

Submitted to Your Vision, Our Future
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Organisation:
Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre

Chapter 3 - Promoting Employment

1 What reforms to the taxation and welfare system should be considered to ensure that taxation and welfare work in tandem to support economic activity and promote employment while also supporting those most vulnerable in an equitable way?

Please outline what reforms should be considered::

Pavee Point Traveller & Roma Centre would like to highlight the difficulties that the current welfare system places Traveller Primary Health Care Workers in with regards to employment.

The employment of Traveller Primary Health Care Workers (PHCWs) is to provide primary health care to the Traveller community. It has long been recognised as an effective approach in bridging the gap between a community experiencing high health inequalities and a health service unable to reach and engage that community effectively in service provision. This approach has also been proven internationally as an effective method of engaging and including minority ethnic groups in health service provision. It is important to recognise that Traveller PHCWs come from the Traveller community and that they and their families experience similar levels of health inequalities to the overall Traveller community. Traveller PHCWs are on the minimum wage and are providing a culturally appropriate and culturally competent service to a community that is difficult for the health service to reach, and are increasing the overall use of health services by Travellers.

Therefore, it is important that PHCWs are valued and recognised for their ability to undertake this role effectively. There is a clear rationale to provide PHCWs with a derogation from engagement in activation programmes (as they are already activated) and also to support them with a range of supports – medical card, rent allowance, maternity leave etc. as recognition for the work they are doing.

Traveller health has not received any new development funding since 2008 and given the current lack of resources within Traveller Primary Health Care Projects (PHCPs) to increase hours and/or pay, PHCWs must avail of a range of social protection payments to bridge this income gap. The most common social protection payment that PHCWs avail of is Jobseekers Allowance- casual payments/dockets, which is claimed either as a single or a joint claimant with their partner (as an Increase for a Qualified Adult). This means-tested payment is contingent on a casual or part-time employment basis, with workers unable to exceed more than three working days (versus hours worked) in a seven-day period. This policy is strictly enforced through payment deduction, leaving no room for flexibility in terms of emerging issues that require a swift response. For example, in the wake of the tragic Carrickmines fire, PHCWs played a central role in facilitating the National Traveller Fire Safety audit. Similarly, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the HSE has relied heavily on Traveller PHCPs to disseminate information, report positive cases, assist with mass testing events, and to facilitate mass vaccination clinics. This work far exceeds the number of hours allocated to PHCWs and within the three-day period for the Jobseekers Allowance payment, leaving PHCWs in a vulnerable position.

PHCWs are continuously tasked with rapidly responding to emerging and complex needs within the community and are met with a Catch-22 whereby not undertaking the work could result in adverse consequences for Travellers on the ground; and engaging in more work than allocated could result in DEASP reducing payment and/or their partner's payment (if claiming jointly), risking the loss of secondary benefits. PHCWs who are considered casual workers by DEASP are also subject to labour activation programmes such as JobPath, which has not provided meaningful support for PHCWs and in fact negatively impacts current employment situation. The State resources provided to JobPath could arguably be more meaningfully invested in PHCTPs whereby Travellers' hours could be increased taking them out of a poverty trap and providing them with a living income. Many PHCWs would be willing to take up more full time employment if they could afford to do so. In implementing a social determinants approach to health, the majority of Traveller PHCPs engage with, and support the delivery of, a broad range of public services to the Traveller community, which is cost-effective; actually saving the State money.

2 Does Ireland's taxation and welfare system strike the right balance between maintaining the incentive to increase earnings and alleviating some of the risks of low income (poverty and deprivation)?

Not Answered

Please explain your view::

3 Are income supports equitable in terms of how they treat people of working age?

Not Answered

How is this balanced with the requirement to meet differing needs?:

4 What changes to the social insurance system should be considered to ensure sustainability into the medium to longer term? (Please note the recommendations of the Pensions Commission and NESC Report 151 on the future of the Irish social welfare system)

Please specify changes to be considered?: