rather should aim to address underlying inequalities by addressing unmet needs in Clare in areas such as housing, healthcare, access to care and supporting the re-localisation of human-fronted services. Public investment in Just Transition planning in Clare should be viewed as a long-term undertaking rather than a series of one-off projects.

5.1.1. Community wealth building and community-led local development

A place-based approach in Clare, underpinned by the principles of community wealth building (CWB), has the potential to unlock transformative change. CWB fosters participative approaches to community, social and public ownership of the economy, redirecting wealth back into the local economy

and creating decent and fair employment opportunities that address underlying social inequalities. Council and government-led approaches to community wealth building, such as those pioneered in the Ayrshire region of Scotland, offer a template for local and national government in Ireland. While we acknowledge the substantial differences in local authority spending power between Ireland and some of the case studies outlined in Chapter 2 of this report (AILG, 2023), such as the considerably lower public expenditure at the local authority level in Ireland (8% compared with an average of 23% among comparable EU member states), we recommend that Clare County Council embed a community wealth building approach in its operations as well as into the upcoming County Climate Action Plan and Local Economic and Community Plan.

As part of a CWB approach, we recommend the following actions:

- Identify and establish a network of anchor institutions in Clare that would be well-placed to support community wealth building initiatives across the county.
- State or State-funded plans, projects, training programmes and funding streams in the county

that seek to create employment, such as those managed by Clare County Council, the LEADER Local Action Group, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, SICAP & the Health Service Executive, should aim to guarantee – as a minimum – the Living Wage, which is currently €14.80 an hour for the Republic of Ireland, in line with calculations made by the Living Wage Technical Group (Living Wage, 2023). Given that Clare County Council now manages several key tourism assets, we note in particular that the Council could provide leadership in this action (Clare County Council, 2023c).

- Leverage the power of public procurement by establishing a local spend baseline, investigating possibilities to utilise contracts that fall below the EU procurement threshold to support existing and forthcoming community-based organisations, investigating contract subdivision or 'lotting', and implementing strategies to increase local spend while promoting well-paid, decent work (Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, 2023). This could include considering and trialling the inclusion of a living wage stipulation into contracts.

- Set up a community wealth building fund aimed at providing financial support to new and existing social enterprises, community-based organisations and co-operatives across Clare. The aim should be to support the development of new local enterprises while embedding the principles of community wealth building in community-based organisations, delivering fair work, responding to local needs and priorities, and building community wealth.

- Hire a community wealth building officer within the Council to assist communities in undertaking this work.

- Actively endorse inclusive community ownership of transition-related assets. This includes considering partial or full ownership by local communities of renewable energy generation projects such as solar farms, wind farms and related supply chain businesses.

Alongside embedding community wealth building within the activities of the Council, we strongly recommend establishing a funded and staffed independent social enterprise and co-operative incubator in Clare, one that uses a community development approach to support the creation of decent work for marginalised

communities in the county. We recommend that this organisation be based in an area of the county that experiences deprivation. While there are several anchor institutions across the county that could form a network to support and promote local community wealth building, there remains a need for tailored community development support. This is especially important to build capacity and provide practical, day-to-day support to community groups, particularly structurally vulnerable groups, who wish to set up social enterprises and co-operatives in Clare. Examples of community-based co-operatives and social enterprises that could deliver environmental, social and economic benefits for the communities of Clare include retrofitting co-operatives, community-owned regenerative tourism enterprises, community-supported agriculture schemes, care co-operatives, community energy social enterprises, community-led transport initiatives and housing co-operatives.

The social enterprise and co-operative incubator would function as an anchor institution in its own right,

dedicated to supporting local job creation by establishing the necessary structures to set up community-based organisations. Its activities could encompass consulting with communities, conducting feasibility studies, facilitating funding applications, managing the co-operative or social enterprise during its early stages while community members are being integrated and supported in their new roles, and providing on-the-job training for marginalised community members. The overarching goal of the incubator would be to offer on-the-ground support to new enterprises in Clare until they can operate independently. However, it is envisaged that they would still receive some level of ongoing – albeit less constant – support, advice, and mentoring from the incubator. A social enterprise and co-operative incubator pilot project in Clare could be supported with State funding through the Rural Regeneration Fund or future iterations of the Just Transition Fund that have a broader geographical scope. Examples from the United States, such as the United Workers' Center in Chicago, which has been managing the Southeast Co-operative Business Incubator since 2014, illustrate the effectiveness of such initiatives (United Workers' Center, no date).

Their incubator was established to assist previously low-wage workers in setting up and running co-operatives, leading to the creation of co-operatives such as Las Visionarias, a catering co-operative run by migrant women. In New York, Green Worker co-operatives run a co-operative academy that has supported the development of a dozen co-operative organisations across various sectors, including interpretation, cleaning, construction, catering and community farming (Green Worker co-operatives, no date).

In Clare, organisations such as Clare PPN, Clare Women's Network and Clare Local Development Company, with the support of State funding, have used their established structures and experience to provide the administrative support required to get community-led organisations off the ground. A group of collaborating community organisations in Clare were allocated funding in 2021 from the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Community Development Programme as part of a pilot project to establish the Clare Traveller Community Development Project (Community Development Programme, no date). As well as supporting the

Traveller community directly, this Traveller-led CDP has been instrumental in enabling community organisations and service providers to reach out to the Traveller community and ensuring that Travellers can participate in informing policies and planning in Clare. We therefore recommend the continued establishment and re-establishment of sustainably funded Community Development Projects in Clare that are based in areas of deprivation. The Steering Committee of this project considers that such a move could multiply the benefits of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the vital service provision and support being undertaken by the Family Resource Centres.

The collaborating partners on this project, made up of State-funded agencies and organisations delivering programmes at the county level, believe that where national funding is channelled through organisations and agencies locally, such as through the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme or the Education and Training Boards, a certain percentage of that funding, for example 10%, should be allocated to

respond to and plan for place-specific Just Transition-related projects, services, education and supports that are designed to meet the specific needs of the local community. The aim would be to give organisations space to innovate locally while continuing to be accountable for public funds and reporting on their spending.

Furthermore, research on this and previous projects has indicated an over-reliance on voluntary efforts to deliver key services and projects in Clare. The availability of paid staff resources dedicated to particular projects will allow the creativity and initiatives of communities to be realised more easily, enable Clare communities to make the maximum use of available funding streams, and support the development of sustainable local employment opportunities. While we note there is availability of advisors and support for committees and community groups, this still leaves the burden of work on voluntary individuals and committees, many of whom have reported 'burn out' and difficulty recruiting and keeping board members. Taking into account Clare's ageing population and the increasing governance requirements for voluntary committees involved in accessing funding streams

for local development projects, we recommend that key funding streams available to communities be redesigned to allow for the recruitment by community groups of project managers or other key staff to deliver projects and oversee and report on funding.

5.1.2. Decent work

Ethnic and class-based discrimination, difficulties faced by migrants in accessing employment suitable to their level of qualification, a deficit of widely available and accessible public transport, insufficient access to caregiving services, and the perception that taking up employment would result in the loss of essential social welfare benefits were perceived as excluding structurally vulnerable groups from participating in and benefitting from present and future employment opportunities in Clare. While unemployment, as measured by the national Census, has reduced in Clare since 2016 (CSO, 2023d), addressing the lack of fair and decent work, along with overcoming various barriers to accessing employment faced by structurally vulnerable groups, is essential to deliver a transition that is fair and rooted in human rights. In addition, consultations revealed concerns about the tourism

industry in Clare, with participants perceiving it as more of an issue than an opportunity. The current tourism model in Clare was described as exacerbating the housing crisis, contributing to low-paid precarious work and pricing young people out of recreational activities in Clare's towns and villages. The recent emphasis on using the tourism sector for employment generation in line with a Just Transition, as seen in the midlands, could potentially exacerbate inequalities in Clare if replicated without careful consideration. Therefore, when public funding is allocated to tourism initiatives, we recommend prioritising community-led and owned tourism models. This approach aligns with the principles of community wealth building, ensuring that the local population in Clare's towns, villages and rural areas directly benefit from tourism-related investments.

Discussions from focus groups and workshops also emphasised the indispensable nature of care work but felt that it is often undervalued. Broadening the current understanding of what constitutes a 'green job' presents a significant opportunity and could support health and inequality reduction in Clare as well as directing public climate

investment into vital livelihoods related to caregiving (both formal and informal) teaching and regenerative farming, among other fields. This expansion of the 'green jobs' concept recognises the importance of care work in the context of a Just Transition, acknowledging it as essential work supporting environmental sustainability and social wellbeing. We recommend reconceptualising the definition of a 'green job' in the forthcoming Clare Climate Action Plan and Local Economic and Community Plan, with a commitment to promoting and supporting decent work in all areas where labour contributes to caring for others and/or the environment.

Within Clare, there is an abundance of work that needs to be done, from care work to nature restoration to retrofitting. Where possible and where State investment is available, this work should be considered in a 'circular' context. Decent employment should be created that supports people and the planet, by considering: What work needs to be done? What are the funds available? Who needs work? In what way can this work benefit the community? Can this work be used to reskill or train someone? In this way, State expenditure can be used as a



We Need Community Spaces

resource for a Just Transition that delivers socio-economic rights. We recommend that the Local Community Development Committee and the Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee, which are tasked with developing and overseeing the Local Economic and Community Plan, take ownership of this action.

Lastly, we note that issues related to apprenticeships were raised, including the difficulty in finding employers to host the complete life cycle of an apprenticeship and a lack of employers in certain regions of the county. Furthermore, discussions raised the need for extra support and mentoring for those from marginalised groups who might wish to embark on an apprenticeship. We consider that there is a possibility here for a pilot project which directly employs skilled tradespeople for the purpose of providing apprenticeships for trades needed in Clare and to deliver programmes of work such as retrofitting. Such a project could be located in an area that experiences deprivation and could become a flagship Just Transition project.

5.1.3. Community space and support

Participants in this project noted a lack of available spaces for their cultural and community activities. Where such non-commercial facilities are not available in a sizeable settlement, we recommend that a space is secured and made available at a low cost for community events. These buildings would allow communities to come together and hold family, cultural, sporting and religious events. They could provide clinic rooms for periodic health services or appointments with agencies, and with proper support, these community-friendly spaces could support the provision of accessible recreational activities for young people in Clare, a key need identified during focus groups.

Two related issues that arose during discussions were a lack of local services and the difficulties faced by participants in accessing increasingly de-localised services, particularly for those with low levels of literacy, digital literacy or financial literacy. While the following section of this chapter includes recommendations aimed at re-localising vital services, we note that help and information centres in key locations in Clare

are also needed. These centres would not seek to duplicate the good work being done by the Citizen's Information Service and organisations such as MABS and Clare Older People's Council, but would aim to support communities, in particular older community members, on a very local level. This would be a space where people could go to have someone look up something on the internet for them, make a call for them, fill out a form or price a service or secure information regarding State services, entitlements or requirements. In addition, help and information centres could house community energy advisors. Numerous voluntary and civil society organisations in Ireland have recommended community energy advisors as a low-tech proposal that would provide on-the-ground advice to community members to overcome barriers to retrofitting (O'Connor, Murphy and Harvey, 2023). As with other recommendations in this report, we consider that while a service such as this could be delivered on a voluntary basis, it would preferably be overseen by paid staff who could ensure continuity, data protection and safety of service.

Outside of publicly funded projects, we note the potential for larger businesses and industries

in the Shannon Free Zone to contribute to communities across Clare. Most such enterprises have corporate social responsibility policies and seek opportunities to be 'good neighbours'. Therefore, we recommend that a scoping exercise be carried out through the Local Enterprise Office to understand what forms of activity, community support, mentorship, support for young people, and placements could be provided by Clare-based businesses to benefit marginalised communities in Clare.

An example of how Clare-based businesses and other large institutions could come together to respond to the needs of the community could be collaborating to address childhood exclusion from amenities and activities in their area due to cost, an issue that arose repeatedly during consultations. Such a project could involve establishing an East Clare-based community group to work with the UL Sport Adventure Centre to facilitate access to water-based amenities for local children.

5.2. National government

5.2.1. Service provision

While the previous recommendations advocate for support and funding for community-based organisations, it is important to emphasise that local action will not compensate for the necessity in Clare for public investment in housing, healthcare, care and transportation. Access to services and infrastructure in Clare is unevenly distributed, with consultations highlighting the desire for a return to human-fronted localised approaches to service provision. Healthcare services in particular were noted as falling below national average standards, leading to residents often having to leave the county for medical care. Participants also described a sentiment that marginalised groups have to compete against each other for access to limited resources. In line with a Just Transition that realises socio-economic rights, a re-localised approach to service provision is needed in Clare, particularly in healthcare and housing. Clare's TDs, Senators and MEPs should continue to campaign for funding and other supports to address the

deficiencies in the provision of GPs, dentists, mental health services and social housing to ensure that, at the very least, County Clare meets national average standards. This approach aligns with the principles of a Just Transition, where socio-economic rights and access to essential services should be guaranteed for all residents.

5.2.2. Planning for and delivering a Just Transition rooted in human rights

Considering the complex challenges facing those experiencing socio-economic exclusion in Clare, coupled with the concentration of beef farming in the county and the presence of Moneypoint, the proposed establishment of a Just Transition Commission in Ireland is highly relevant to securing a Just Transition for communities across the county. While the development of this Commission was included in the Programme for Government in 2020, its establishment has been delayed and is currently pushed back to 2024 (O'Doherty, 2023). We, therefore, recommend that the Just Transition Commission is put in place as a matter of priority in order to avoid an unjust transition that could negatively

impact people's perceptions of climate action and undermine the potential to embed socio-economic rights in the fabric of Clare's communities.

This recommendation is consistent with recent appeals from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC, 2023; IHREC, 2023a). Given how the challenges faced by people experiencing deprivation in Clare intersect with the need for a Just Transition, we recommend that the Commission take a broad view of Just Transition to encompass structurally vulnerable groups and people living on the margins, in addition to providing support for affected workers. The Scottish government has taken a similar approach by establishing a Just Transition Commission that aims to deliver fairness and tackle inequality and is expected to consider broader aspects of equality (Just Transition Commission, 2023). Their remit also extends to sectors such as transport and agriculture.

As mandated by the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (2021), the national Climate Action Plan will be updated annually, with each local authority developing a five-year plan. The Clare Climate

Action Plan is being prepared, with a public consultation anticipated later this year. We recommend that public funding for Just Transition planning and implementation should be made available country and county-wide to protect the most vulnerable. This funding should support a place-based approach to a Just Transition and, in alignment with a rights-based approach, should focus on local development and meeting the needs of those most likely to be impacted negatively by the transition.

From our research, it is apparent that within the groups consulted for this project, the majority do not feel that they are in a position to avail of the grants available through the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) for retrofitting. While those living in Local Authority Housing will have their houses retrofitted over time, our research indicates that significant challenges remain for renters, those on HAP, those on halting sites, owners of older one-off housing, low-income older people living alone and low-income, single-parent families. Aligned with research conducted by O'Connor, Murphy and Harvey (2023) examining energy poverty in

Ireland, we recommend that the SEAI should provide broader access, including to those on low and middle incomes, to its Fully Funded Energy Upgrade Scheme as well as to grants and loans to protect the living conditions of structurally vulnerable groups in Clare. In the case of those living in private rented accommodation, we would like strong safeguards put in place for tenants, such as legislative protection introduced to protect their tenancies during retrofitting by landlords in addition to upholding the commitment in Ireland's national housing plan, Housing for All, to introduce a minimum Building Energy Rating (BER) for rental properties, beginning in 2025 (Government of Ireland, 2021b). Further, we recommend expanding collective or neighbourhood-based approaches and directing funding towards them to allow for economies of scale and remove some of the administrative burdens from individuals. Reducing fossil fuel dependency at home supports a fairer transition by delivering reductions in carbon emissions while also improving homes, health and lowering energy costs for those who benefit. As noted above, we also see the opportunity to develop sustainable livelihoods within State-funded retrofitting schemes.

5.3. Thematic taskforces

5.3.1. Public Transport

Consultations for this project strongly underscored the need for improved community-based, accessible and flexible public transportation services across the county. The absence of a universally accessible public transport system in Clare appears to exacerbate issues such as car dependency, transport disadvantage and forced car ownership. Participants described the difficulties accessing vital health services, employment and education opportunities and amenities and social events in Clare. In addition, the impact of increasingly de-localised services appears to deepen transport disadvantage for marginalised groups in Clare.

Recommendations made by the OECD (2022) suggest that mainstreaming on-demand transport solutions catering to all population groups, such as community transport services, peer-to-peer ridesharing and car-sharing, could have transformative potential in reducing car dependency in Ireland. Participants in this project recommended that introducing smaller buses

suitable for rural areas, ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities, caregivers and older community members, expanding the rail service, providing safe active travel infrastructure and formalising and funding car-sharing initiatives would be a step in the right direction.

We recommend the establishment of a Universal Access Public Transport System Task Force in the County, with public transport users and service providers collaborating to identify solutions, routes, training and necessary improvements and to promote and publicise information on public transport widely in Clare. The terms of reference for this task force would include a mandate to lobby for resources or policy changes, a remit to ensure communities and community groups have access to affordable, accessible transport options and should support the development of 'green jobs' for administrative staff, drivers and vehicle maintenance staff from communities where employment is needed.

We note the previous 'Clare Local Lift' project and recommend that it be re-established and piloted on the Loop Head Peninsula as planned to test the concept of community car-sharing in a rural area of Clare.

5.3.2. Housing

Previous research by Clare PPN (McCabe, 2022) found that the right to adequate housing is one of the socio-economic rights that is not being realised equally in Clare. It highlighted how those currently housed in emergency accommodation, direct provision centres, hotels, roadside sites and nursing homes, as well as those on the social housing list and those seeking to purchase, build or rent housing from their own resources, are all experiencing difficulties. The report also noted that these difficulties exist alongside a high level of vacancy in the county, with the CSO measuring 17% of habitable dwellings as vacant.

Participants in this project echoed what emerged in 2022 and spoke about the need for culturally appropriate accommodation for Travellers, expressed wishes to live outside of Ireland's Direct Provision system and discussed difficulties related to affordability and competition for housing, particularly with those buying holiday homes in Clare.

Clare requires significant investment in new public and social housing alongside a dedicated plan to reduce vacancy and dereliction.

The Steering Committee of this project recommend establishing a housing and accommodation task force in the County that brings together planners, councillors, builders, community organisations, those in housing need and the housing executive from the Local Authority. This task force would have the remit to identify areas, properties, schemes and funds to increase and enhance Clare's housing stock and to meet the needs of the communities. This could involve repurposing holiday homes or commercial premises, redeveloping institutional buildings into residential accommodation and purchasing suitable properties by the local authority itself.

In light of significant concerns and challenges raised by the Traveller community in relation to accommodation, we recommend that the Local Authority fully supports the ongoing peer-to-peer Traveller Housing Needs Assessment initiative being conducted by the Traveller CDP in Clare and commits to implementing its recommendations. We further recommend that the Local Authority reviews and amends the Traveller Accommodation Programme on completion of the Housing Needs Assessment

and we note the availability of dedicated funding streams for Traveller-specific accommodation and suggest that Clare makes full use of same.

5.4. A Just Transition for beef farmers

Beef farmers in Clare face an unjust transition due to the economically unsustainable nature of beef farming coupled with the urgent need to reduce emissions. Farmers have highlighted the toll that stress can take on a farmer's mental health, as they struggle to maintain profitability while feeling underrepresented in decisions affecting their livelihoods. Aligned with findings from the report on Just Transition in Agriculture and Land Use, published by NESC (2023, p.viii), a move away from the top-down implementation of agri-environmental schemes towards a model based on 'local and context-specific participation in innovation and experimentation' could assist in building trust in sustainable practices. This model should also guarantee the inclusion of farmers' knowledge and perspectives, thereby ensuring they have a voice in the transition to more sustainable practices, and securing representation.

Actions to secure a Just Transition should, therefore, consider economic factors which impact farmers as well as factors relating to mental health and community wellbeing. While farmers highlighted doubts about the potential for farmers to come together in the form of co-operative structures to advance economic sustainability, a collective approach could be beneficial for providing support to farmers in areas relating to mental health. One example of this could be applying the Farmers' Yard initiative across the county. This was a pilot project led by the Rural Studies Centre at the University of Galway and conducted at Mountbellew Co-op Mart (Bardon 2023). This project aimed to provide a space for farmers to chat about farming, local news and other areas of interest. Schemes such as the Rural Social Scheme in Clare appear to be providing the twin benefits of income support as well as community and company while linking farmers to existing services they may not have had otherwise. There may be an example in those positive aspects of that model, which supports farmers, farm families and rural communities into the future.

A localised Just Transition plan is needed for beef farmers and low-income farmers in Clare. This strategy should build on existing positive examples such as Burren Life and the Farmers' Yard and support farmers and workers in the sector to actively protect and restore the natural environment by providing avenues for sustainable diversification and viable income-generation alternatives within those sectors. Alongside economic considerations, measures must also consider connected social challenges such as rural isolation and mental health. A first step in developing a tailored approach to securing a Just Transition for farmers in Clare should include undertaking extensive dialogue and engagement with beef farmers and low-income farmers across the county. We envisage that this work could be overseen by the Local Action Group that will be implementing LEADER and funded through that funding stream.

In terms of addressing the interconnected challenges of improving food security and supporting farm diversification away from a dependence on the low-income beef sector, we recommend expanding and increasing funding support for fruit and vegetable growers. Those we consulted noted the difference in labour intensity between

beef farming and organic growing and considered that support for organic growers should be substantially increased to reduce emissions in agriculture, enhance food security and provide diversification opportunities for farmers.

Increasing the production of locally sourced fruit and vegetables could support food security, community wellbeing, and community wealth building in Clare. Challenges facing farmers who may be interested in farm diversification include the time and costs incurred by moving towards new farm practices (Stock et al., 2014). To address this challenge, the provision of financial support is paramount to ensure that a transition away from livestock production does not result in increased economic uncertainty for farmers. Previous failings in farm diversification strategies, namely the failure of the miscanthus sector to develop following its promotion by national government, highlight the need for security in order for farmers to become involved in new land use practices that could enhance farm sustainability (Robb, 2022). The need for security is also highly relevant to the growing

of crops, due to the impact of inclement weather on the growing and harvesting of plants. One example of this is the impact that Ireland's wettest July on record had on tillage farmers in the summer of 2023 (O'Brien, 2023). Alongside the provision of financial support, other policy measures must be undertaken to ensure that the growing of organic fruit and vegetables does not replicate the inequalities present in the sectors in which Clare farmers currently operate (McCabe, 2020). These measures include ensuring that markets are identified that provide farmers with a stable income, alongside ensuring that the wealth generated from a move to fruit and vegetable growing stays in the community. Furthermore, as farmers may not have previous experience of operating in a farming sector other than beef production, knowledge exchange and informational supports will be critical. Aligned with the need for a Just Transition Plan, tailored supports from agricultural advisory services would be necessary to identify the fruits and vegetables that may be most suitable in terms of land type and potential yield. The development of fruit and vegetable co-operatives could also be beneficial in reducing the costs farmers would face relating to the

inputs and machinery required for growing fruit and vegetables, as well as the marketing of produce (Tregear and Cooper, 2016).

5.5. Realising the socio-economic rights of migrants in Clare

It is widely recognised that the current Direct Provision System for International Protection Applicants is detrimental to long-term wellbeing and that socio-economic and human rights often go unmet, particularly for children and families (Cid, 2023). As the age profile of Clare's population trends upwards, and in light of the desire raised by International Protection Applicants who participated in this project to be able to integrate into Clare, feel safe, 'make friends', 'give back to the community' and find decent work in areas such as care, construction and healthcare, inward migration to the county could support and contribute to the development of Clare's communities into the future, we recommend that the commitment in the current Programme for Government to end the practice of Direct Provision is delivered on and carried forward to any incoming Programme for Government. We also recommend ending the

inequalities within the state's treatment of different groups seeking protection in Ireland.

While we recognise that the International Protection System is for those in particular situations who need to leave their home to seek safety rather than a general migration process, the current system of institutionalisation is damaging to those within it and prevents host communities from experiencing many of the benefits of inward migration even though the people who could bring them are already living alongside us.

As part of our consultations with people displaced from Ukraine who are beneficiaries of the Temporary Protection Scheme, participants raised an issue regarding their length of permission to stay in Ireland. Participants felt that because their permission to stay is granted annually, they did not have the certainty they needed to start businesses or enterprises in Ireland. We believe that a three-year permission would be more beneficial for host communities and for those displaced from war.

We further recommend that Clare's TDs, Senators and MEPs campaign for a long-term approach to inward migration that removes barriers to self-

sufficiency for all migrants, irrespective of their status, including in relation to earlier provision of work permits, recognition of qualifications, access to bank accounts, driving licences, legal supports and social welfare, including housing supports. We note that such an approach will entail tackling the backlog in housing for all communities in Ireland and recommend that this is a key priority for any incoming government.

During focus groups with International Protection Applicants and those fleeing the war in Ukraine, participants expressed a fundamental desire for enhanced opportunities to learn English, particularly for International Protection Applicants during their first six months in Ireland when they cannot avail of work permits. We consider that an opportunity exists to promote two-way integration and local friendship by expanding informal language-sharing opportunities in Clare. We note the great work done by organisations such as Fáilte Isteach, a community project bringing together volunteers and migrants through English classes (Irish Refugee Council, 2023) in this regard and consider that such an initiative or similar should have a county-wide, paid development

officer to support local voluntary language sharing groups to emerge and run sustainably. We believe this would be an excellent investment in integration.

5.6. Building upon previous research on socio-economic rights in Clare

The following recommendations have been put forward by the Steering Committee of this project and are designed to respond to the issues raised by people living in Clare who participated in 'Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare', carried out in 2021-2022.

As discussed in Chapter 3 of this report, in 2022, 21% of Clare's population had a disability or long-lasting condition (CSO, 2023b). Despite low unemployment rates nationally (Department of Social Protection, 2023), Ireland, alongside Greece, has the joint lowest employment rate for people with disabilities in the EU at 32.6%. This compares to an EU average of 51.3% (European Disability Forum, 2023). Further to this, the Department of Social Protection Cost of Disability Report published in 2021 estimated that the average

additional cost of having a disability in Ireland ranges between €8,700 and €12,300 per household (Indecon, 2021) while the current (October 2023) level of means-tested Disability Allowance amounts to €11,440 (Citizens Information, 2023c) highlighting a risk of poverty for people with disabilities. For those unable to work as a result of a disability, recent data from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2022 revealed that almost one in two (44.3%) are living in deprivation (CSO, 2022), and 35.2% were at risk of poverty (CSO, 2023d).

In addition, this project and last year's research have shown that exclusion is exacerbated by infrastructure deficits around affordable universal access public transport, by difficulty in recruiting and retaining home care workers and personal assistants and by the distance from services and cultural, social, employment and sports amenities.

