

‘There are no services, they just put you on tablets’

Towards an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare

Dr Conor McCabe
September 2022



Coimisiún na hÉireann
um Chearta an Duine
agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and
Equality Commission

This project is supported
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FOREWORD

Clare Public Participation Network is an organisation of 331 community and voluntary groups in County Clare. The membership of Clare PPN is separated into three thematic groupings: community and voluntary, environmental and social inclusion, although in reality the work and interests of groups overlap across these boundaries. In April 2021 five of Clare PPN's social inclusion groups came together to discuss strategies for better collaboration and advocacy across the interlinked issues of marginalisation, deprivation, urban disadvantage and rural isolation.

These five groups – Clare Immigrant Support Centre, Clare Women's Network, Clare Leader Forum and Shannon and West Clare Family Resource Centres – had participated in the Covid-19 Community Response in Clare and had worked closely together during that time. Collectively, under the umbrella of Clare PPN's Social Inclusion College, they made a successful application for funding to the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) under its Equality Grants Scheme to develop a project called, 'Developing a Participative County-Level 5-Year Anti-Poverty Strategy for Clare'. During the course of the project a much needed new Traveller Community Development Project was established in Clare and that organisation also became part of the steering group for this project.

This report presents the findings from a nine-month long research project led by Dr Conor McCabe. Conor was assisted in the focus group aspects of the project by two peer researchers, Lily O'Donoghue and Madge O'Callaghan who brought extensive skills, empathy and lived experience to the project. Clare PPN staff, Sarah Ferrigan, William Hederman and Sarah Clancy oversaw the organisation of the project.

As organisations led by and working daily with those who experience socio-economic deprivation in Clare we were extremely grateful to have the opportunity provided by funding from IHREC to take a step back

from the frontline and, with the help of our lead researcher, examine the causes of and possible responses to poverty in the County.

We note that even during the life of this project the dynamics of some of the issues raised have changed, with inflation and in particular energy prices soaring. People on fixed incomes and in low wage work will be particularly badly affected and will need further support. Secondly, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia amongst its other consequences has seen more than 3000 people displaced from their homes and arrive in Clare, with many now housed in hotels and other accommodation not suitable for the long term.

As always in such situations, Clare communities and community organisations are and will continue to respond generously and to the very best extent possible but with many of them already stretched and short on services, accommodation and with organisations lacking consistent funding the situation is far from ideal.

As this report demonstrates, these issues all predate the arrival of displaced people from Ukraine and were in need of urgent solutions, however the situation is if anything now more critical. We hope this work we have done will help in plotting a path forward for all of those in our communities, whether they may live here for months or generations. Ní neart go cur le chéile.

We look forward to engaging in discussions about solutions to some of these issues and we thank everyone who trusted us with their stories and life experiences. Our sincere thanks to Dr Conor McCabe for his detailed and committed work on this project.

Mary O'Donoghue

*On behalf of the steering group:
Clare PPN, Women's Collective Ireland – Clare,
Clare Immigrant Support Centre,
Clare Leader Forum,
West Clare and Shannon Family Resource Centres
and Clare Traveller Community Development Project*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a report from a nine-month participatory research project on socio-economic exclusion carried out in County Clare with funding provided by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Grant Scheme. The project was convened by groups representing and made up of those who experience poverty and marginalisation in Clare who came together through Clare Public Participation Network to collaborate in this effort. The purpose of their project was to begin work on creating an anti-poverty strategy for the county which moved away from ‘trouble-shooting’ or ‘sticking plaster’ remedies and took a systemic approach. With the guidance of lead researcher Dr Conor McCabe, the project entailed desktop research, peer-to-peer research and policy analysis, and primary research.

While this project uses first-person testimony and the contributors’ lived experience, it does not seek to use those to describe poverty and exclusion in Clare. What it seeks to do is to locate these issues within the framework of policies, plans and resource distribution applied to the county by government and state agencies, and identify areas where these must be changed in order to respect the socio-economic rights of all those living in Clare. While this project was necessarily limited in scope, duration and scale, the research findings will nonetheless have a widespread application because of the method used, which sought and presents statistical evidence for issues raised in personal testimony.

Some key findings include:

- 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 particular 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.
 - Disabled people 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.

Despite the critical nature of this project’s findings and the fact that it might make uncomfortable reading, the

‘We’re not in Alaska, are we? We’re one hour from two major cities and three hours from Dublin, of course we should have services and infrastructure.’

Steering Group is extremely proud of what this project has been able to present. With a budget of €17,000 and the enthusiastic and committed participation of some of those who experience socio-economic deprivation in Clare, we have been able to demonstrate that poverty in Clare is infrastructural, systemic and intersectional with people frequently experiencing several layered types of discrimination and exclusion.

We do not consider this either inevitable or acceptable, furthermore we do not consider it individual. Our report makes it clear that poverty remedies that focus only on training, medicating or managing individuals will not compensate for deficits in infrastructure, investment and services.

As organisations based in County Clare we want to address these issues, however given that many of the deficits we are presenting here are the results of, or are exacerbated by, national policies and lack of investment in infrastructure we will not be able to do that without the attention and consideration of policy-makers. As one participant noted, 'We're not in Alaska are we? We're one hour from two major cities and three hours from Dublin, of course we should have services and infrastructure.'

The proposals contained in this report include:

- Identifying and remedying the gaps in information and data relating to Clare, policies should be based on evidence, and data gathering should be underpinned by a commitment to protect and enhance human rights, including socio-economic rights.
- Reviewing the National Development Plan as it relates to Clare, a regional approach as currently mandated serves to disenfranchise large areas of Clare from accessing the investment and sustainable economic development needed.
- Clare needs a dedicated social housing action plan. The housing situation outlined in this report is chaotic – a story of record homelessness alongside thousands of vacancies in the county. This action plan must include planning for population increases and changing demographics including the needs of aging rural dwellers.
- As agreed in the programme for government the Direct Provision System must be phased out and

'It's Clare for your holidays and for wind farms isn't it?'

replaced by adequate supports for those seeking protection here to live independent lives – it in itself is a direct cause of poverty, child poverty and marginalisation, particularly in rural areas.

- Health services in Clare need to be localised or re-localised and commitments made by Government to ensure that the people's right to health is realised through sufficient provision of the service levels enjoyed in other counties.
- The charity model of service provision needs to be replaced by a human rights based model where all public and publicly funded bodies are designed to meet the needs of individuals and their communities.
- Clare needs a jobs investment plan – in social services and green transition there is work that needs to be done in Clare, this must be provided for in terms of creating sustainable decent work for people living in Clare.
- Clare needs to adopt a model of development which ensures a properly defined just transition strategy – in particular for farming communities but also for all those likely to be adversely affected by climate action or climate change.
- Clare needs a county-wide effective and accessible public transport system.
- Ireland needs to legislate up to and including constitutional change to ensure that socio-economic rights are justiciable, both by individuals and communities.

We therefore present this research as the first step in what will of necessity be an ongoing attempt to align the social and economic policies adopted in Clare with the socio-economic rights of all those in the county.

For our part, we will continue to do what marginalised communities have always done – we will build our collective power, build our alliances for campaigns on national issues, and we will educate, organise and agitate for our human rights.

INTRODUCTION

The county of Clare needs a social investment plan and strategy that is geared to the needs of its communities. This is necessary in order to tackle structural inequalities and significant levels of poverty. It is also vitally important that those communities are, as much as possible, the authors of that strategy themselves.

The purpose of this report is to contribute to that process by first mapping the social infrastructure of the county as much as is possible, and to allow local service providers, community activists, and members of often marginalised groups, to voice why such investment is needed and what solutions are needed.

It will show that Clare has been marginalised by successive national and regional policy plans and that this needs to change as part of a wider process of nurture and social growth in the county.

It will look at the areas of housing, health, industry, farming, employment and poverty. It will use a combination of statistical data and personal testimony to do so.

Finally, it will present a series of suggested policy initiatives and campaigning strategies that are geared towards the needs of Clare as a county.

This report is presented as a document to aid and inform discussion on the areas covered. In that sense, it is an open-ended and living document, an opening line to what is hoped will be an ongoing and fruitful discussion on ways to tackle institutional poverty in Clare.

1. POPULATION AND HOUSING

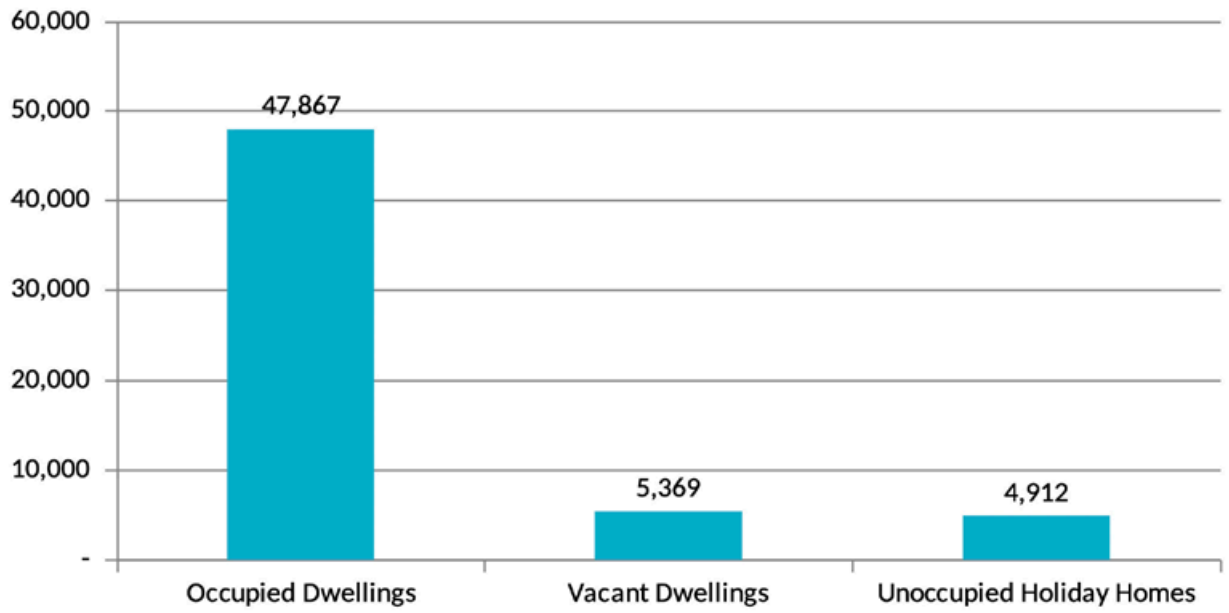
The current total population of Clare is 127,419.¹ This is an increase of 8,602 people, or 7.2%, since 2016. It is currently at its highest level since 1891. All five Local Electoral Areas (LEAs) saw increases in population, ranging from 4.6% in Shannon to 9.3% in Ennistymon. Of the 151 Electoral Divisions (EDs) in the county, 31 saw a population decrease while 118 saw an increase. Two EDs – Ballagh (Ennistymon) and Mullagh (Kilrush) – were unchanged. The LEA with the largest number of EDs to have a decrease in population was Kilrush, followed by Ennistymon, although Ballycannon ED in Shannon saw the largest single drop in population in the county (-143 people).

Whilst earlier outputs of this research made use of the 2016 Census's population data it is not included here because given the changes to population documented above, demographic information gathered seven years ago will be unreliable for current analysis until it can be compared with the new Census, which will be available in 2023.

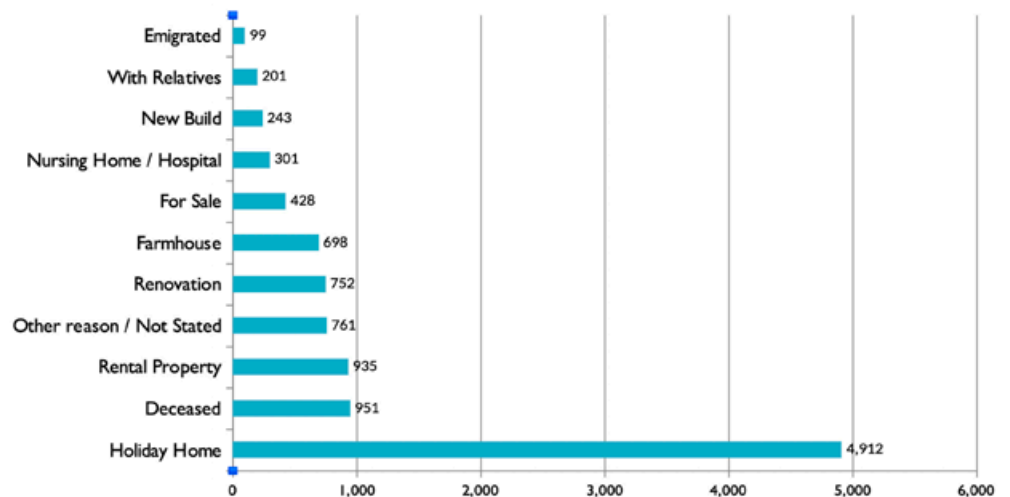
Clare has a lower proportion of its households in local authority housing than the national average. This is not a reflection of demand for that housing, simply a fact that the *provision* of social housing in Clare is lower than the national average. In May 2015 there were 3,273 people in need of social housing in Co. Clare, with just 59 vacancies available.² Five years later in 2020 the number of people requiring social housing was virtually unchanged, with 1,209 households on the social housing list³ – although the figure itself was a 12.9% increase on 2019.⁴ The County Council also reported '106 homeless presentations in County Clare in the year to June [2020], 83 repeats and 23 new presentations.'⁵ Kathleen Sherlock of the Minceir Whidden group said in 2021 that as many as half of the people declaring themselves as homeless in the county were from the Travelling community, 'despite the total make up of Travellers in Clare's total population being less than one per cent.'⁶

In the 2016 Census, 23.3% of the population were in rental accommodation and home ownership stood at around 74%. We will have to wait until 2023 when the CSO will release the detailed returns from the 2022 Census to see whether there has been any change in these ratios, but it is almost certain that home ownership has fallen given the pressures on housing across the county and the state over the past six years.

Housing in Co. Clare, Census 2022 (Preliminary)



Vacancy by Type, Co. Clare 2022



Local Electoral Area	Electoral Division	Housing Stock	No. of Vacant Properties	Vacancy %	Population 2016	Population 2022	Pop.change
Ennis	Ennis Rural, Co.Clare, 16032	7,802	578	7.4	17,709	19,039	1330
Kilrush	Kilrush Urban, Co.Clare, 16005	1,501	221	14.7	2,571	2,767	196
Ennistymon	Ennistymon, Co.Clare, 16054	1,650	216	13.1	2,331	2,474	143
Shannon	Clenagh, Co.Clare, 16027	4,373	215	4.9	10,299	10,942	643
Ennistymon	Milltown Malbay, Co.Clare, 16063	1,187	157	13.2	1,633	1,759	126
Ennis	Ennis No. 2 Urban, Co.Clare, 16002	1,131	108	9.5	1,810	2,131	321
Killaloe	Killaloe, Co.Clare, 16134	1,110	104	9.4	2,055	2,281	226
Shannon	Ballyglass, Co.Clare, 16106	2,194	99	4.5	5,994	6,023	29
Ennis	Ennis No. 4 Urban, Co.Clare, 16004	750	94	12.5	1,478	1,439	-39
Ennis	Ennis No. 1 Urban, Co.Clare, 16001	771	88	11.4	1,452	1,571	119
Ennistymon	Lisdoonvarna, Co.Clare, 16012	383	87	22.7	951	1,254	303
Killaloe	Tulla, Co.Clare, 16155	559	86	15.4	1,089	1,144	55
Shannon	Newmarket, Co.Clare, 16040	853	86	10.1	1,966	2,079	113
Ennis	Clareabbey, Co.Clare, 16026	1,459	80	5.5	2,984	3,539	555
Kilrush	Kilkee, Co.Clare, 16088	1,695	69	4.1	917	1,214	297
Ennistymon	Killilagh, Co.Clare, 16058	429	66	15.4	820	803	-17
Ennistymon	Corrofin, Co.Clare, 16019	641	62	9.7	1,335	1,353	18
Ennistymon	Drumcreehy, Co.Clare, 16010	361	56	15.5	423	554	131
Killaloe	Scarriff, Co.Clare, 16137	642	56	8.7	1,278	1,465	187
Kilrush	Kilmurry, Co.Clare, 16092	509	55	10.8	714	837	123

The 2022 Census results released so far, however, show an increase of 2,369 habitable dwellings (+4.2%) in Clare since 2016, giving an overall figure of 58,148.⁷ Of these, 47,867 were occupied, 4,912 were unoccupied holiday homes, and a further 5,369 were vacant dwellings. This means that there were 10,281 unoccupied dwellings in the county, giving a total vacancy rate of 17.68%.

It is important to note that census figures **do not** include derelict buildings. They relate to dwellings that are in a generally good state and are habitable. Furthermore, the number of occupied dwellings includes households that were temporarily absent on the night of the census (Sunday 3rd April) but were otherwise resident in the county. As such, the vacancy figures relate to houses, flats, and apartments that were vacant for the five-week operation of the Census. Rental properties in Clare account for 9% (935) of all vacant properties, and 17% once holiday homes are excluded. The Census categorises AirBnBs as rental properties, not holiday homes. At the time of writing (July 2022) there are just 10 properties for rent on Daft.ie for the entire county of Clare.

The Census also gives figures for vacancy by electoral division (ED).⁸ There were 895 vacant habitable dwellings in Ennis town and its neighbourhoods in March/April 2022.⁹ The ED with the largest amount of vacant properties in the county is Ennis Rural (587), followed by Kilrush Urban (221). Again, none of these are derelict or are holiday homes.

Of the top 20 EDs by number of vacant properties only two – Ennis No.4 Urban and Killilagh – saw a decline in population since 2016. All the others had an increase in population. Ennis Rural ED experienced an increase of 7.5% – 1,330 people – and yet has 578 vacant properties within its boundaries. The population of Kilrush Urban ED increased by 13% (196) since 2016, and has 221 habitable vacant dwellings lying idle.

According to Clare County Council, there are just 53 vacant properties in Clare,¹⁰ or 0.5% of the total identified by enumerators over the five-week period of Census 2022. The Council states that there are only two vacant dwellings in Ennis EA; the Census found 1,092 (not including holiday homes). It says that there is only one vacant dwelling in the whole of Shannon EA; the Census found 651. Even taking into account the difference in the definition of ‘vacant’ between the Council and the Census – the Council views only long-term derelict as vacant, while the Census views empty but otherwise habitable as vacant – the gap between 53 on the one hand and 10,281 on the other is staggering. Apart from anything else, even a cursory drive through Clare will show that there are more than 53 derelict dwellings in the county. The methodology used by the Council to find and pursue vacant dwellings is – to say the least – somewhat self-limiting given the facts on the ground.

As of 31st May 2022 there are 2,847 households on the social housing list in Clare.¹¹ Just over 41% (1,177) have Ennis as their first area of choice, with a two-bedroomed property overwhelmingly the main allocation for households, accounting for 77% of all preferences across the county. The majority of household applications (1,519 or 53%) are for transfers, with 1,328 (47%) households waiting on housing.

Normally, Clare County Council does not release figures for the number of people on the housing list. The official statistics relate to households only. However, in response to a Labour Party claim that as many as 10,000 people were on the list, the Council issued a statement saying that it ‘can confirm that at the time of this response [mid-May 2022] there are 6,241 individuals (adults and children) on the social housing waiting list, of this figure 2,998 individuals are in HAP accommodation.’¹² This gives a density of 2.2 persons per household, which is lower than the average of 2.73 in Clare. It suggests fam-

Social Housing Waiting List 31.5.2022						
First Area of Choice	1 Bed	2 Bed	3 Bed	4 Bed	5 Bed	Total
Ennis	6	916	185	67	3	1,177
Shannon		182	25	14		221
Clarecastle		133	29	10	1	173
Feakle/Scariff/Whitegate	1	135	28	4		168
Ennistymon/Lahinch	1	113	25	5		144
Kilrush		96	32	7		135
Meelick/Parteen/Westbury		77	35	10		122
Miltown Malbay/Mullagh/Quilty		70	12	7		89
Kilkee/Cross/Carrigaholt		69	11	1		81
Corofin/Ruan		53	21	3		77
Newmarket-on-Fergus		58	14	4		76
Killaloe		57	9	3		69
Lisdoonvarna/Ballyvaughan		38	10	3		51
Cooraclare/Doonbeg	2	37	10	1		50
Sixmilebridge		35	5	8		48
Tulla/Kilkishen/Broadford		40	7	1		48
Kildysart/Ballynacally		24	3	2		29
Quin		16	8	1		25
Clonlara		17	5	2		24
Kilmihil		9	7	3		19
Kilmeady		10	3			13
Kilfenora		6	2			8
Total	10	2,191	486	156	4	2,847

ily units tend to be smaller on the social housing waiting list, and this appears to be borne out by the proliferation of two-bedroom dwelling allocations or preferences. It will take further research to establish whether it is the social housing applicant's wish for a two bedroom property or their categorisation as needing a two bedroom property by the housing authority which is determining the demand. Discussions in the focus groups which formed part of this project indicated that in at least some cases social housing tenants find themselves in overcrowded accommodation due to increases in family size which might have been better planned for.

Overall there are 4,434 social housing tenancies in the county, including 2,711 local authority stock, 1,297 HAP, 244 leased properties, and 182 RAS tenancies. There are 91 council properties currently vacant, with an average vacancy period of 129 days. The Council's permanent, publicly-owned stock of 2,711 housing units amounts to 4.6% of the total stock of 58,148 habitable dwellings. Nationally, around 6.6% of habitable dwellings are under public ownership. In 2019, the most recent year for which figures are available, there were 22 Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in Clare, providing 655 rental units.¹³

From 21st April to 19th May 2022 there were 192 people listed as homeless. This is an increase of 86 people

since June 2020. In other words, there has been an 81% rise in homelessness in Clare over the past two years.

Unoccupied holiday homes (4,912) account for 8.4% of the total housing stock in Clare. It is the fifth highest proportion in the state and is over two and a half times the national average of 3.1%. There is no further breakdown of the figure currently available. The CSO intends to publish the Census 2022 housing report sometime next year.

The Census 2016 Report, however, contains insights that can give us an indication of the nature and use of holiday homes in the county. It recorded 4,821 unoccupied holiday homes, which was 8.6% of the total housing stock that year. A report compiled by the Oireachtas Library in 2020 put the number of occupied holiday homes in the state at 4%, which would give a holiday home vacancy rate of 96%.¹⁴ (In the interest of clarity, 'holiday home' refers to use and not just construction. In cases where a holiday home is being used for long-term occupancy it is no longer a holiday home, it is a permanent household and is recorded as such by the CSO.)

Holiday homes are sometimes put forward as an employment/investment strategy for Clare, providing income and jobs due to the rise in tourism they provide. It should be noted that there is no evidence at the present time to support this contention.¹⁵

This means there were 10,281 unoccupied dwellings in the county, giving a total vacancy rate of 17.68%

Furthermore, the proliferation of holiday homes in Clare was the result of Celtic Tiger-era tax breaks and not down to any kind of a tourism strategy. 'Another 40 large three-bedroom holiday homes which qualify for tax breaks are going on the market in Kilkee' wrote the *Irish Times* in 1998.¹⁶ 'Under the seaside resort scheme, buyers can claim tax relief against all income, including PAYE, once the houses are made available for letting over 11 years.' It added that '50 per cent capital allowances can be claimed in the first year and the balance of 5 per cent between the second and 11th years.' The newspaper later advised its readers that this was the 'last chance to invest in seaside tax resorts' and that the units in a 48-apartment scheme in Kilkee 'are covered by the Section 23 tax relief on rental income.'¹⁷

By 2005 it was warning that 'buying a holiday home in Ireland is often only a good idea if your motivation is to cover costs rather than make a substantial profit' and that 'some have made the mistake of choosing on the basis of tax benefits alone and have suffered high vacancy rates as a result.'¹⁸ Despite this, in the same year Clare County Council 'refused planning permission to only ten holiday homes, from applications for over 300 tax-driven holiday homes since the start of the year.'¹⁹ Ger Dollard, who was the Council's former Assistant Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development with responsibility for planning, tourism and economic development in the Ennis Municipal District, told the *Clare People* that towards the end of 2004, 'Government tax-reliefs for tourist-related developments resulted in the council receiving planning applications in the space of a few weeks that would normally take a quarter of a century to be lodged.'²⁰

Holiday homes in Clare, for the most part, were a tax avoidance scheme, not a long-term jobs initiative, and it would be wrong to retrospectively apply a tourism logic to a socially and economically unsustainable tax policy. It should be noted that the business model of holiday homes (such as it is) has now been surpassed by the rise of Airbnb, which brings its own problems and tensions. Indeed, the idea of a standalone holiday home owned by an individual and used for no more than four weeks in the year is one that dates from an era of Celtic tiger

excess that gave us Ponzi apartments in Bulgaria and helicopters for shopping and funerals.²¹

The numbers on housing in Clare, while stark, do not fully capture the nature of the housing situation. There is a crisis in all three areas of shelter: public rental, private rental and private purchase.

In the words of one participant in a group interview session in Kilrush:

'First of all you can forget about buying a house in west Clare. You would want to be on a CEO's pay, you're not going to get it. The price of houses is shocking high. I'd say in west Clare there's about a 1,000 [houses] that would be holiday homes, but there's no proper social housing at all.'

Another participant talked about homelessness, and how the official figures mask its dynamic in the town:

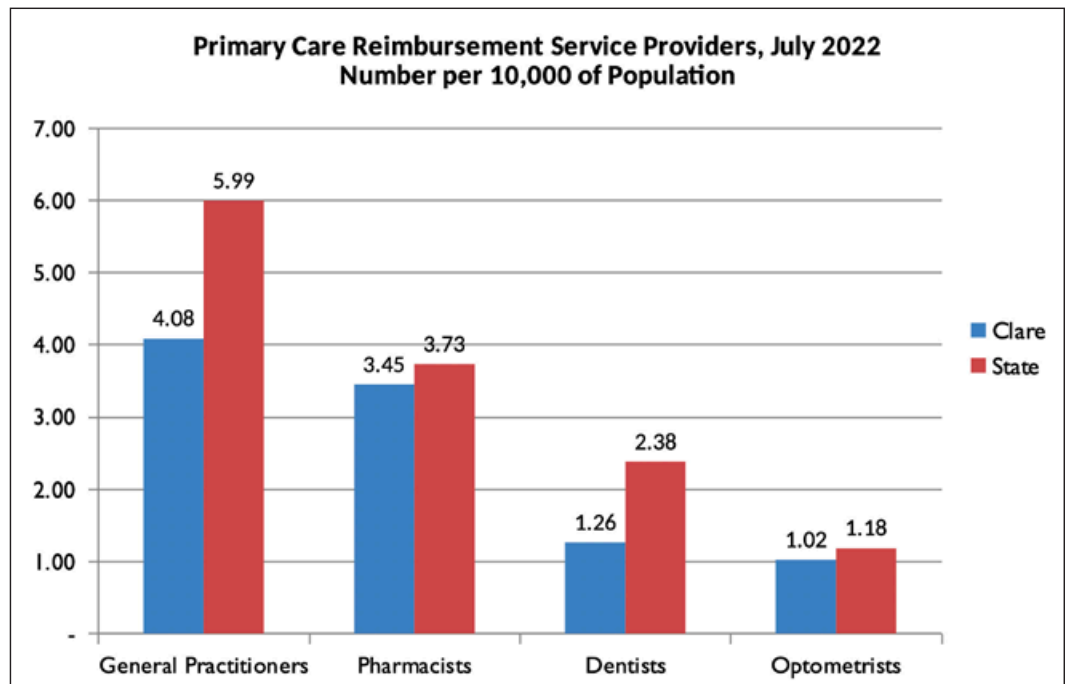
'The big thing here [in Kilrush] is overcrowding. What happens is people mightn't go to the Council and say "oh we're homeless" but what they're doing is people are doubling up in houses, like people living with family members, so there's a lot of overcrowding as well.'

Social housing, when it is available, is not always suitable. As one participant said:

'The Council will say, "oh we have loads of council houses in west Clare" but they're talking about wanting people from Kilrush to move to Quilty or Spanish Point or move to other places... If you move someone out of the town and they don't have a car or can't afford to run one they are not going to have access to any of the services that might be available to them.'

Participants from Clare Older People's Council strongly recommended the planning and development of town centre housing options for older people. In discussions around supported housing options they raised their reservations about what one participant memorably termed 'granny ghettos' where accommodation for older people is provided in supported housing developments in rural areas away from centres of population. They felt that these developments do not reflect the ongoing ability and desire of older people to contribute to, benefit from and participate in the daily life of their communities which can be achieved through proper planning and investment.

These quotes get to the nub of a lot of the issues that surrounding housing, and how there is more to it than simply a roof over one's head.



Source: HSE, PCRS Contractor Reports (July 2022) <https://www.ssps.ie/portal/annual-reporting/>

2. HEALTH

As of July 2022, there are 52 general practitioners (GPs) in Clare who are part of the general medical services (medical card/GP card) scheme.²² This works out at four per 10,000 of the population. The national average is around six per 10,000. In order to be on par with the State, there would need to be 77 GPs in the county, which gives a shortfall of 25 based on the national average. In the 2016 general election this issue under the campaign name ‘No doctor – No village’ was raised by communities in Clare to such a level that GP Dr Michael Harty was elected to the Dáil on that platform.

Similarly, there are 16 dentists in Clare, or 1.26 per 10,000 population. This is just under half the national average of 2.38 per 10,000. ‘At the moment you can’t get a dentist in west Clare,’ said one resident in Kilrush during a group interview held in the town in April 2022. ‘If you’re on a medical card it looks like the nearest dentist that will take you on if you are new to [the scheme] is in Limerick. They’ve stopped taking medical cards full stop in Kilrush.’

There are 13 optometrists, or 1.02 per 10,000, in the county while the national figure is 1.18 per 10,000. There is roughly the same proportion of pharmacists to population as the national average.

The latest figures show that there are 40,571 medical card holders in Clare, around 32% of the population.²³

Nationally it is around 30.1% of the population. There are 12,036 GP visit card holders in Clare, around 9.4% of the population.²⁴ Nationally that figure is 10.4%.

Taken together, there are 52,607 medical card and GP visit card holders in Clare, or 41% of the population, compared to a national figure of 40.5%. This means that while Clare has a slightly higher percentage of medical card and GP visit card holders than the state average, it has 33% fewer GPs in the scheme. ‘Doctors are not taking people on’ said one participant at a group interview session in Kilrush. ‘I know one family that just moved [into Kilrush], they tried every doctor they can’t get one.’

While some variation in numbers is to be expected, the size of the gap points to a structural issue in service provision, compounded by policy. It is not because of a lower need or less demand. For example, there were 1,616 optical claims made by Clare-resident medical card holders in July 2022.²⁵ It was around 2.8% of the total optical claims made nationally that month. This is roughly in line with the population of Clare which is around 2.5% of the national population. In other words, there is nothing stark or unusual about the medical needs of people in Clare, they are on a par with the rest of the state. The difference is in delivery of those services and the level of structural investment in the county.

In 2019 the ESRI published a geographical profile of healthcare needs and non-acute healthcare supply in Ireland on a county-by-county basis.²⁶ Its analysis was

Non-acute healthcare supply in Co Clare, 2014 (ESRI 2019)

More than 10% Below National Average	National Average	More than 10% Above National Average
GPs - General Medical Services Physiotherapists Occupational therapists Speech & Language Therapists Counsellors & Psychologists Social Workers Home Care Hours	Public Health & Community Nurses Long Term Residential Care	Podiatrists and Chiropodists

based on figures from 2014. The authors found that the supply of seven out of ten non-acute primary and community care services in Clare were more than 10% below the national average.²⁷ Only one – podiatrists and chiropodists – showed Clare to have an above-average supply of service. It should be noted that the national average is not in any way a benchmark of quality and/or optimum service provision – it is presented here simply to show where Clare lies in relation to the rest of the state.

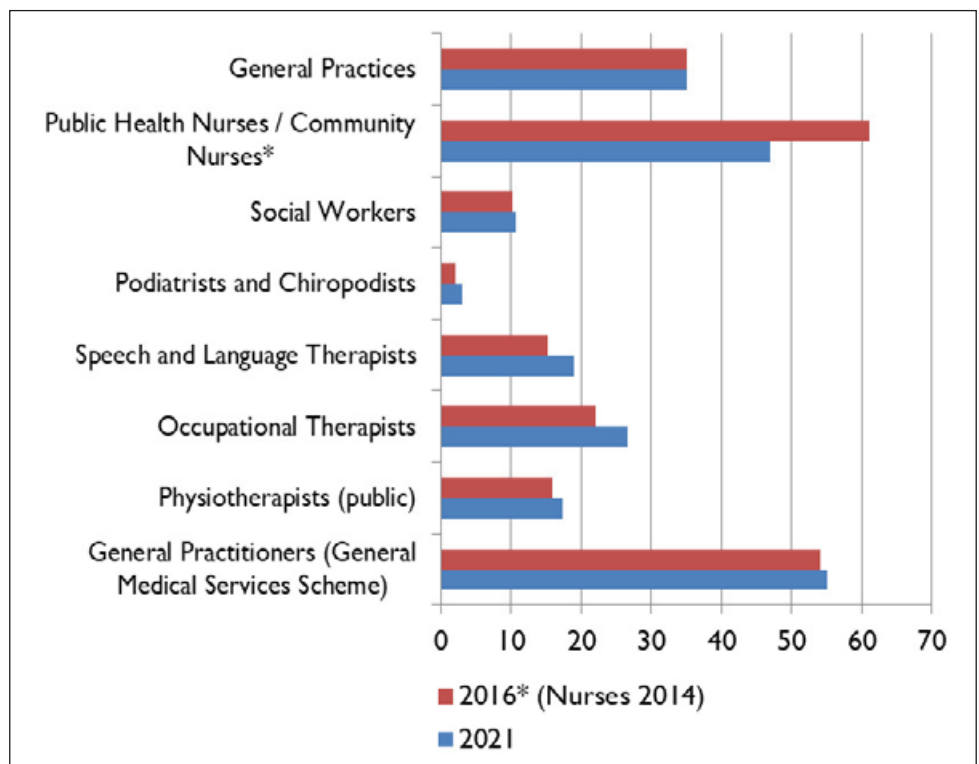
According to the Department of Health there has been a small increase in staffing levels in a select number of services since 2016. The figures in the chart below were provided in a series of written answers to parliamentary questions (with the exception of the figure for public health/community nurses, which is taken from the 2019 ESRI report).²⁸ These modest improvements, while welcome, are not enough to address the deficit in service provision highlighted by the ESRI in its 2019 report, and do not take into account the 7.2% rise in population in Clare since 2016.

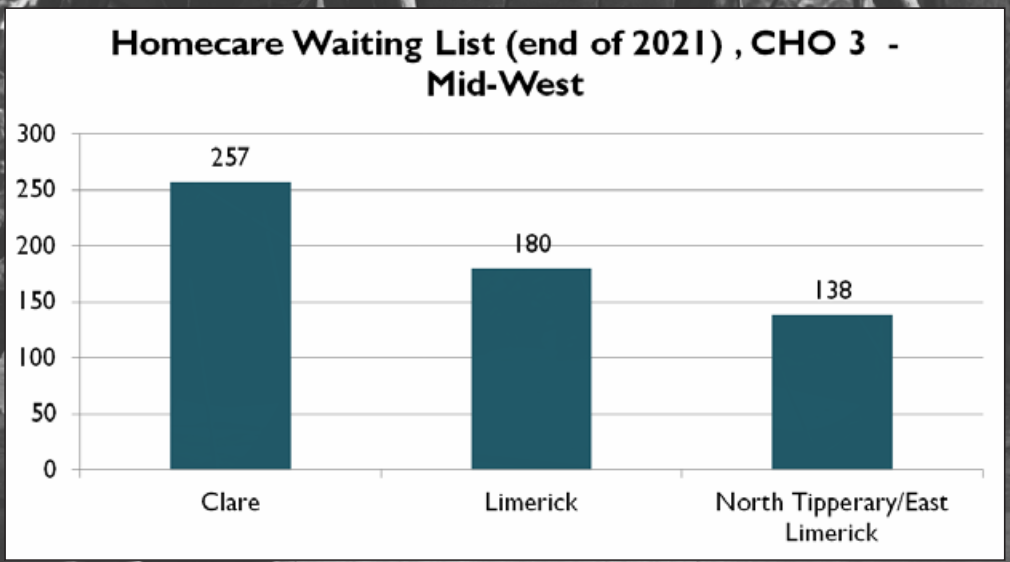
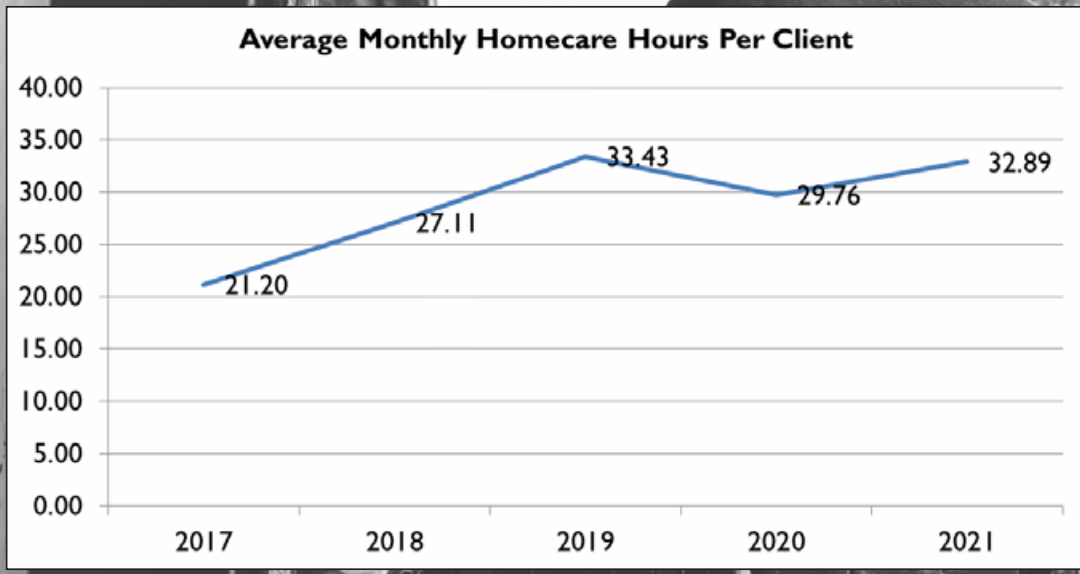
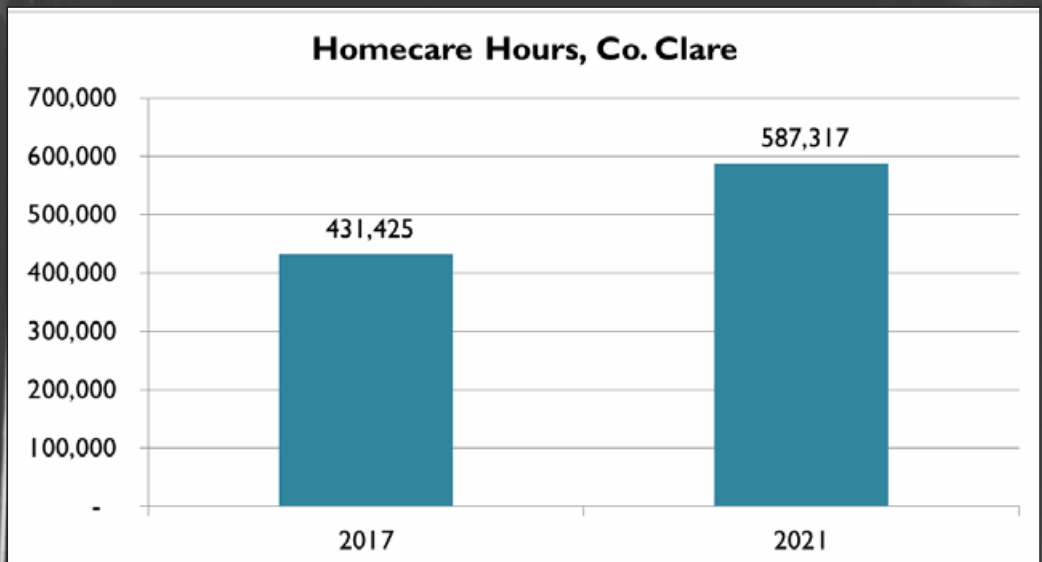
There is also some discrepancy in the figures. The ESRI report stated there were 61.7 Whole-Time Equivalent (WTE) public health and community nurses in Clare in 2014. However, according to the HSE there were only 37 employed in 2016, rising to 47 in 2021. What appears to be a rise in service when using HSE-supplied figures, turns into a fall in service when compared with the ESRI report. Similarly, the ESRI says that there were 48

general practices in Clare in 2014, while the HSE says that in 2016 there were 35 and that remains the figure today.²⁹ The updated figures from the HSE place public health and community nurse staffing levels in the county well below the national average.

Homecare Provision

The one area of significant growth in service in the past five years has been in homecare hours. There has been a 34% increase in hours approved and a 95% increase in clients since 2017.³⁰ Home support services are mainly provided to persons over 65 years of age, but are also provided to people under 65 in certain circumstances based on assessed needs. On average a person was approved for around 21hrs of home care per month in 2017. This rose to around 32hrs per month in 2021. The figures, however, do not tell us about the level of need





Source: Home and Community Care Ireland, The Waiting List Lottery: Home Support Across Ireland, March 2022, p.17.

for homecare hours, or how well (or otherwise) the additional hours go towards servicing that need.

In our discussions older participants noted that the availability and quality of support services up to and including home care services available to them in their communities are key factors in independence and quality of life. Clare Leader Forum, a disabled people's rights group who are on the steering group for this project, raised their concerns that there appears to be a conflation in available statistics between home care, home helps and personal assistant services. It has been further raised by the group as well as by elected representatives, that there appears also to be a conflation in the actual provision of services between home care, home helps and personal assistants – leading to very different outcomes for disabled people.³¹

Clare Leader Forum are part of the Independent Living Movement and have long campaigned for access to sufficient personal assistant services to enable disabled people to take control of their lives and realise their human rights. Further steps in this research will need to establish the level of provisions of PA hours in CHO3, and in Clare and the manner in which these services are provided in the county.

Only 4.4% of homecare hours in Clare are delivered directly by the HSE.³² This is in stark contrast to Limerick and North Tipperary/East Limerick (the other areas that make up the HSE region known as CHO 3) where direct HSE homecare provision is at 49.6% and 56% respectively. Clare also has the highest number of people on waiting lists, a situation driven mainly by a lack of staff.

The private service providers acknowledge that there is an issue with recruitment. Fiacre Hennsey of the National Community Care Network (NCCN) said in March 2022 that nationally they have 1,000 vacancies and are struggling to recruit in rural areas such as west Clare. He told the *Irish Examiner*:

'I'm based in Co Clare, and you would always have black spots, places that are far from Ennis or Shannon so to recruit in those areas has become quite difficult... The real difficulty is you have potential clients in fairly rural areas and how do you now get a carer to go to those clients? Most of our members would pay some sort of travel pay but what is not covered is the time.'³³

A report by the *Irish Examiner* in April 2022 highlighted the case of 74-yr-old Rita Parrott from Meelick, Co. Clare. She was granted a homecare package but could not get a carer for the full hours. 'A girl came in and said to me, "I'm sorry Rita, the carers just aren't there

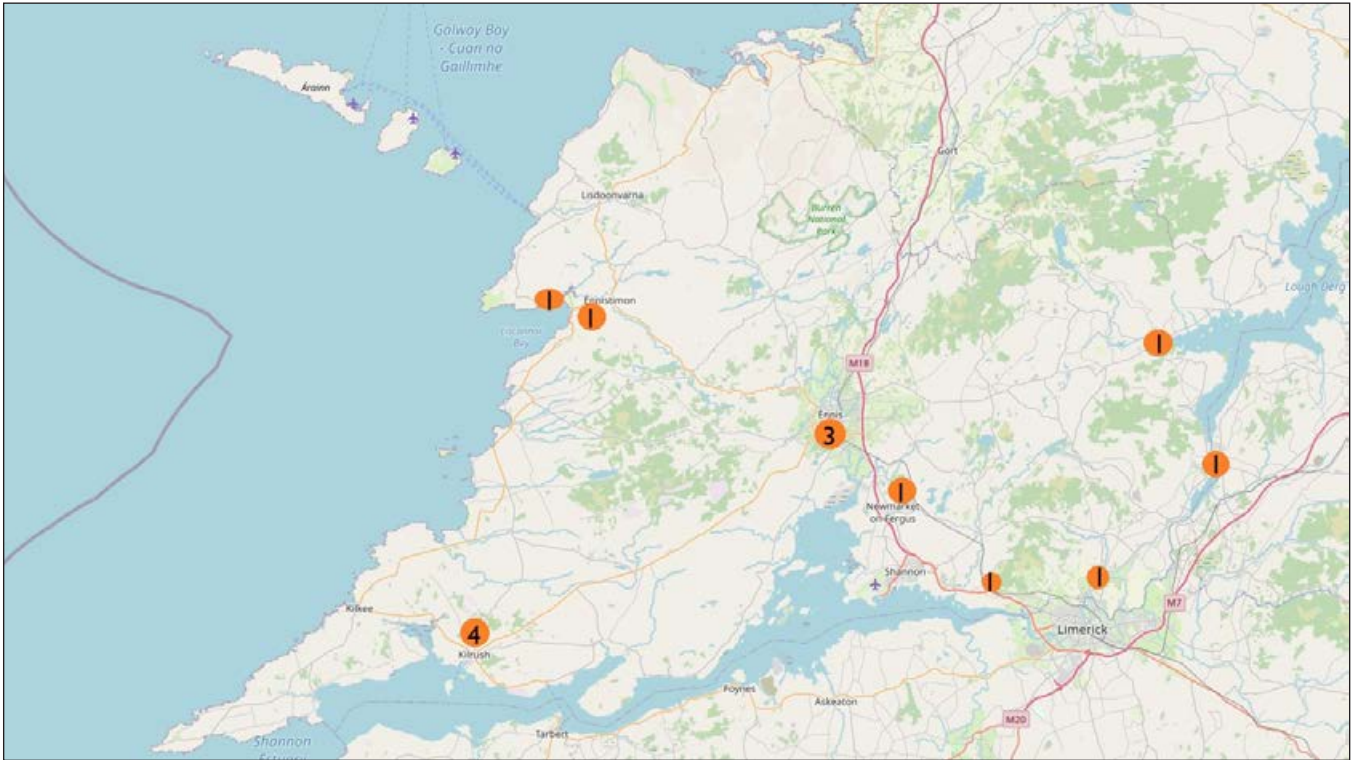
Only 4.4% of homecare hours in Clare are delivered directly by the HSE, compared with 49.6% in Limerick and 56% in North Tipp/East Limerick. Clare also has the highest number of people on waiting lists.

love", straight out. It's terrible,' she told the *Examiner*.³⁴ Louise Murphy, a Cork-based carer, pointed to low wages, long hours, and insecure working conditions in the industry, 'which is pushing the mainly female workforce to desert the profession'.³⁵ Another carer, Rose Long, talked of one private company that was getting €28p/hr from the HSE, but paying €11p/hr to the carer. Michael Harty of HomeCare Direct said that 'the topline economics of the homecare industry in Ireland is the agencies roughly are charging €27 an hour and they are paying carers around €12 an hour.'³⁶

The issue of pay and conditions for carers was also raised during a group interview session in Kilrush, undertaken by Clare PPN in April 2022. The participants talked of their direct experience of homecare in the county, either as carers or as family recipients of care. 'Depending on the company you work for, you pay for your own travel [as a carer]' said one. 'You're never guaranteed the hours [and] you could be going from seven in the morning till ten at night with seven customers,' said another. In terms of the main companies or agencies, 'there's Clarecare and there's Bluebird and they're always looking for people.' One participant described the issue with the homecare hours provided to clients:

'I think [the hours provided] are a fantasy. If you're an older person in the town and you get two or three hours of home help it's bad enough, but if you are further back out west where you mightn't be able to drive anymore, you're only able to get home help once or twice every couple of weeks, you're totally isolated. And you've to fight for those hours.'

Some of the privately-run courses to train as home help can cost up to €1,000 to work in sector that pays around €11p/hr with no guaranteed hours nor payment for travel time. 'The solution is proper pay and no privatisation' said one. 'There are a lot of services that should just be there.'



Location of public and private residential care centres in Co. Clare

Residential Care Centres

There are 14 residential care centres in Clare: ten private and four operated by the HSE. The public older persons residential centres are: St. Joseph’s Hospital Ennis; Ennistymon Community nursing Unit; Raheen Community nursing Unit Scariff; and Regina House, Kilrush. Between them they provide 142 care beds – an increase of 11 since 2016.³⁷ The centres also provide short stay services including respite care, palliative care and rehabilitation care.

The 10 private nursing homes as listed on the HSE’s website are:

- Cahercalla Community Hospital Ennis
- Carrigoran House Nursing Home, Newmarket-on-Fergus
- Ennis Nursing Home, Drumbiggle, Ennis
- Kilrush District Hospital, Kilrush
- Kilrush Nursing Home, Kilimer Road, Kilrush
- Lakes Nursing Home, Hill Rd, Killaloe
- Riverdale House Nursing Home, Blackwater, Ardacrusha
- Sancta Maria Nursing Home, Cratloe
- St. Dominic Savio Nursing Home, Liscannor

- St Theresa’s Nursing Home, Leadmore East, Kilrush.³⁸

Nine out of the 14 residential care centres in Clare are situated alongside the Kilrush-Limerick road, with the greatest single concentration in Kilrush which has around 10% of the population of Ennis. Three of the four operators in the town and surrounding area are private, for-profit entities. There are just three centres north of Ennis in the county.

None of the private nursing homes in Clare have had a published HSE inspection report since May 2009. The HSE-run St. Joseph’s Hospital Ennis was subject to a high-profile inspection by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) in 2017.³⁹ An independent review carried out this year, however, found improvements alongside ongoing challenges.⁴⁰

As with homecare service providers, the private nursing homes struggle to retain staff. They also charge residents under the Fair Deal scheme for items such as laundry, hairdressing, and physiotherapy. Clare Leader Forum highlighted the practice of disabled people being accommodated in nursing homes because of a lack of provision in the county of suitable accommodation and home and personal assistant supports, a practice which denies the human rights of those affected. They are seeking an immediate end to this practice.⁴¹

Year	Activity	Persons Engaged	No. of Enterprises
2019	Manufacturing (C)	7077	509
2019	Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (G)	5800	1186
2019	Accommodation and food service activities (I)	5410	653
2019	Administrative and support service activities (N)	5049	681
2019	Construction (F)	3226	1615
2019	Human Health and Social Work Activities (Q)	3065	398
2019	Professional, scientific and technical activities (M)	2380	852
2019	ICT total (261 to 264,268,465,582,61,62,631,951)	1853	237
2019	Transportation and storage (H)	1630	456
2019	Other Service Activities (S)	1276	547
2019	Education (P)	1033	431
2019	Information and communication (J)	787	247
2019	Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (R)	770	259
2019	Financial and insurance activities excluding activities of holding companies (K-642)	680	137
2019	Real estate activities (L)	393	274
2019	Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities (E)	180	21

Source: CSO Business Demography 2019

3. INDUSTRY, AGRICULTURE, TOURISM, AND EMPLOYMENT

There are no official statistics available on the labour force in Clare. The CSO does not produce them for public use. It publishes numbers relating only to the region known as the Mid-West, which includes Clare, Limerick, and north Tipperary. As a result, there are no up-to-date statistics on employment across Clare, only in certain sectors. There is no official monthly, quarterly, or yearly count of unemployment in Clare outside of the Census which is held every 5/6 years. The current truncation of statistics means that a government strategy for employment and industry for Clare is second in priority to the needs of the Mid West – a region created by statisticians which does not have a democratic expression and accountability in terms of local government and Dáil representation. There is no TD for Mid-West for example, only TDs for the counties within it. This means in effect that elected representatives and local government officials have to lobby those in central government who oversee a region that exists only in reports but nonetheless is used to shape national policy and investment strategy for the two and a half counties that make up this fiction.

Nonetheless, there are some figures and statistics pro-

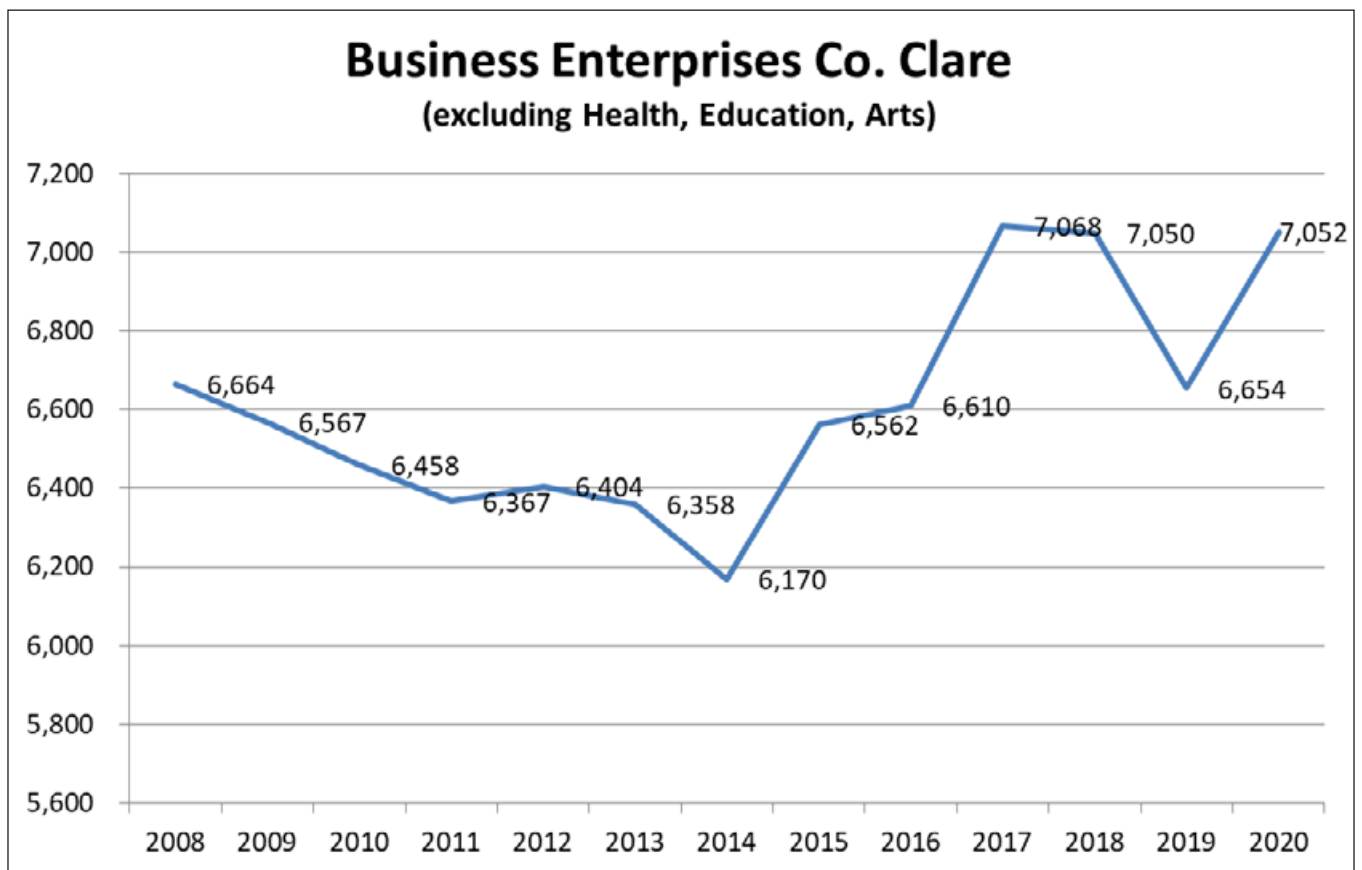
duced for Clare, and this chapter will attempt to bring them together to try to get a sense of the nature of employment and unemployment in the county. It will also draw upon the group interview sessions that were held in Ennis, Shannon, and Kilrush as part of this research project, in order to get an overall sense of the dominant issues on the ground.

Employment Sectors

Every year the business statistics section of the CSO produce a report on ‘the numbers of enterprises, enterprise births and deaths and survival rates and related employment figures’ for selected employment sectors across the state. It is known as the Business Demography report.⁴² The most recent one available is for 2020 and was published on 1st July 2022.⁴³ The figures below are taken mainly from the 2019 survey. The reason for this is to avoid any possible distortion due to Covid, although we will refer to the 2020 survey later on when we discuss the effect that Covid had on businesses in Clare.

It is important to note that it is a survey of private enterprises. Public sector employment is not included, nor is employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing. We will have more accurate figures when the results from Census 2022 are released, but this will not be until 2023 at the earliest.

The largest private enterprise employment sectors in



Clare in 2019 were in manufacturing (7,077); wholesale and retail trade (5,800), and accommodation and food service (5,410).⁴⁴ The CSO Business Survey defines ‘employment’ as persons who are paid a fixed wage or salary’ and the figures are calculated ‘using a monthly employment return received from Revenue’, with the ‘employee count’ as ‘the average employment figure over the period’.⁴⁵ The figures for ‘Persons Engaged’ include working proprietors and family members, as well as direct employees.

The overwhelming majority of private enterprises in Clare (92.8%) employ on average less than ten people each and together they account for 32% of all employment. Large enterprises (employing more than 250 people each), make up 0.2% of enterprises but account for 21% of private sector employment. These large employers include not only industrial enterprises but also those in retail such as Dunnes, Tesco, Aldi, and Lidl.

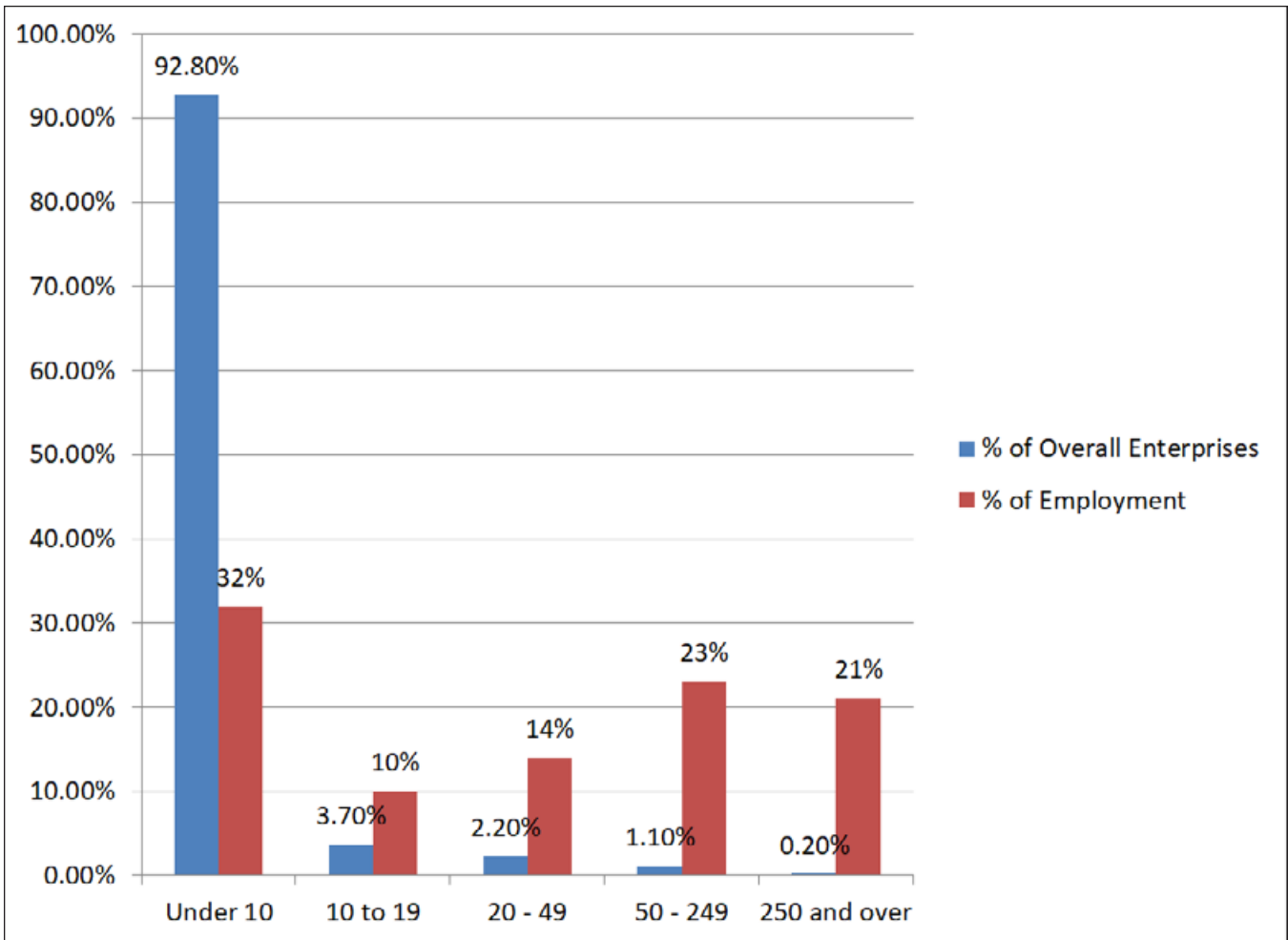
With regard to overall occupations (public and private

‘Anybody who gets a job in tourism, straight away it’s minimum wage, it’s seasonal, it doesn’t add to anybody’s quality of life.’

sector), the 2016 Census revealed the following breakdown of workers in Clare, compared to the state. It found that Clare has more residents working in agriculture, forestry or fishing than nationally – 6.9% compared to 4.4%. However, the percentage of jobs in those sectors is comparatively low for a country with a 59:41 percentage split in terms of rural and urban households. The percentage of jobs in manufacturing and industry is over double that of agriculture, forestry and fishing combined. It stood at 15.5%, compared to 11.4% for manufacturing and industry across the state. According to the 2016 Census, there were three unemployment blackspots in Co. Clare. These were Kilrush (27.9%), Ennis No.2 Urban (29.1%), and Kilkee (28.1%).⁴⁶

‘Anybody who gets a job in tourism straight away it’s minimum wage, it’s seasonal, it doesn’t add to anybody’s quality of life. The only ones who benefit from the tourism industry are the owners of the businesses.’
– Clare PPN group interview, Kilrush, April 2022

There were 868 tourism enterprises in Clare in 2019, employing a yearly average of 4,722 people. These figures were supplied directly to the present author by the CSO.⁴⁷ There were an additional 629 owners and family members also employed, giving a yearly average of 5,351 persons engaged in the sector that year. We do not have a figure for total employment in Clare in 2019. The latest figure we have dates from 2016, when 49,511 people



were employed. Allowing for demographics and the increase in employment from 2016 to 2019, it appears that tourism, on average, accounts for around 9%-10% of employment in Clare.

The CSO also supplied the present author with figures for 2020.⁴⁸ There were 845 active tourism enterprises that year, employing 3,503 persons, with 4,102 persons working in the sector once working proprietors and family members were taken into account. This was a drop in employment of around 24%, reflecting the impact of Covid on the industry that year.

It should be noted that the CSO's definition of tourism enterprises includes activities that are not solely tourist-related such as taxi operation, rail transport, mobile food services, coffee shops, car hire, and the renting and leasing of cars and trucks.⁴⁹ However, the figure of between 4,100 and 4,700 Full-Time-Equivalent (FTE) jobs in tourism seems to tally with other surveys.

In its 2020 publication, *County Clare Tourism Strategy 2030*, Clare County Council said that 6,600 jobs were supported by tourism in the county.⁵⁰ However, while

no source or reference was given for this statistic, the reports said that the job figure equates to '4,440 FTEs [Full-Time Equivalents].'⁵¹ The 2018 publication, *Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026*, calculated the number of people employed in tourism in 2015 by looking at the estimated total income from tourism in the county and extrapolating employment from that figure. It said,

'In terms of the Catering and Accommodation sector, which is a proxy for tourism-related direct employment (overseas and domestic), Fáilte Ireland estimated that, in 2015, overseas tourism (597,000 visitors) expenditure was €127 million and domestic tourism expenditure was €101 million in Co Clare. On the basis that 30% (€68 million) of total revenue was available for wages at €17,000 per full time equivalent job, 4,000 jobs approximately were supported in the county.'⁵²

While the methodology used is somewhat questionable, the final figure arrived at does resonate somewhat with the CSO figures. The minimum wage was €8.65 p/h in 2015, which would equate to €17,000 per year based on a 37hr week. In other words, the analysis put forward

Table 5: Breakdown of workers by industry in Clare compared to the State

Industry	Clare	State
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	6.9%	4.4%
Building and construction	5.1%	5.1%
Manufacturing and industries	15.5%	11.4%
Commerce and trade	18.3%	23.9%
Transport and communications	7.9%	8.6%
Public administration	5.6%	5.3%
Professional services	22.5%	23.5%
Other	18.1%	17.8%



by Clare County Council on the future of tourism in the county was predicated on a minimum wage workforce across the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Of the 2.652 million visitors to the mid-west region (Clare, Limerick and Tipperary) in 2019, 1.6m or 60% visited the Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience Centre.⁵³ It employs 110 full-time staff during the peak season, with another 50 people employed by tenant companies on the site.⁵⁴ The Cliffs of Moher are associated primarily with package holidays, particularly foreign travellers who arrive on tour buses and leave directly afterwards. This can be seen by the type of tourist who visits the Centre. Only 11% are domestic, the other 89% comprising visitors from overseas.⁵⁵ Of the 1.432m overseas tourists who visited the mid-west region in 2019, 1.424m of them (99.44%) paid to attend the Centre.

It is an astonishing concentration of tourist business in one site, and given its tour bus nature, it is fair to say that a significant proportion of all visitors to the Centre are bused in and bused back out again with little by way of spillover in additional expenditure in the county. It is no

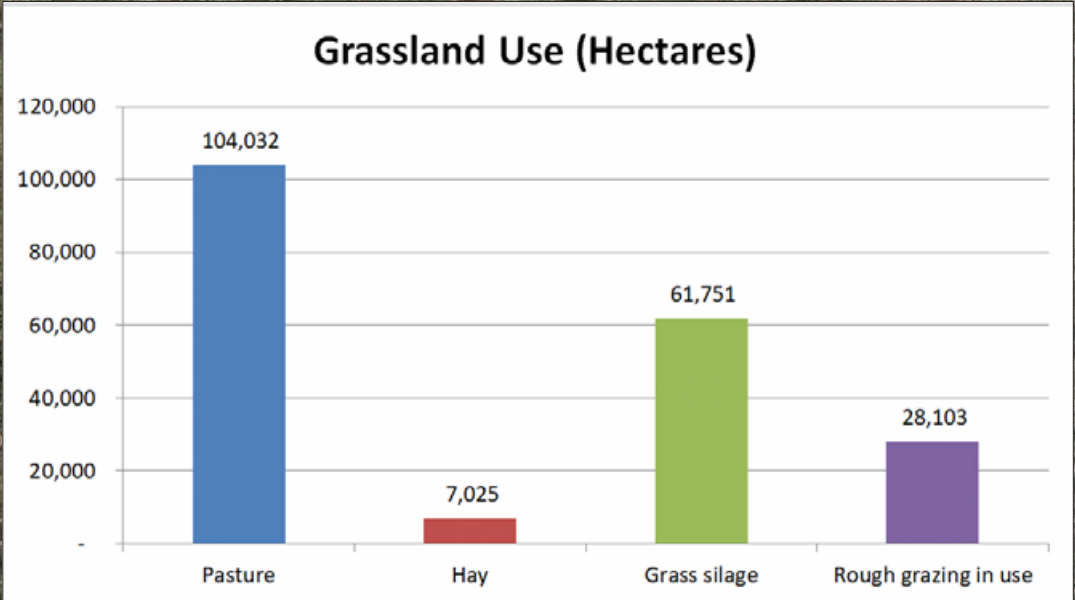
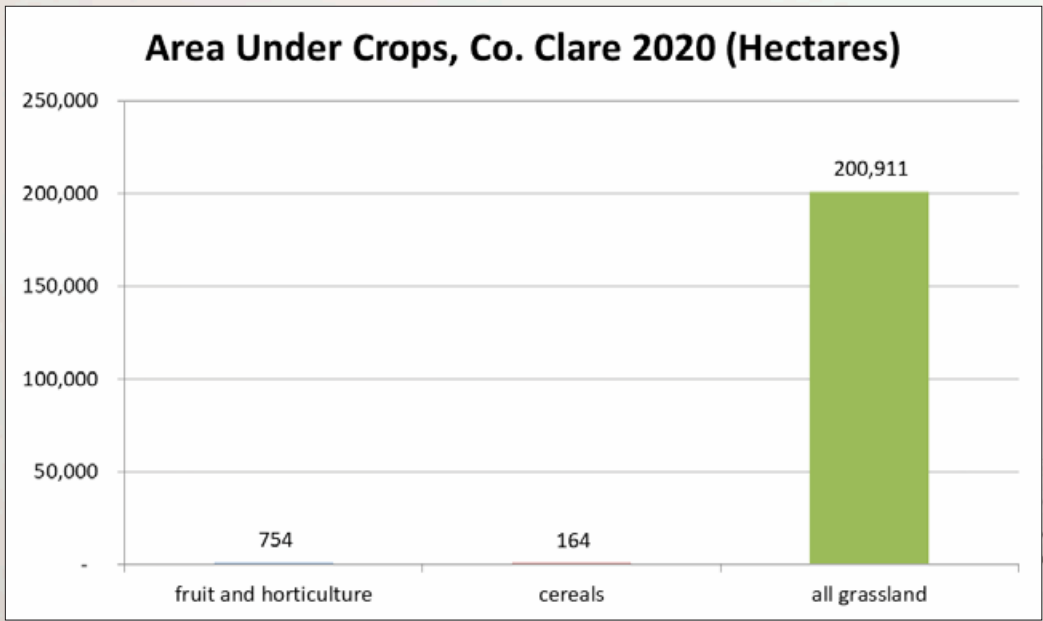
surprise then that the local community feels disconnected with the Centre, seeing only severe traffic disruption as the main 'benefit' to the community.⁵⁶

The figure of c.4,400 tourist jobs in Clare arrived at by both the CSO and Clare County Council while using different methodologies gives credence to the conclusion that the sector accounts for around 9%-10% of employment in the county on a yearly average. These jobs, by frank admission of the Council, are extremely low paid, the absolute minimum pay allowed by law – a state of affairs that was expressed by a participant in the group interview session in Kilrush, as earlier quoted.

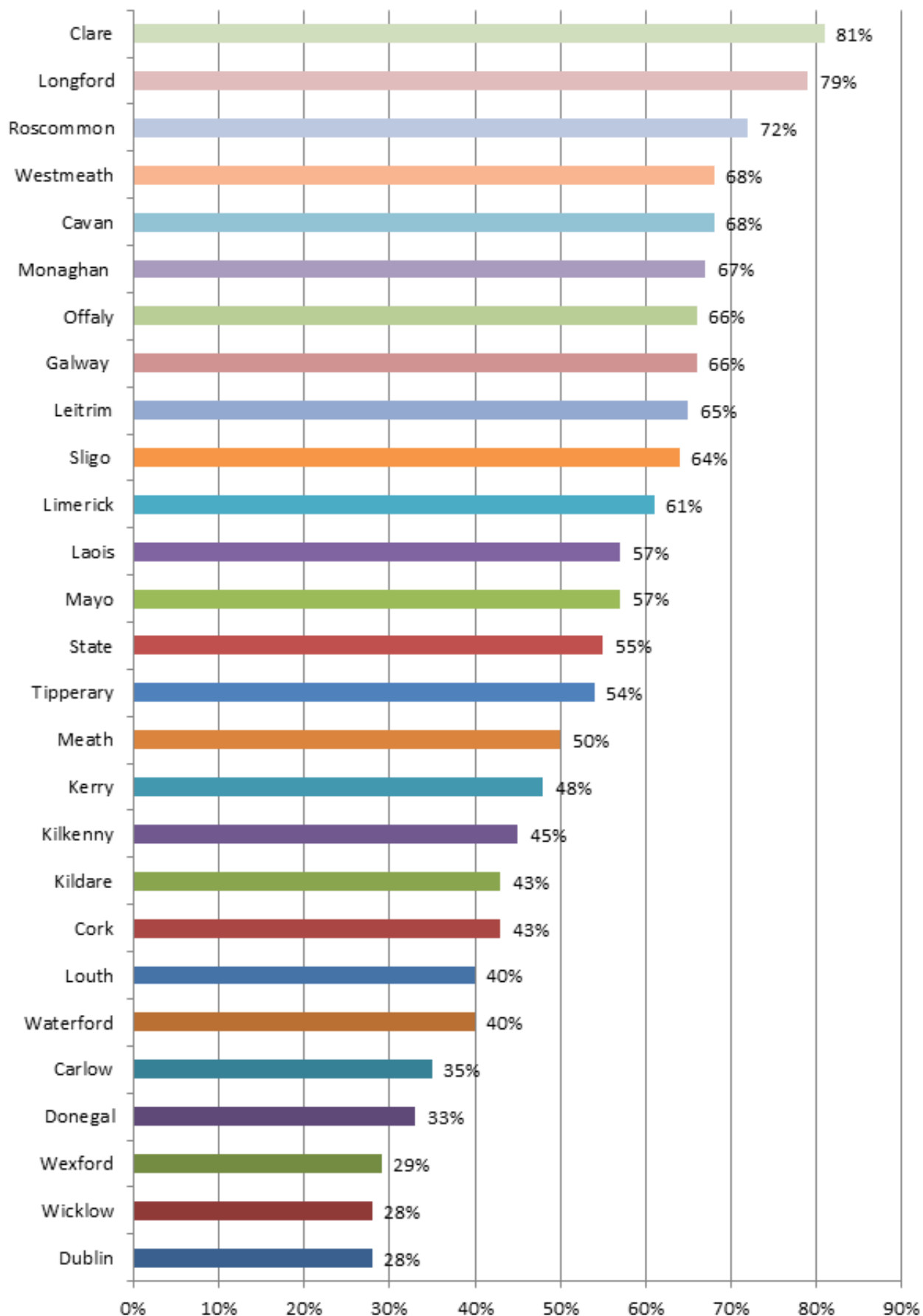
The employment figure also stands out in that, based on the most recent figures available, there are more vacant holiday homes in Clare (4,912) than employees in tourism (4,722).

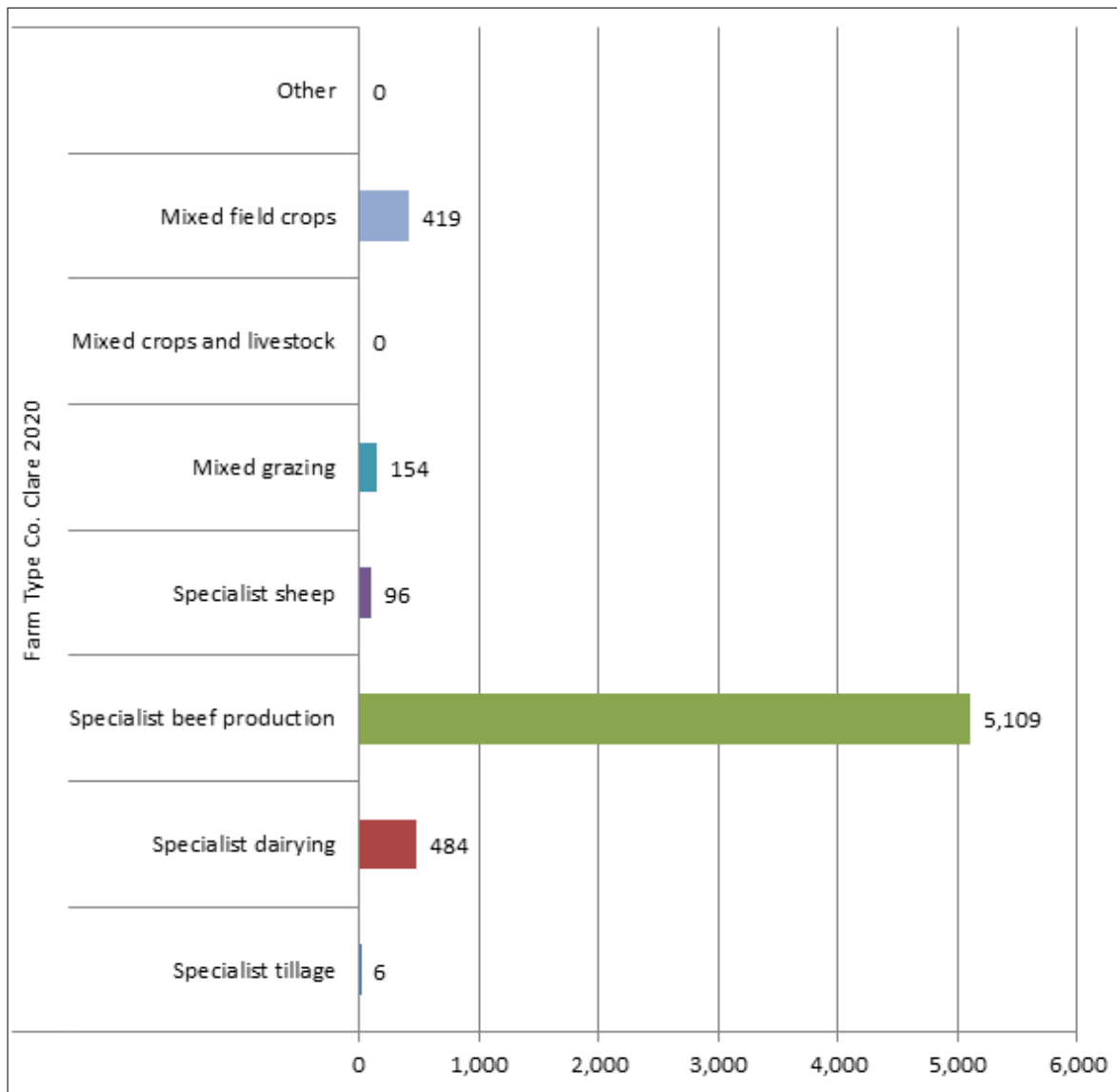
Agriculture

As of 2020, there were 6,297 agricultural holdings in Clare with an average size of 79 acres.⁵⁷ Of these, 6,153 (98%) were listed as family farms.⁵⁸ The CSO defines



Specialist beef production farms 2020 % of county total





an agricultural holding as ‘a single unit, both technically and economically, which has a single management and which undertakes agricultural activities’.⁵⁹ The average age of a holder was 57 years.⁶⁰

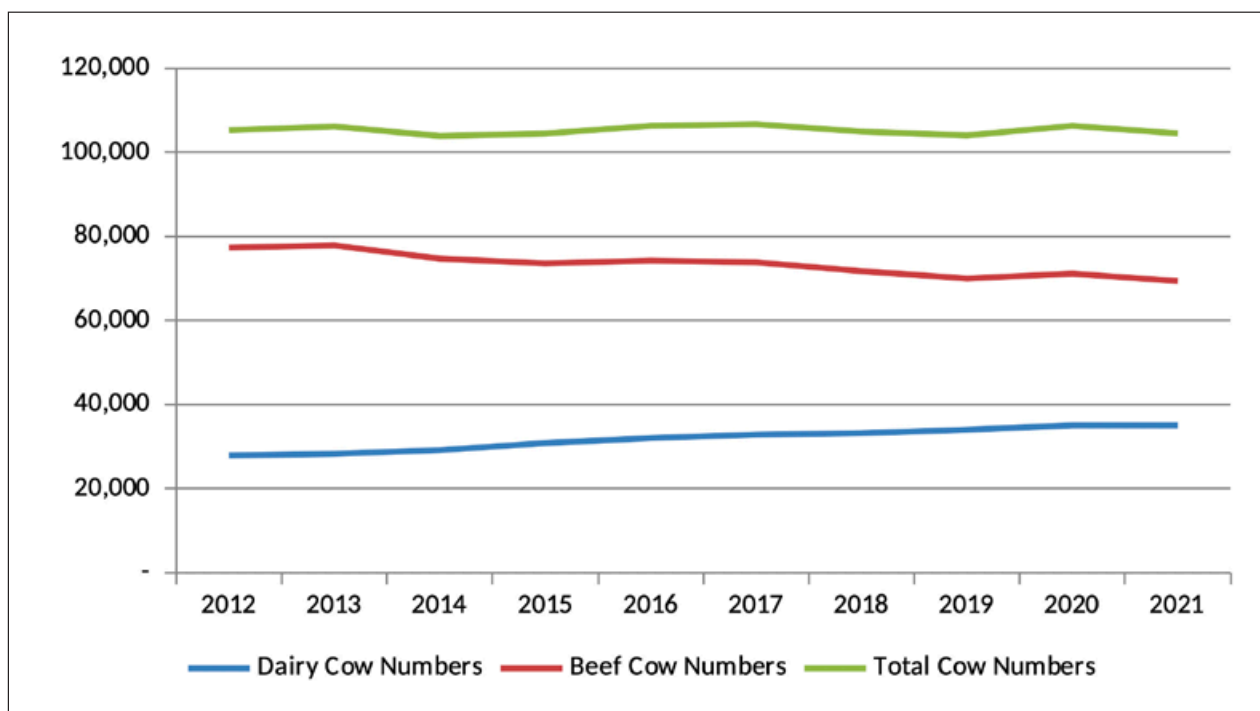
The CSO has statistics on the number of family farms who list farming as their sole occupation, as their major occupation, and as a subsidiary occupation – but it does not release these figures at county level, only at regional level.

The most recent figures on agricultural employment in Clare are from Census 2016. The number of people listed that year as working in farming, fisheries and forestry was 3,423. Given that not everyone who works in the sector owns an agricultural holding, it is reasonable to assume that the majority of farmers in Clare are part-time and use it to subsidise their income rather than the other way round.

There are 201,829 hectares of farmland in Clare, which

is around 63% of the total area of the county.⁶¹ In 2017 it had 57,447 hectares of forest cover (including non-forest woodland and scrub), around 18% of the county.⁶² Virtually all of the farmland area under crops is used as grassland.⁶³ The vast majority of farms are engaged in specialist beef production. At 81%, it is the highest concentration of beef farms in the state. The average for the Mid-West region is 65%, with Limerick at 61% and Tipperary at 54%. The significant difference between the regional average and the actual county figure is just one example of the pitfalls of using regional statistics as a proxy for Clare.

The comparatively low number of specialist dairying farms in Clare is not reflected in the county herd. On 1st June 2020 there were 35,148 dairy cows recorded in the county, along with 71,108 beef cows – a breakdown of 33% and 67% respectively.⁶⁴ The percentage of specialist dairying farms is 8%, while specialist beef production farms is 81%. While it is not possible to give an accu-



Source: Irish Cattle Breeding Federation, Stock Numbers Statistics (Clare County)

rate figure for the average amount of cattle per specialist dairying farm – due to the presence of 154 mixed grazing farms – it is probably fair to say that dairying farms in Clare tend to be bigger than beef farms, and therefore less likely to comprise part-time farmers or people working as farmers to subsidise their income. In other words, there is an observable socio-economic dynamic at play between dairying and beef production in Clare. This dynamic can be further observed by the growth and decline in the dairying and beef herds respectively. While the number of beef cows in Clare has fallen by -10% since 2012 (-7,964), the number of dairy cows has risen by +24% (+7,187). The overall herd in Clare has fallen by about -1% in nine years, but this masks the change in composition with an almost one-for-one swap of beef cattle for dairy cattle. The fact that there are far fewer specialised dairy farms than beef farms in the county would suggest a trend towards a concentration in dairy cattle at the expense of specialised beef farms.

The general secretary of the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association, Eddie Punch, told the *Clare Champion* in 2021 there were 'significant parts of West Clare and the Burren where sucklers are the only realistic enterprise. There is great stock being produced on these farms, but they're not suitable for tillage, fattening cattle or dairying because the farms are fragmented or the land isn't good enough.'⁶⁵ The region is among the poorest in the county. The prominence of specialist beef

production in the economics of West Clare is due more to the lack of viable alternatives in terms of income generation than to the industry itself. At the same time this is also its strongest point: in a poor region, suckler farming provides one of the few sources of income for families and (to a lesser extent) the surrounding area.

The Irish government recently announced a target of a 25% cut in agricultural greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The debate as to whether this target constitutes appropriate climate action (along with the essentially voluntarist nature of the target) is outside the scope of this report. However, regardless of the merits or otherwise of the policy, there is almost universal agreement that the national herd will have to be reduced in size in order to meet any reduction targets. This means there is a particular and urgent need for a just transition for farmers in Clare, given that 89% of farms in the county are dedicated to specialised beef and dairy farming. Clare PPN's environmental groups have expressed their concerns in relation to the effects of intensive dairying and nitrates use on water catchment areas in the county and identify access to clean water and waste water treatment for rural communities as key issues to be addressed in ensuring a just transition.⁶⁶

Just Transition or just a transition?

According to the European Commission, a Just Transition in climate action is 'a key tool to ensure that the



transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaving no one behind.⁶⁷ The Climate Justice Alliance defines it as ‘a vision-led, unifying and place-based set of principles, processes, and practices that build economic and political power to shift from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy.’⁶⁸ It adds that:

‘The transition itself must be just and equitable; redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations. If the process of transition is not just, the outcome will never be. Just Transition describes both where we are going and how we get there.’

This approach is echoed by Sinéad Mercier, the leading Irish theoretician on the principles and objectives of a Just Transition. In a paper published by the Irish Economic and Social Council in 2020, Mercier argued that, among other things:

- Social dialogue is an effective, if not fundamental, mechanism for fostering trust and adopting a problem solving approach to transition. It fosters shared understanding, enables the exchange of difficult facts, supports delivery and encourages a prob-

lem-solving approach.

- An inclusive, place-based approach is necessary, with an overall focus on regional development rather than just directly affected workers and companies.
- Uncovering, valuing and cultivating the existing skills and capacities of a region can assist in sustainably developing a region and creating long-term, high-quality employment.
- State investment in supportive alternative infrastructure is a key driver of a positive transition.⁶⁹

This is not exactly the approach taken by Irish government in its Climate Action Plan, which was published in 2021. It says:

‘While just transition can also be applied in other policy contexts to refer to policy considerations which require fairness, inclusion and protection of the most vulnerable, in the context of climate policy the term is used specifically in relation to the transition to a climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy.’⁷⁰

The emphasis on a ‘climate neutral economy’ rather than on community is at odds with the principles of a Just Transition. For example, it is entirely possible to have a ‘climate neutral economy’ 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 – but it would hardly be an approach informed by social justice. The entire reason for a Just Transition is to *avoid* such neoliberal deconstructions from happening in the first place in the supposed name of ‘progress’.

The government, in its plan, is effectively saying that it will adhere to the principles of a climate action Just Transition *except when it comes to climate action*. The policy as framed is more akin to a compensation scheme, a buyout of affected businesses, than anything that can be recognised as a Just Transition. There is no dedicated strategy for the affected communities, villages, towns, and regions outside of a vague promise that the free market will provide jobs and houses and hospitals. There have been no attempts to establish the type of community-influenced dialogue and input that is critical to a Just Transition process.

Clare County Council, in Volume 10b(i) of its draft County Development Plan 2023-2029 (“Strategic Environmental Assessment [SEA] Environment Report”), was challenged by the SEA to ‘achieve a Just Transition,

The vast majority of farms are engaged in specialist beef production. At 81%, it is the highest concentration of beef farms in the state

particularly for communities that may be economically disadvantaged by decarbonising projects'.⁷¹ It said in response that 'This is achieved through the inclusion of CDP Objective 2.2 relating to Climate Change Mitigation, Adaptation and Resilience.' Yet, CDP Objective 2.2 says nothing of the sort. It reads:

"It is an objective of the Clare County Council:

- a) To support the implementation of the Clare Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 (and any subsequent versions);
- b) To promote measures that build resilience to climate change to address impact reduction, adaptive capacity, awareness raising, providing for nature-based solutions and emergency planning;
- c) To raise awareness of issues relating to climate change and climate change adaptation during the lifetime of this Plan;
- d) To liaise, collaborate and work in partnership with the relevant Government approved sectors in relation to initiatives and activities across the County;
- e) To support the Ennis 2040 Spatial and Economic Strategy and its aspiration for Ennis to become Ireland's first climate adaptive town; and
- f) To facilitate and support the relevant stakeholders and enterprises in the progression of advancements in climate adaptation solutions and renewable energy generation and technologies.⁷²

The Council's objective simply tallies with the government's objective to implement climate action without reference to the guiding principles of a Just Transition. The *Clare Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024*, to which the Council refers, does not mention a Just Transition once, merely that it aims to achieve a 'successful transition to low carbon and climate resilient society'.⁷³

The Just Transition Alliance, which includes the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, SIPTU, Fórsa, Friends of the Earth, Stop Climate Chaos (of which Clare PPN is a member), and TASC, recently voiced its concerns about

the government's lack of adherence to the core principles of a Just Transition. In March 2022 it said that,

'The Government is now devising sectoral emission ceilings for all economic sectors, but it does not appear to contemplate any form of dialogue or engagement with communities or unions that represent workers in these sectors. We believe that each new sectoral ceiling must be accompanied by a mandatory Employment Impact Report, which identifies the measures required to mitigate or offset job losses.'⁷⁴

The alliance reiterated that the state needs 'a Just Transition to protect and create jobs, reduce emissions, enhance living standards, safeguard and restore biodiversity and generate new opportunities that will help to build sustainable, resilient communities across the country'.