On a national level, we recommend that those who represent Clare, including TDs and Senators, commit to repairing Ireland's record with regard to people with disabilities by:

- **Working to ensure that Ireland ratifies the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) Optional Protocol in line with the current Programme for Government to make people with disabilities's rights justiciable.**
- **Calling for immediate and sustained increases of at least 50% to the core and support payments for people with disabilities in Clare.**
- **Supporting the removal of barriers to employment for people with disabilities as outlined in the following section of this chapter.**
- **In line with findings from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission that 9 in 10 people believe more should be done by employers to hire people with disabilities (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2021), those who represent Clare should support the development of a programme of investment to ensure that people with disabilities are treated equally when seeking employment.**
- **Committing to ensuring that all new developments in infrastructure, public services and public transport are universally accessible.**
- **Committing to the immediate phasing out of the accommodation of people with disabilities in nursing homes against their wishes.**

During consultations in 2021 and 2022, certain groups, particularly those who were long-term unemployed, spoke about their fears and worries about loss of benefits and medical cards, which they describe as preventing certain groups from entering standard paid employment. The 2022 Survey on Income and Living Conditions found that 35.6% of people who were unemployed at the time were at risk of poverty in 2022 compared to 5.8% of the population at work, highlighting a situation where for one-third of people, social welfare payments alone have not been enough to remove the risk of poverty (CSO, 2023d).

We would welcome the introduction of a scheme for long-term unemployed people, and those on disability or carers benefits where specific State supports and social welfare payments are maintained at full rates for the first year a person enters work, followed by a phased reduction based on a person's income. This approach would resemble the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme (Citizens Information, 2023b). Such schemes provide a safety net for people seeking to improve their economic circumstances while ensuring they do not lose vital support. We believe this

scheme would not be cost-intensive to the State because the benefits are maintained at the same level as if the person did not work, but the person who takes up the scheme will also enter the tax net through their contributions on income earned.

Lastly, taking into account the need for urgent action to realise the socio-economic and human rights of people with disabilities, we recommend that in consultation with people with disabilities in Clare and under their leadership, a funded a Disabled People's Community Development Project for the county should be established.

5.7. Local democracy in Clare

The facilitated roundtable discussions with elected representatives that were undertaken during this year's research and last year's examination of socio-economic exclusion in Clare, were very well received. The discussions were primarily made up of Councillors, who welcomed the opportunity to discuss local issues on a cross-party basis outside formal Council meetings. Building on this momentum

and positive reception, we consider that a pilot project in Clare to develop periodic opportunities for discussion, research and workshops for and by Councillors would be a very valuable investment in local democracy. We recommend that such a structure should be independent of the local authority and should be led by the Councillors themselves. Further, we would envisage that this forum would have a budget for venue hire, administration, research and facilitation, in addition to the ability to request workshops on pertinent issues. We suggest that ownership of this action should lie with Councillors and that funding could be requested from the Department of Local Government, allocated from Councillors' discretionary funding, or sought as a pilot project from philanthropic sources interested in the promotion of democracy. We would estimate that a low level of funding, to the tune of €10,000-€15,000 per year, would allow this to be tested.

Within this research and previous work, those we consulted have raised many issues from healthcare, transport and housing, which fall under a national remit but

are experienced locally. As noted above, the system of Government in Ireland is highly centralised, with just 8% of public expenditure spent at the local authority level. This compares to an average of 23% among 23 comparable European countries (AILG, 2023). In addition, the European Committee of the Regions Decentralisation Index ranks Ireland as having 'very low/quasi-no decentralisation' (European Committee of the Regions, no date). We therefore recommend a national re-evaluation of the role of local government in respect of welfare services and infrastructure. We also recommend rebalancing the power differential between the executive and elected representatives and, following these steps, an increase in direct funding delivered through Local Authorities to at least the European average.

Recommendations put forward in this report

Local government and community action

Community wealth building and community-led local development

1. We recommend that Clare County Council embed a community wealth building approach in its operations as well as in the upcoming County Climate Action Plan and Local Economic and Community Plan.
2. We recommend establishing a funded and staffed independent social enterprise and co-operative incubator in Clare, one that uses a community development approach to support the creation of decent work for marginalised communities in the county. We recommend that this organisation be based in an area of the county that experiences deprivation.
3. We recommend the continued establishment and re-establishment of sustainably funded Community Development Projects in Clare, which are based in areas of deprivation.
4. Where national funding is channelled through organisations and agencies on a local level, a certain percentage of that funding, for example 10%, should be flexible and available to allocate locally for Just Transition-related projects, services, education and supports.
5. We recommend that key funding streams available to communities are redesigned to allow for the recruitment of project managers or other key staff to deliver projects and over-see and report on funding.