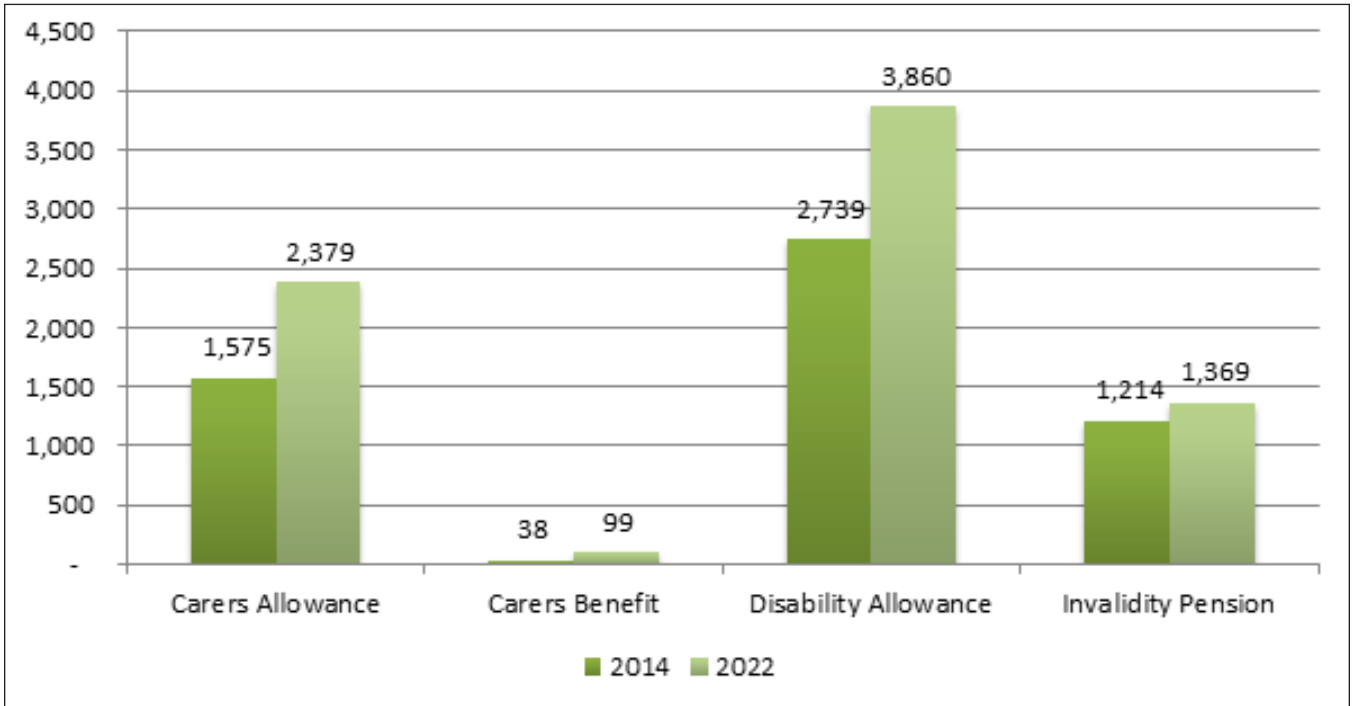
At one point in its Climate Action Plan, the government says its approach, which it sees as 'both incremental and broadly-based',

'does not exclude the possibility of concentrated impacts in different parts of the country or income groups (e.g. with higher reliance on private cars for mobility, on solid fuels for domestic heating, or on particular types of agricultural production).'⁷⁵

It has essentially described Clare in this sentence, and yet there is no dedicated Just Transition plan for the county. This is despite the fact that there will need to be anywhere between -6% and -22% cut in the beef herd in order to meet climate action targets for the agricultural sector.

Without a Just Transition plan in place for Clare, it is likely that these 'cuts' will be achieved through the forced exit of low to middle income family farms from the sector with no replacement plan in place for those communities. As noted elsewhere in this report, carbon reductions and taxes will also impact disproportionately on Clare given the dependence on fossil fuels for heating and private car transport. Clare is also the county in Ireland third most at risk for flooding due to climate change, with an estimated 13% of its housing at risk of flooding during the next 30 years.⁷⁶

Clare PPN has engaged with the Local Authority in regards to its preparedness through various avenues, including in 2019 making an extensive submission to the County's Climate Adaptation Strategy. However, neither their concerns nor proposed solutions formed part of the eventual strategy, with the local authority deciding not to take on board a single suggestions from a range of public submissions received, including Clare PPN's.⁷⁷



4. POVERTY

There is a distinct lack of detailed statistics on poverty in Clare. The Minister for Social Protection said: ‘poverty data is not available at county level, only at a regional level.’ This was in response to a series of questions put by TDs Cathal Crowe, Michael McNamara, and Violet-Anne Wynne.⁷⁸

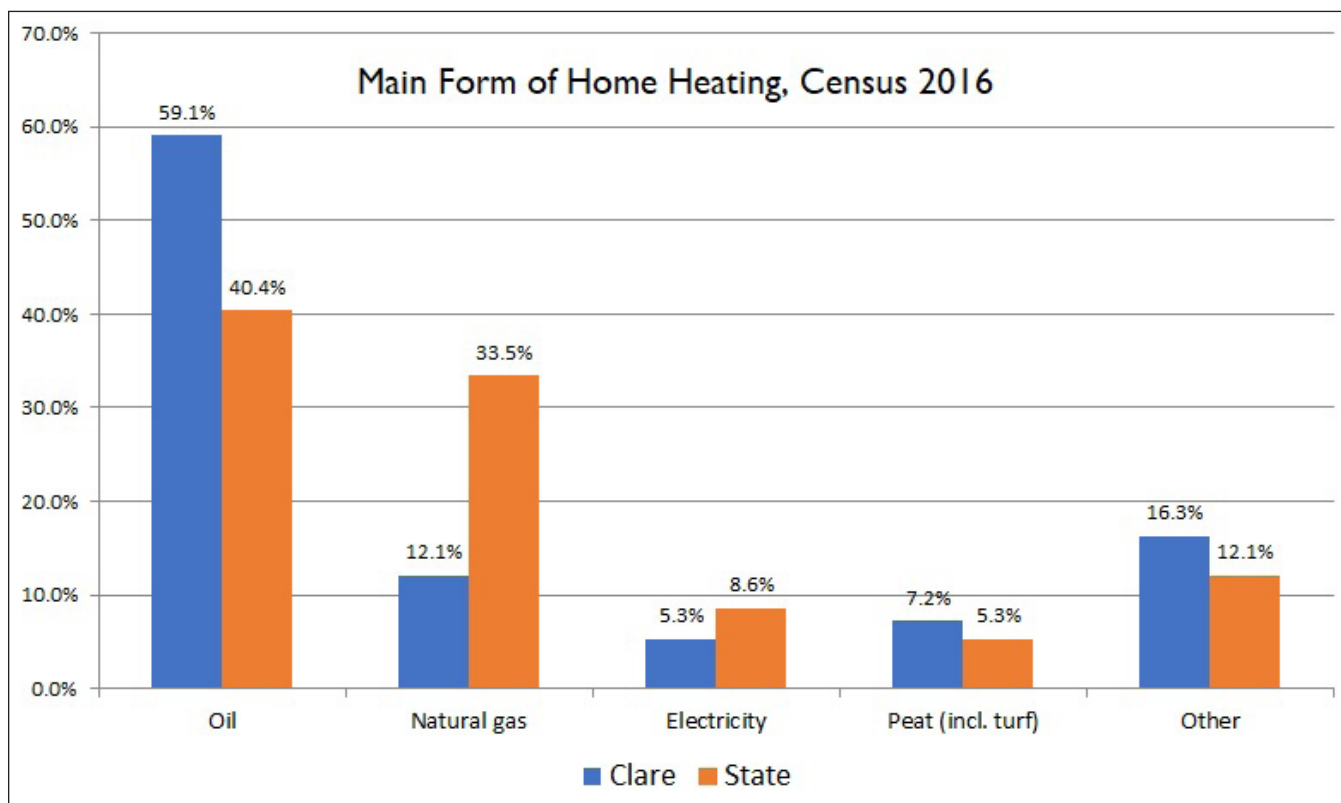
There is no data on child poverty at a regional, county or electoral area/district level. The Minister said that despite this, ‘addressing child poverty continues to be a Government priority.’ He said the government’s ‘roadmap for social inclusion underlines that no child in Ireland should live in poverty and that, where it happens due to adverse circumstances, available supports should ensure that the child and their family exit poverty as soon as is possible.’ It has not been explained by any government department or minister how it is possible to address systemically where child poverty happens in the absence of factual information on where child poverty happens.

There is no official food poverty indicator in Ireland, nor is it measured at a regional, county, or electoral area/district level. In April 2021, the Minister for Social Protection established a Working Group on Food Poverty in order to deliver on a commitment to ‘develop a comprehensive programme of work to further explore

the drivers of food poverty and to identify mitigating actions.’ The Minister said that the ‘membership of this group comprises representatives from relevant government departments as well as the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Crosscare and the Children’s Rights Alliance.’

When asked to provide the reports and information that the Working Group will draw upon, the Minister listed among other items an article from 2015 by Diarmuid D Sugrue, UCD School of Medicine and Medical Science, entitled ‘Food Poverty and Policy In Ireland: A Review of the Literature.’ Sugrue found ‘major problems in the calculation of food poverty in the Irish population’; that ‘no direct population-wide analysis of food poverty has ever been carried out in Ireland’; and that ‘the SILC [Survey on Income and Living Conditions] does not measure access to food, nor the nutritional quality of that which is affordable’.⁷⁹

The situation has not changed in the intervening years. In May 2022 a book written by Michael Drew entitled, *Uncovering Food Poverty in Ireland: A Hidden Deprivation*, was published by Polity Press. It agreed with the characterisation of the policy response to food poverty in Ireland as one led by ‘inaction, incoherence and ineffectiveness’.⁸⁰ The Working Group on Food Poverty appears to be operating in the absence of even the basic statistical data on the structural reality of food poverty that is needed to complete its task. It has plans



to develop two case studies – one urban and one rural – presumably to use them as a proxy for all urban and all rural areas. However, we know from the few statistical reports available – such as the Pobal Deprivation Index 2016 – as well as from personal testimony from organisations on the ground in Clare, that there are significant variations to deprivation even within the county, never mind across the state. It is hard to see at this stage what benefit, if any, the eventual findings of the Working Group will be to the people of Clare given the absence of even the most rudimentary of applicable data on the issue in the county.

There is no official fuel poverty indicator in Ireland. The issue is not measured at a regional, county, or electoral area/district level.

While there are government commitments to tackling child poverty, food poverty and fuel poverty, there is no concurrent commitment to providing data on these issues and measuring or mapping their occurrence at a county and electoral area/district level.

This is a significant hurdle to overcome in terms of producing even the most basic of targeted policy initiatives. When it comes to poverty, there is a deep-rooted aversion to mapping its reality by certain government departments and state institutions – a situation that is hard to understand, comprehend or, indeed, justify.

Illness, Disability and Caring

At the end of June 2022 there were 2,478 people in Clare in receipt of a carers payment from the Department of Social Protection: 2,379 were receiving Carers Allowance, while 99 were receiving Carers Benefit.⁸¹ This is a 54% increase in recipients since March 2014. There were 3,860 people in receipt of Disability Allowance – a 40% increase over the same period. There were also 1,369 people in receipt of Invalidity Pension – a 13% increase since 2014.

Around 13% of people in Clare have a disability, according to the last Census. There were 60 employers in the county in 2019 who availed of government's Wage Subsidy Scheme, which is designed to encourage employers to employ people with disabilities.⁸² This was about 1% of all active enterprises in the county that year.

Around 4.62% of Clare's population were engaged in unpaid care work – that is, work for which they did not receive a wage. The county had the third-highest rate of unpaid carers in the state, after Sligo (4.73%) and Mayo (4.7%).⁸³ Family Carers Ireland published its first survey of the state of caring in Ireland in 2020. It was a nationwide survey and did not have a county-by-county breakdown. However, given the fact that Clare has one of the highest percentages of carers in the state, it is not unreasonable to assume that many (if not all) of the findings are deeply reflective of the reality for carers in Clare.

The report found that:

- 55% of carers have given up paid employment to care for a loved one
- 29% of carers live in households with a total income of less than €20,000 per year
- 70% of carers find it hard to make ends meet
- 57% of carers have experienced or are likely to experience debt as a result of caring
- 21% of carers who are struggling financially have cut back on essentials such as groceries and heating
- 75% of carers who juggle caring with full-time employment provide over 50 hours of care per week
- 75% of carers experienced difficulties accessing services for at least one of the people they care for⁸⁴

It also found that 'Over 1 in 10 (12%) [of carers] are in arrears with their rent and mortgage and 15% are in arrears with utility bills... 66% of carers who also have a health condition or disability are more likely to find themselves in debt (compared to 57% of all carers)... [and] one in four of carers said they cannot prepare for future care needs as they have no savings and live on a low income.'⁸⁵

Fuel and Transport

The issue of home fuel/heating has a particular impact on Clare as, according to data from the 2016 Census, 59.1% of all households used oil as the main source of home heating. The average prices of 1,000 litres of home heating oil in Clare in 2016 was €583. The price as of 2nd August 2022 was €1,310 – a 125% increase.

There is also a significant reliance on private cars/vans as a primary mode of transport. Around 72% of all journeys in Clare in 2016 were undertaken by car/van. In some areas it was as high as 87%.

The high percentage of car usage is a consequence of the limited public transport network in Clare. Because of this, households are reliant on private car use for their transport needs, with 72.6% of people in the 2016 Census stating that they travelled to work or education by car or van compared to the national average of 62.2%. Only 6.6% of people were able to use public transport for their transport needs, as opposed to 12.9% nationally. This has implications for cost-of-living issues as well as climate action policy. The distinct lack of alternative public transport in the county means that measures to price people out of private car use will have the effect of increasing cost but not lowering demand by any signifi-

55% of carers have given up paid employment to care for a loved one. 70% of carers find it hard to make ends meet

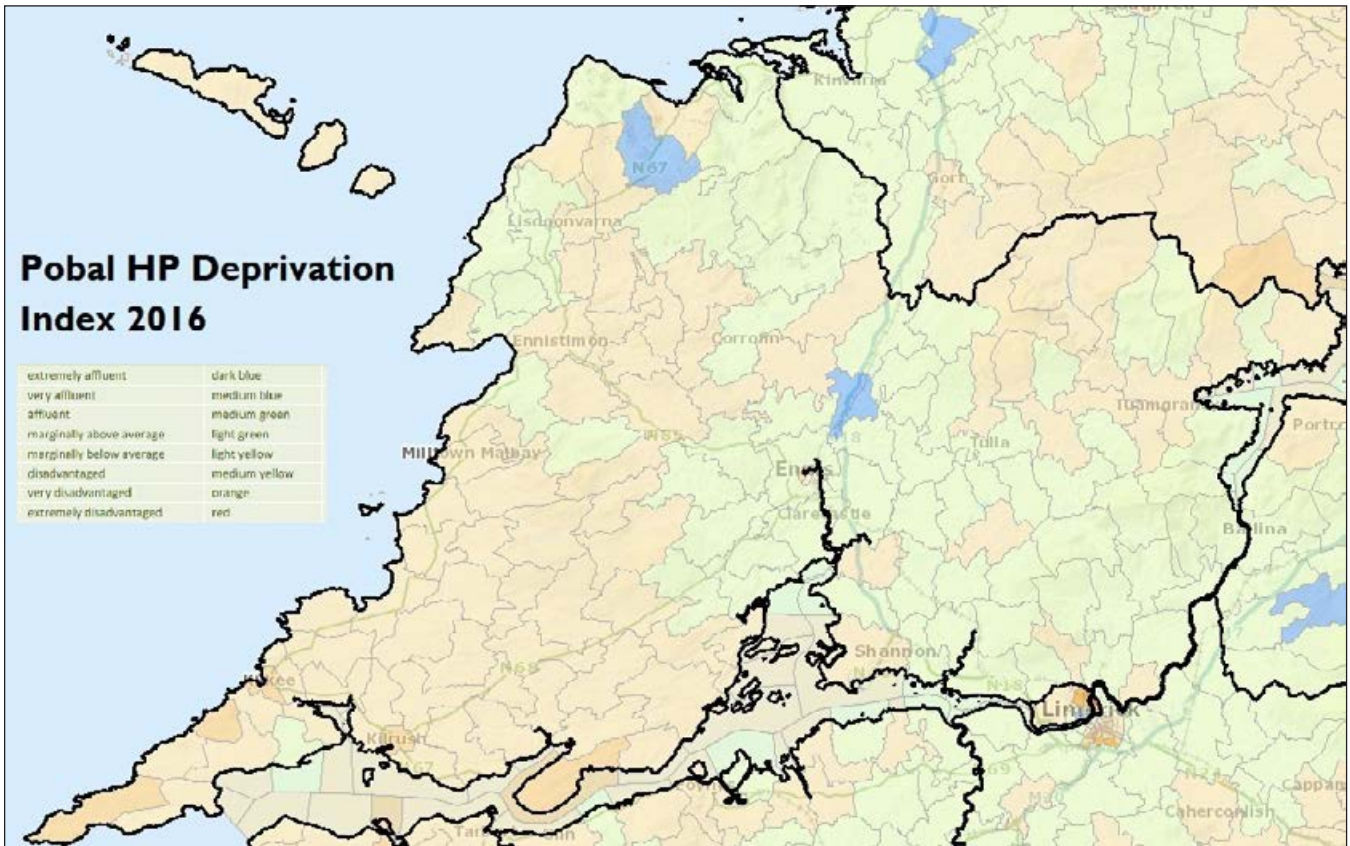
cant level, as the alternatives are not in place.

As discussed by participants in our focus groups, some of the transport options that do exist fail to serve the community needs – one member of Clare Older People's Council had to start an online campaign in order to have the bus timetable adjusted between a town in rural Clare and Ennis because the bus service was scheduled to arrive in Ennis each day minutes after the Ennis to Dublin train departed, making it impossible to travel to the capital in one day by public transport.

Similarly, with around 59% of households in places designated as rural Clare (Census 2016 figures), access to services for those households is a particular issue for the county. The CSO does not provide a county study, but in February 2021 it published *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) Report on Household Amenities and Access to Services 2004-2019*, which gave state-wide findings that nonetheless speak to the realities of rural living in Co Clare today.

The report found that:

- The proportion of rural households with some or great difficulty accessing public transport increased from 48.0% in 2011 to 57.0% in 2019, whereas the proportion for urban households remained the same in 2011 and 2019, 9.8% and 10.0% respectively
- In 2019, one in ten (10.7%) urban households said they had some or great difficulty accessing primary health care services (such as a General Practitioner (GP), a primary health centre, a casualty department or similar, where first-aid treatment could be received), compared with almost four in ten (37.9%) rural households
- Over one in four (28.1%) households in rural areas said they had some or great difficulty accessing a shop in 2019, compared with 6.3% of urban households
- Rural households were also more likely to report having some or great difficulty accessing a bank (44.2%) or post office (33.1%) in 2019, compared with urban households at 16.8% and 8.8% respectively.⁸⁶



Pobal HP Deprivation Index

Pobal was established in 1992 to manage EU grants for local development. Its role today ‘is to provide management and support services to 38 programmes in the areas of Social Inclusion and Equality, Inclusive Employment and Enterprise, and Early Years and Young People.’⁸⁷ In September 2017 it launched the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index which purports to measure ‘the relative affluence or disadvantage of a particular geographical area using data compiled from various censuses.’⁸⁸

Pobal claims it ‘is a key resource to enable a targeted approach towards tackling disadvantage, by providing local analysis of the most disadvantaged areas throughout the state.’⁸⁹

Before presenting the findings from the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, it is important to highlight just what the Index contains and what it does not contain.

Pobal does not measure deprivation linked to housing, health, disability or income; nor does it measure deprivation linked to transport, structural discrimination by gender and/or ethnicity, or the location of socially necessary services and their distance from communities.

The Pobal Index only works as an actual measure of

deprivation if we assume that access to health, housing, income, transport, and services is completely equal for all persons so that age, education, employment, and family structure are the only variables ‘causing’ deprivation. Although it may not be the intention, in the absence of a structural context and analysis, the Index posits the cause of deprivation on the individual – i.e. it is ‘caused’ by a combination of a person’s age, education, job title, and family unit structure.

This can lead to the promotion of solutions such as more education courses in Pobal-defined areas of deprivation as lack of education is seen as a major cause of it. This is based on the premise that one can educate oneself out of deprivation and still remain in the same area. However, as one participant said at a group meeting, ‘we have courses coming out of our ears and nothing changes’.

The Index can still tell us something about deprivation, but only in conjunction with the type of data that Pobal refuses to use as it believes it to be ‘circular’. This includes not only statistical data on housing and health and other issues, but also evidence from people and communities.

This leads us to the final section of this part of the report: the group interview sessions.

5. INTERVIEWS

In Spring 2022, Clare PPN organised a series of group interviews for the purpose of this report. They were held in Ennis, Kilrush, and Shannon over the course of two months. People also had the opportunity to input via email or by phone conversation. The participants included community activists, county councillors, members of the Travelling community, people with lived experience of Ireland's International Protection System, people with disabilities, LGBTQI people, single parents, carers, men and women from the Older People's Council, people with loved ones suffering from addiction and mental health issues, and volunteers and staff members who work in various service provisions across the county. Given the intersectional and structural nature of poverty and discrimination, many of our participants, including those employed in community organisations, had lived experience of multiple, interlinked levels of exclusion and socio-economic insecurity. All comments were made on the basis of anonymity.

There were certain subjects that were common to all sessions. These were housing, health, mental health, disability rights, transport, childcare, care work, the role and experiences of women, Traveller discrimination, the treatment of migrants, and the Direct Provision system.

Housing

Housing dominated the sessions, and people often brought up the link between housing and mental health. In fact, there was a strong sense across all participants of the interconnectedness of issues – an insight that is all too often lacking when it comes to official policy formation and implementation. The participants were acutely aware of the way that social issues compound and consolidate around each other. One example is the following quote from a community volunteer in Ennis, who was able in a couple of sentences to link together housing, mental health, depression, and Direct Provision:

'A lot of people we're seeing, we all know it's happening, there's a lot of couch surfing that you guys were talking about earlier on, it's absolutely huge. When you're talking about well-being and mental health and depression and people needing support for all those things – there are things that can really exacerbate the situation and one of those is not having your own front door. Humble as it may be. Direct Provision of course is a classic example of that around mental health.'

'We have a Direct Provision centre for men in Ennis,

about 52 people there. There's one in Lisdoonvarna for women and family groups, about 120 people there. The biggest and longest running one, Knockalisheen, about 340 people and also technically in Clare although it relies mostly on Limerick city for services. It's just on the boundary. We have also had three phases of resettlement of programme refugees in Clare with families being placed in Ennistymon, Shannon, Sixmilebridge, and Ennis.'

A participant who had spent several years in the direct provision system in Clare responded:

'You ask me what state services are available to me and I have to say that the state service is the problem, IPAS, who run the centres, the system is the problem, while some people with special support needs may need to be in reception centres for longer, most of us don't – I mean what's the risk? We should be allowed live independently in the community, not managed in an institution. People are now talking about own door accommodation but I say we need to live independently – anything else will end up with our lives and families being managed.'

They also said:

'I don't want to say that the locations of the centres are the problem because I want the DP system to be ended, not the centres moved, but they put us in isolated areas where there is nothing in the countryside and you have to get taxis if you need to go to hospital or anything or if your child needs a doctor – people get isolated and they don't have transport and many of them still can't work, childcare doesn't exist, we don't even know yet the damage being done to our children.'

The stress and anxiety caused by the current housing situation is not confined to young people or couples starting a household together. It is an issue that affects all ages. As one person put it:

'People in their 40s and 50s are having to share accommodation and sometimes it's in households where people are 20 or 30 years younger than them. It is unsustainable as a housing model. Homelessness is going up all of the time.'

The housing and rental market was raised by all groups, including the current criteria for social housing, HAP and other supports. It was felt that the rules needed to be reviewed.

'There is a huge disparity between the rent caps here for HAP and actual rent paid. You can't get any-

thing [rent-wise] for less than a €1,000 unless it's in very poor condition and probably isn't a registered landlord which means you're not going to get HAP anyway, so it's a vicious circle. Unless you want a one-bed [flat] and you're not allowed a one-bed if you have a child. Rent freezes, rent reductions, these are needed.'

The criteria for social housing was raised by councillors. They were in agreement as a group that the current eligibility caps are not fit for purpose and serve only to exclude many households who would be eligible if they lived in another county. They highlighted the current income trap of those who earn too much to apply for social housing, but not enough to afford a mortgage or market rents. Some in the community activist group felt that landlords were 'gaming' the situation by not letting out properties until they got the highest price possible.

'There's a false scarcity around housing in Clare. There are landlords sitting on properties waiting for the "right" tenant. We need proper rules and regulations around it instead of this game-playing that is going on.'

The recent census discovered over 900 rental properties in Clare that were vacant for the entire five-week period during which enumerators were knocking on doors and delivering and collecting forms. The comment on false scarcity was made before the census results were published so, although it was anecdotal, it does seem to speak to a certain reality on the ground.

'There are no Clare babies anymore, it's either Limerick or Galway for the maternity depending on where you live.'

Housing is also a huge issue for those with disability. There are often problems with landlords who do not want to have a tenant with a disability, along with issues of accessibility and access to supports and transport needed. In some cases, as a participant who is a wheelchair user noted, even the condition of footpaths in the locality of housing can be the difference between being housebound or able to circulate in the community.

For members of the Travelling community, housing is not just a crisis of access and affordability, it is also a space

of outright discrimination and racism. This point was made not only by members of the Travelling community but also by councillors, community activists and volunteers. It was expressed as an item of fact by settled and Traveller participants that Travellers in Clare are treated with discrimination by private landlords and by local and state institutions and that this needs to change as a matter of the utmost urgency.

One member of the Travelling Community talked of spending months and years in hotel rooms while waiting for suitable accommodation. They said the Council would often tell them a house would soon be available, only for it seemingly to be given to someone else. They said they were well aware that any person that gets a social house obviously needs it, but that it's hard not to see a pattern of people from the settled community getting housing while Travellers wait as the promises fade. 'All they're doing is getting my hopes up,' they said, 'and dragging them down again.' They felt that, at best, there is no consistency around how people are assessed and that this needs to change. They know that people have to wait for social housing, but feel the wait must be fair. Other members of the Travelling community talked about how the Council's Traveller accommodation programme was passed without any real input from Travellers in Clare and doesn't include any plans for new developments of Traveller-specific homes in the county, except on one existing site.

At the meeting of Clare councillors, people talked of how there are significant issues in getting social housing built in Clare – not just in relation to sites and funding, but also in terms of objections from the wider community. They talked of a number of social housing developments that had been cleared by the Council and funds secured, only for planning objections to be lodged by local residents. 'There is a stigma in Clare around social housing,' they said, 'and it is hard to shift.'

Overall, it was felt that there is 'a patchwork of housing strategies' in Clare and they are not working.

Health

Two trends emerged from the group sessions with regard to health. The first related to the loss of services, particularly since the 2008 crash including, as some of the community workers noted, the downgrading of Ennis hospital and the relocating of services to UHL in Limerick; the other related to the historical absence of services – that is, services that were never there in the first place.

In Ennis, participants made the following points:

‘There are no Clare babies anymore, it’s either Limerick or Galway for the maternity depending on where you live. And this is not something that happened yesterday. You’re talking about over a 20-year period. In general for medical services it’s Limerick or Galway, or if you’re in east Clare you go to Tipperary for your healthcare.’

‘There’s no emergency unit. There’s an injury clinic in Ennis that’s open from 8am to 6pm. Now, I had a fall one time and I was told if it was above my knee that they couldn’t see me. It was my hip that was bothering me so I had to go into Limerick for that. So there’s that kind of thing.’

‘And you also have to deal with the distance. Like if you have to go from west Clare into Limerick or Galway you’re talking about 70/80km and there have been fatalities that you could say were linked to the distances.’

One participant in Shannon shared their recent experience of being forced, in their view, into private health care due to waiting lists.

‘This month alone I had to go to a cardiologist. That’s €200 a trot, or I could go on a two and a half year waiting list. I’ve to go into Limerick to a private outfit to get a thing done on the arteries in my neck, an ultrasound there. I have these [health] issues and they should be addressed but they’re not addressed by the health services. And there was a time when they would have been addressed.’

In Kilrush, the participants talked not only of losing services, but of not having essential services in the first place. The issues of mental health and addiction were ones that participants felt were forgotten about or not taken seriously by the authorities. The fact that addiction and mental health are intertwined was lost on service providers, according to the participants, who felt that the HSE tended to have an either/or setup in terms of treatment.

‘Addiction and mental health are two huge issues here around Kilrush. The day hospital hasn’t had a clear psychologist in about four years. They come and go. There’s no programme that anyone can go into that can develop and support them to get through whatever they’re going through.’

‘They’re not interested in anything other than a medical model.’

‘You can’t keep an emergency for the day that services show up, be it a Wednesday or a Friday or whatever. So people are left to fend for themselves.’

‘I’m on medication that costs a lot of money and I couldn’t afford them if I was working because I’d lose the medical card. It’s a trap. I can’t afford to work’

‘Under the guise of improving our services, they are taking away what we had. And those services were working. Something as simple as the Warfarin clinic, which was working very well for eight or 10 years, and mostly helping women, back in west Clare. They took it away and brought it over to Ennis. They took away what was actually working.’

In Shannon a participant talked of issues associated with having a mental health crisis outside daytime clinic hours.

‘If you have a crisis at night and you don’t have a letter from your doctor you can be turned away at the unit. And for somebody in distress to be turned away at that time of the morning, I mean...’

The lack of proper mental health supports was a significant issue among participants from the Travelling community. One person said that while appointments to see a doctor regarding mental health were not an issue, the focus was on medication:

‘There are no services, just tablets. You see the doctor and they just put you on antidepressants. “Ah here, take these,” they say, “you’ll be down for a week.”’

One person made the point about support for certain types of business and work activity in West Clare, but not for health.

‘It’s interesting how Clare County Council set about getting the means for people to work in digital hubs, where you could go to do your work for your employer, but it didn’t set up any health hubs. It’s not innovative around our needs.’

Gender and Poverty

Participants in Ennis and Kilrush raised the gendered aspect of poverty in Clare. They said this was seen most strongly through care work responsibilities (paid and unpaid); one-parent families (which tend to be women-led); issues around domestic violence and housing; work; income; and health (including mental health). As one person put it:

‘Rent, childcare, income, and physical security. These

are the issues women have to deal with in Clare today. This comes back to work. It's mostly part-time work they get because they have children or there's a care issue. And if the job's in Ennis then you have the issue of transport. Now they need a car because the public transport won't fit the hours they're working.'

Another person talked about the issues that come up in their local women's group and made an incredibly powerful point about the nature of the State when it comes to women in poverty and their needs:

'One of the things that comes up quite strongly in our group is state violence against women. One example is women who are diagnosed with mental health issues that are the result of deprivation, the result of all the things that women identify as their needs and instead of having those needs met, the state is just medicalising their situation with prescription pills and tablets. Meeting people's needs with prescriptions instead of recognising that you're actually perpetuating the situation.'

It was similar to the earlier point raised by members of the Travelling community – that prescription drugs are being used by medical services to dull the emotional damage caused by struggles in a world of curtailed services and truncated social budgets. These issues are a huge source of mental stress for women who for the most part are left on their own to deal with the trauma that arises from the structural poverty that envelops households and communities in Clare, with little by way of support save for a chemical response from the State via antidepressants. As one participant said:

'Women are being prescribed so many anti-depressants. They're not being followed up on. You're being told, "Oh you'll feel worse before you feel better" and it's so difficult to challenge that as an individual. You just think, "Oh that's right, I am crazy," you know?'

Another participant talked of the effect that homelessness has on women and their children in one-parent families:

'You have so-called emergency accommodation that lasts for years. They say six months but for the majority of families, single mothers with kids, they are confined to single rooms, bedrooms basically, and children are born into those rooms, their "home". It's just ridiculous like. The children are not meeting their milestones, and the parents are having mental health problems, it just has a huge knock-on effect.'

This point was expanded upon by others in the room, with one participant saying:

'One parent families are badly affected by childcare, by food poverty, with cost of housing and everything, and medical care when it comes to maternity services and when you've got children.'

The changes to the One Parent Family (OPF) payment, brought in by the Fine Gael/Labour Coalition of 2011-2016, is a direct example of state violence against women, of the kind that was raised by people at the group sessions. In February 2022 Clare TD Violet-Anne Wynne asked the Minister for Social Protection for data regarding the number of recipients of the payment in Clare. The answer showed that while there were 1,175 recipients of the payment in Clare in 2014, this fell to 646 in 2015 – a drop of 45% in one year. 'This is not surprising' said the Minister for Social Protection, 'given the changes to the eligibility rules for OPF and the introduction of the Job-seeker's Transition Payment (JST) during that period.'⁹⁰

Women's care duties often mean their employment opportunities are curtailed, even where work is available.

'Rent, childcare, income, and physical security. These are the issues women have to deal with in Clare today. This comes back to work. It's mostly part-time work they get because they have children or there's a care issue. And if the job's in Ennis then you have the issue of transport. Now they need a car because the public transport won't fit the hours they're working.'

In terms of physical security, one participant made the following point about the effect the housing crisis is having on women who are victims of domestic violence:

'If women have to move from a violent situation, it's on them to find a new place to live, a safe place to live, they often have to move away from their own area, away from their own community, uproot their entire family to do that, and that's a huge ask. There's so much to do to make that move.'

In its pre-budget submission for 2022, Safe Ireland found that a €161m investment in 338 new emergency refuge spaces for victims of domestic violence was needed as a matter of urgency. There were six refuge spaces in Clare pre-Covid. Based on the county's population, that figure should be 13 in order for it to meet the absolute bare minimum of refuge spaces agreed under the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women. The lack of spaces, as well as additional supports, was not addressed in the Budget, leading the CEO of Safe Ireland, Mary McDermott to state:

'It is beyond disappointing, indeed offensive, that despite national prioritisation, and huge efforts by so many to heighten both public and political awareness

of the scale of violence against women, and against children; despite evidence of the cost to survivors, their families, communities and the State, that government has again failed to commit to a coherent response in this budget cycle.⁹¹

It remains to be seen where this issue will be addressed in Budget 2023, although the Minister for Justice has already stated it will take years until services are given the budgets needed to provide even the absolute bare minimum protection for victims of domestic violence.

‘There has been an attitude of exclusion for those with a disability. Purposely.’

– Shannon group interview session, May 2022

Persons with Disabilities

Transport, housing, access, and supports, in particular Personal Assistant Services, were seen as core issues for people with disabilities at a group interview session in Shannon in May 2022. Participants pointed out that there is no shuttle bus around Ennis. Most Bus Éireann buses are not accessible. Using public transport requires booking well in advance and is very limited. One person said they can’t go anywhere in Shannon, even just to meet a friend.

“People with disabilities have to book transport 24 or 48 hours before they use it. If I’m going to Limerick [from Shannon] I ring Irish Rail. I tried to do it online and I am unable. Same with the buses. You can’t just rock up and get the bus.”

The group talked about how there are huge waiting lists for personal assistants and care attendants. Training and funding are greatly lacking, and the jobs themselves do not pay well. There is also a lack of agency for people with disabilities when it comes to home help. One person said:

“I should be allowed to choose who my home help is. Often you do not get that choice, and often personal assistants are making decisions for you when it should be the client who is making decisions.”

People said that in school there are lots of services, including physiotherapy, but as soon as you leave school it all disappears. Physiotherapy has to be paid for, and it is not affordable.

Housing was seen as a big problem. One participant shared their story:

“I was thrown out of my house at 19. I have autism and mental health problems. I was told to go to a charity for help. I eventually got a shared house, but I am sharing with drug users. A doctor called me “retarded”. I want to work but very difficult to get work. It’s very hard for a young, single person to get housing.”

Another person talked about fuel poverty:

“I can’t afford to fill my oil tank. It has risen by €100 to fill the tank. Electricity price rises impact me a lot because I use a medical machine every evening. And people with limited mobility get colder and need more heating.”

There was significant criticism of supports around employment. This related to attitudes of employers towards people with disabilities, as well as state supports which can give rise to a poverty trap if the supports are lost upon attaining employment.

‘I was told by an employer they wouldn’t take me on because it involved too much paperwork.’

‘There is equal access legislation, but very few people use it. It’s a very slow process. And it’s only for an individual every time.’

‘I have a third level qualification in business but I can’t get a job.’

‘Employers and the public need to be made aware of mental health and that people with mental illness can do a good job. They need to be made aware of the advantages of hiring a person with a disability – half the wages are paid by the state.’