Decent work

6. When public funding is allocated to tourism initiatives, we recommend prioritising community-led and owned tourism models.
7. We recommend reconceptualising the definition of a 'green job' in the forthcoming Clare Climate Action Plan and Local Economic and Community Plan, with a commitment to promoting and supporting decent work in all areas where labour contributes to caring for others and/or the environment.
8. We recommend that planning for sustainable livelihoods is considered a 'circular' context, taking into account what work is required, who is in need of work, what funding is available to pay for it and how it can be organised to benefit the local community. We recommend that the Local Community Development Committee and the Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee, who are tasked with developing and overseeing the Local Economic and Community Plan, take ownership of this action.

Community space and support

9. Where non-commercial facilities are not available in a sizeable settlement, we recommend that a community space is secured and made available at a low cost for community events.
10. We recommend that help and information centres be established in key locations in Clare.
11. We recommend that a scoping exercise be carried out through the Local Enterprise Office with the aim of understanding what forms of activity, community support, mentorship, support for young people, and placements could be provided by businesses based in the region to benefit marginalised communities in Clare with a particular reference to those located in the Shannon Industrial Estate/Shannon Free Zone.

National government

Service provision

12. We recommend that TDs, Senators and MEPs continue to campaign for funding and other supports to address the deficiencies in the provision of GPs, dentists, mental health services and social housing to ensure that, at the very least, County Clare meets national average standards.

Planning for and delivering a Just Transition rooted in human rights

13. We recommend that the Just Transition Commission is put in place as a matter of priority in order to avoid an unjust transition that could negatively impact people's perceptions of climate action and undermine the potential to embed socio-economic rights in the fabric of Clare's communities.

14. We recommend that public funding for Just Transition planning and implementation should be made available country- and county-wide to protect the most vulnerable.

15. We recommend that the SEAI provide broader access to its Fully Funded Energy Upgrade Scheme for low- and middle-income households as well as to grants and loans to protect the living conditions of structurally vulnerable groups in Clare. In the case of those living in private rented accommodation, we would like to see strong safeguards put in place for tenants, such as legislative protection introduced to protect their tenancies during retrofitting by landlords in addition to upholding the commitment in Ireland's national housing plan, to introduce a minimum BER for rental properties beginning in 2025. Further, we recommend expanding collective or neighbourhood-based approaches and directing funding towards them to allow for economies of scale and to remove some of the administrative burdens from individuals.

Thematic taskforces

16. We recommend the establishment of a Universal Access Public Transport System Task Force in the county

17. We recommend establishing a Housing and Accommodation Task Force in the County that brings together planners, councillors, community organisations, those in housing need and the housing executive from the Local Authority.

A Just Transition for beef farmers

18. A localised Just Transition plan is needed for beef farmers and low-income farmers in Clare. As a first step, we recommend extensive dialogue and engagement with beef farmers and low-income farmers across the County. We envisage that this work could be over-seen by the Local Action Group that will be implementing LEADER and funded through that funding stream.

19. In terms of addressing the interconnected challenges of improving food security and supporting farm diversification away from a dependence on the low-income beef sector, we recommend expanding and increasing funding support for organic fruit and vegetable growers.

Realising the socio-economic rights of migrants in Clare

20. We recommend that the commitment in the current Programme for Government to end the practice of Direct Provision is delivered on and carried forward to any incoming Programme for Government and that housing and accommodation provision are improved sufficiently to end institutional living for all communities in Clare

21. We believe that a three-year permission would be more beneficial for host communities and for those displaced from war who are beneficiaries of a temporary protection than the current practice of granting permission on an annual basis.

22. We consider that an opportunity exists to promote two-way integration and local friendship by expanding informal language-sharing opportunities in Clare through the funding of a paid coordinator role.

Building upon previous research on socio-economic rights in Clare

23. We recommend that all of those who represent Clare commit to repairing Ireland's record with regard to the human rights of people with disabilities.

24. We recommend the introduction of a scheme for long-term unemployed people and those in receipt of disability or carers benefit, where specific State supports and social welfare payments are maintained at full rates for the first year a person enters work, followed by a phased reduction based on a person's income.

25. We recommend that in consultation with people with disabilities in Clare and under their leadership, a funded Disabled People's Community Development Project for the county should be established.

Local democracy in Clare

26. We recommend a national reevaluation of the role of Local Government in respect of welfare services and infrastructure. We also recommend rebalancing the power differential between the executive and elected representatives and, following these steps, an increase in direct funding delivered through Local Authorities to at least the European average.

27. We recommend a pilot project in Clare to develop periodic opportunities for discussion, research and workshops for and by Councillors. We recommend that such a structure should be independent of the local authority and led by the Councillors themselves.



Graphic by Cuin O'Gomain www.justseeds.org

This quote comes from a poem written by James Connolly

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nobody's
free until
everybody's
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Fannie Lou Hamer