‘I’m on medication that costs a lot of money and I couldn’t afford them if I was working because I’d lose the medical card. It’s a trap. I can’t afford to work.’

‘I don’t know if we have to raise awareness with the general public. The people who are locking us out of work are the employers. We need to raise awareness of the advantages of taking us on. All of us here have third level education but all they see is the disability.’

‘We need quotas in employment. Employers should be punished for not keeping to them.’

The participants were very critical of EmployAbility, an employment support and recruitment advice service funded by the Department of Social Protection. Several



participants talked of how they had been ‘through the ropes with EmployAbility’ but to no avail, and that they found it to be a hopeless service.

Participants with disabilities also wished to highlight an ongoing situation whereby a set of personal transport supports which were vital to their ability to afford the transport solutions needed to participate in employment, education and social life were discontinued in 2013 and have not been reinstated. Ombudsman Peter Tyndall said in 2021 that personal transport supports for people with disabilities are inadequate, unfair and inequitable.⁹²

Traveller Community

Lack of housing was seen as the number one issue by participants from the Travelling community who took part in a group interview session in May 2022.

Some had been living in homelessness accommodation for more than three years, usually in a hotel. The public health nurse told them it is not suitable to have two adults and two children in one hotel room.

Clothes, toys and personal belongings have to be stored in boxes piled high around the beds. There’s no room even for a pram. There is nowhere to cook. It is not possible to eat properly. There is nowhere to do laundry, nor any space to have people visit.

There is no space for children to do homework, and no space for them to play. When they get out of the hotel room they run around because of all the stored up energy and they get into trouble.

Dangerous items are left in the bathroom because it is the only room that can be locked. Because of this it is dif-

ficult to potty train a child. There is no security in a hotel, and door cards open other rooms.

All the participants experienced discrimination when trying to find or secure accommodation. Landlords don’t want Travellers so they try to get them out. One participant had been given notice to leave their accommodation by their landlord, but there is nothing available. ‘[Landlords] hear your family name and they don’t want to deal with you.’

Mental health is at crisis point in the Traveller community. Every family has been affected by a death by suicide. Some families have lost many members. There is no access to counselling, just medication. People are given tablets and told to take them and come back in a month’s time. They said the government had promised to improve mental health services for Travellers but that there still isn’t a Traveller mental health action plan in place.

The death by suicide rate among Travellers is seven times that of the settled population. In one particularly affecting moment, a participant talked of how Traveller children are playing ‘funeral’ with their toys.

‘On one particular site where there have been a lot of suicides, I’ve seen children, six, seven, eight, nine years of age, putting on an act with a cardboard box, putting a doll into the box, pretending that it was one of their children, and they’re carrying the box over their shoulder, pretend crying, saying ‘please get up, please get up’. These are children watching what they’ve seen and play-acting it. That has to have huge, huge... [pauses]... I mean, when it comes to that, that’s it, you know?’

Overall, there are gaps in every service. The group talked of how there is no free childcare for two-parent families. There is no therapy for children for ADHD. They will get assessed at five and then go on a list. There is no early intervention. There is not enough support for people with a disability or their families. As one person put it,

‘We have the most wonderful policies in place but nothing is being delivered.’

There are no sanctions for state and public sector service providers if services are not delivered. It was felt by the group there is no accountability. On top of this, the participants said they have to battle institutional forms of racism when it comes to services. Travellers are treated differently for no other reason than they are Travellers.

Service Providers

A number of service providers were interviewed for the purposes of this report. They were asked what are the key issues in their main activity or activities; what are the service or funding gaps they may have; and what is needed to address them. They were also asked what is needed for Clare in general.

We received eight responses from organisations engaged in health, homecare, childcare, family support, addiction services, older persons services, disabled persons services, community development and employment services. Together they deal with thousands of households across Clare on a weekly, sometimes daily, basis.

The service gaps identified by the providers in the quotes below tallied quite strongly with the everyday experience of those that took part in the group interviews.

‘We need accessible mental health services, social worker supports, affordable housing that’s available before people hit crisis point.’

‘We see real issues with fuel poverty and food poverty.’

‘There is a big gap in services for people diagnosed with Early Onset Dementia. They don’t fit into old age services if they are under 65 and dementia is not considered a disability so they don’t qualify for services from the disability sector.’

‘There are no individual plans for people with disabilities to ensure that they have their full potential realised.’

‘The principle of Nothing About Us Without Us is non-existent at all levels of government, state and publicly-funded bodies when it comes to people with disabilities.’

‘There is a lack of qualified staff in childcare and not enough childcare places.’

‘There is a lack of public transportation, and the services that are available are costly.’

‘No playground for children in Ennistymon.’

‘Limited supports available to the Traveller community despite their population size.’

‘Limited access to mental health services.’

‘There is a deficit in social and economic infrastructure in North Clare.’

‘All family supports are based in Ennis’

‘Transportation is an issue for all of rural Clare.’

‘Poverty and resulting inequalities in health, education and employment.’

‘Poor accommodation and physical living conditions and difficulties in physically accessing services.’

Health issues including higher prevalence of chronic diseases, of mental health issues and of drug and alcohol use.’

‘Discrimination and racism.’

‘Recognition of the need for people living with dementia to be given the opportunity to be an integral part of all community activities. Many of them and



‘On one particular site where there have been a lot of suicides, I’ve seen children, six, seven, eight, nine years of age, putting on an act with a cardboard box, putting a doll into the box, pretending that it was one of their children, and they’re carrying the box over their shoulder, pretend crying, saying, “Please get up, please get up.”’

their families do not have the opportunity to take part in community life due to the lack of dementia friendly (universal design) services.’

‘Consultation, participation, and decision-making in services for people with disabilities to be run and controlled by a majority of people with disabilities.’

‘When it comes to services in Clare, there is too much emphasis on the structure rather than the person. There is a lack of opportunity for the proper delivery to the relevant person.’

‘We need a proper strategy and structure to encompass the needs of everyone with regard to the full services that are the responsibility of the Council, the HSE, and other government agencies. The services must be rights-based and have accessibility for all.’

‘A co-ordinated anti-poverty and empowerment approach is needed, with support and training for community leaders.’

In terms of the pressures faced by service providers, funding and staff recruitment/training were seen as key issues. The attitude of the state towards service providers, as well as the frameworks used to access so-called ‘value for money’ were also criticised.

‘We have huge funding gaps. The government expects work done on the ground to be carried out voluntarily. Staff are underpaid and are not valued. There is a need to fund organisations adequately so that staff do not have to spend their time fundraising and applying for grant applications.’

‘Year to year contracts and government funding levels are significant issues that have to be addressed. They make it very hard to develop a strategic plan or do long-term planning. The government pays lip service to consultation but is only interested in stats/ outputs. It is not interested in people’s journeys. The complexities of people’s lives and how they achieve outcomes/progression.’

‘Poor pay in the community sector – mostly mini-

mum wage offered. Few part-time work opportunities. Employer grants [to service providers] are paid for employment over 21 hours which does not suit the majority of our clients who are at threat of losing disability allowance/social welfare/supplementary benefits depending on hours worked.’

‘We have insufficient funding to develop projects.’

‘Due to insufficient resources in terms of recruiting home care staff we are unable to address the demand for home care services.’

‘There is a lack of funding to provide follow-on support services to people.’

‘Limited funding from the HSE enables us to provide only a few hours of home care support if at all in some cases.’

‘We need funding for Travellers and Roma to self-organise in groups, deciding on the focus of work they want to engage in, as much current funding is linked to specific objectives.’

‘Funding to support the development of Traveller-specific responses to accommodation, education and health is needed. A clear targeted approach that can then be used to tackle different issues.’

‘Funding for community initiatives such as social clubs, dementia cafes, cognitive stimulation therapy and sports/ activities for people with dementia which could be embedded in local communities.’

‘Funds are not available for individuals, only for groups. Each person with a disability has specific needs that need to be addressed.’

When asked for solutions, it was quite revealing that both the service providers and participants in the group interviews identified not only a need for more investment and long-term planning, but also a need for a sea change in attitudes and analysis from the state, HSE, local government, and other state agencies when it comes to the needs of Clare. These will be discussed in greater detail in the Conclusion chapter.

6. A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Socio-economic and cultural rights 'are those human rights relating to the workplace, social security, family life, participation in cultural life, and access to housing, food, water, health care and education.'⁹³ The foundational text for these rights is *the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which was drafted in 1966 and ratified by the UN on 3 January 1976.⁹⁴ Today, the UN describes these rights as follows:

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, including 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.⁹⁵

The key element of these rights is how they are expressed and incorporated into legislation and policy practice. They are indivisible and interdependent. They cannot be divid-

ed and parcelled off in sections or made applicable under only particular conditions and circumstances. You cannot say that someone has a right to health and yet deny them the right to decent housing, as the latter will fundamentally affect the former. You cannot say someone has a right to an adequate standard of living and at the same time deny them core workers' rights and decent pay, as again they are interdependent.

Human rights are a chain that cannot be broken up and handed out in pieces, as they only work as a chain of rights. And yet, that is the situation we are faced with in Ireland today.

In its 2002 review, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights affirmed 'that all economic, social and cultural rights [in the Convention] are justiciable' and it strongly recommended that the Irish state 'incorporate economic, social and cultural rights [in the] Constitution, as well as in other domestic legislation.'⁹⁶

Successive Irish governments over the past 50 years have consistently refused to accept this reality. On 1 October 1973 at a ceremony in New York, the then Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Garret Fitzgerald signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on behalf of the Irish state.⁹⁷ It was a political gesture, a signal of intent, but one with no legal standing. Sixteen years later, on 8 December 1989, it was finally ratified by an Irish government, by then one of only two countries in Europe that had not done so.⁹⁸

However, it was done in the absence of a clear constitutional or judicial framework to give effect to the rights expressed in the Convention. As such, the document exists in a kind of legislative purgatory, where it exists in Irish law but is *not enforceable* under Irish law.

This state of affairs has not been lost on the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESER), which monitors implementation of the Covenant. In its second periodic review of Ireland, which it published in June 2002, the Committee noted 'with regret that, despite its previous recommendation in 1999,

Human rights are subject to arbitrary budgetary calculations, where numbers are not collated but guesstimated. They are not rights but privileges, subject to the whim of a statistician's pen



no steps have been taken to incorporate or reflect the Covenant in domestic legislation, and that the [Irish State] could not provide information on case law in which the Covenant and its rights were invoked before the courts.⁹⁹

By the time of its third (and to date the most recent) review in 2015, it said that the ‘Committee regrets that, despite its previous recommendation [in 1999], no steps have been taken to incorporate the Covenant in domestic law and that the State party [i.e. Ireland] does not intend to do so.’¹⁰⁰

The Irish government, in response to the UN review, said that ‘it meets its obligations to implement the Covenant “through policies aimed at improving the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights” as, in its view, “this differentiated approach affords the best means of implementing Ireland’s obligations under the Covenant.”’¹⁰¹ It argued that to involve the courts in adjudication on policy decision, including decision involving expenditure, would go against the separation of powers inherent in the Irish constitution. It is for the Dáil to decide policy, they say, not the courts.

It is something to which the courts themselves appear to agree. In a ruling in 2001, Justice Hardiman gave his opinion as to why the courts should not involve themselves in social and economic issues. He said:

‘Firstly, to do so would offend the constitutional separation of powers. Secondly, it would lead the courts into the taking of decisions in areas in which they have no special qualifications of experience. Thirdly, it would permit the Courts to take such decisions even though they are not, and cannot be, democratically responsible for them as the legislature and the executive are. Fourthly, the evidence based adversarial procedures of the Court, which are excellently adapted for the administrative of commutative justice, are too technical, too expensive, too focused on the individual issue to be an appropriate method for deciding on issues of policy.’¹⁰²

Yet, as Dr. Mary Murphy, acting chair of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in 2014, pointed out as a meeting of the Constitutional Convention that year, ‘constitutional economic and social rights “give a framework with which to manage resource limitations and to protect the most vulnerable... Justiciable economic and social rights offer opportunity to restore faith and trust in political institutions.”’¹⁰³ In a more detailed response to Justice Hardiman’s comments, Gerry Whyte, Professor in Trinity Law School and a Fellow of Trinity College, wrote in 2006:

‘...judicial enforcement of [social, economic and cultural] rights is both constitutionally and democratically legitimate. Such a role for the courts may be defended by reference to strands of the respective ideologies that underpin the Constitution... Moreover it is arguable that an activist role for the courts in this area is both a better fit with the constitutional text and that it would promote the development of deliberative democracy in our society requiring the political system to take account of the needs of marginalised groups who otherwise tend to be ignored.’¹⁰⁴

Whyte points out that the Irish Constitution ‘currently provides explicit protection for at least two socio-economic rights, the right to free elementary education and the right of children suffering from extreme parental neglect to be provided for by the State.’¹⁰⁵ However tentative this may be, the precedent is there and it seems strange to ignore it or to pretend that socio-economic and cultural rights are exclusively the preserve of the Oireachtas to decide, deliver, and adjudicate upon.

The strongest argument in Whyte’s paper, however, comes from Judge Albie Sachs of the Constitutional Court of South Africa. Sachs, a lawyer and long-time anti-apartheid activist, first arrested in 1963 and the victim of a bomb attack in 1988 in Maputo, Mozambique, that was carried out by the South African security services. He lost his right arm and left eye in the attack which nearly killed him.¹⁰⁶ He was appointed to the constitutional Court of South Africa by Nelson Mandela in 1994 and was one of

the authors of the country's post-apartheid constitution. In 2003 he wrote in defence of the judicial enforcement of socio-economic rights. It is worth quoting in full:

The very notion of entrenching rights is to provide a basic framework of constitutional regard for every human being. It is not the duty of courts to side with one section of society against another, however powerful or weak they might be and however sympathetic to their claims individual judges might feel. But there is every reason why it should be incumbent on the courts to see to it that basic respect for the dignity of every person is maintained at all times. That is why we have fundamental rights. The Bill of Rights is there not simply to protect the vested interests of those that have, but to secure basic dignity for those that have not. The key question then is not whether unelected judges should ever take positions on controversial political questions. It is to define in a principled way the limited and functionally manageable circumstances in which the judicial role of being the ultimate protector of human dignity compels them to do so. It is precisely in situations where political leaders may have difficulty withstanding populist pressures, and where human dignity is most at risk, that it becomes an advantage that judges are not accountable. It is at these moments that the judicial function expresses itself in its purest form, as the judges, able to rely on the independence guaranteed to them by the Constitution, ensure that justice is done to all without fear, favour, or prejudice.¹⁰⁷

It is a powerful statement and one that shows up the weakness of the establishment's argument that while the Judiciary are capable of adjudicating on matters relating to the minutiae of company or tax law, when it comes to basic human rights suddenly they are in over their heads. It is an argument for maintaining the status quo in the teeth of the Irish state's nominal international obligations when it comes to the protection of social, economic and cultural rights.

A recent case involving Clare County Council and a local Traveller family, however, appears to offer the slightest chink in the conservative armour of earlier rulings.

Rights that cannot be affirmed or enforced through the judicial system are not rights but aspirations. Far from being an expression of the separation of powers, the stance taken by the Courts on economic, social and cultural rights is a negation of the separation of powers. Their refusal to adjudicate on these matters means that, effectively, the Irish government is its own judge regarding its protection or otherwise of social, economic and cultural rights. This is because of the extremely weak powers, processes and procedures that are currently held by Dáil committees.

The decision not to map poverty, employment and investment at county level would suggest the state would prefer for these statistics to remain unseen

This is unacceptable in any modern democracy and is the reason why the Constitutional Convention voted in 2014 to insert a provision that the State shall progressively realise socio-economic and cultural rights, subject to maximum available resources and that this duty is cognisable by the Courts.

The purpose of inserting socio-economic and cultural rights into the constitution is not just to allow recourse to individuals and groups to the courts in order to have those rights affirmed. It is also about changing the very terms of reference of policy and development in Ireland today. The 'common sense' which permeates the institutions of the Irish state is one that is fundamentally lacking in socio-economic and cultural rights that can be enforced by the courts with reference to the Constitution. And nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the myriad of plans and objectives which surround and permeate County Clare and its people.

The practical application of basic human rights in Ireland varies from county to county, and in the case of Clare, within the county itself. There is a Kafkaesque logic at play here by the State and local authorities in which everyone has the same human rights as long as you don't ask for them. Human rights are subject to arbitrary budgetary calculations, where numbers are not collated but guesstimated. They are not rights but privileges, subject to the whim of a statistician's pen.

The State and local authorities say that the application of human rights in health, housing, infrastructure, the environment and climate change are all subject to available funds. It makes the process sound neutral – as if tax; investment; privatisation; outsourcing; low wages and temporary hours; the centralisation of services under the NDP; the refusal to collate data on poverty; and the refusal to release county data on employment, unemployment, and investment; are simply objective and universal practices that enhance human rights. They do not. That which is mapped, can be seen. The decision not to map poverty, employment, and investment at county level would suggest that the state would prefer for these statistics to remain unseen. This needs to change.

7. CONCLUSION

In January 2022 Clare County Council published its 10-volume draft *Clare County Development Plan 2023-2029*. It is 6,198 pages long and contains 1,952,230 words, which is two and a half times more than the Bible. It is over seven times the length of James Joyce's *Ulysses* – a paltry 265,222 words in comparison. The Plan mentions poverty 16 times, the majority of which relates to the Council's aspiration to tackle it, but without clear plans and targets to which it could be held accountable. It mentions fuel poverty twice, both times in the context of retrofitting homes. There is no mention of either child poverty or food poverty. Its objectives for a Just Transition are in opposition to the principles of a Just Transition. In Volume 10(ii) it says that it applies gender proofing to its plans, but there is no evidence of this across its 1.9 million words.¹⁰⁸

Since 2017 Clare County Council has spent over €21 million on consultants.¹⁰⁹ It does not appear that any of that money was spent on finding up-to-date data on how many people work in Clare and in which sectors; how many are unemployed and where is it concentrated; the nature and extent of fuel, food, and child poverty in the county; ways to achieve a Just Transition given the county's significant concentration of cattle farming and the risk posed by flooding; the number and location of abandoned, derelict, or vacant buildings; the gendered nature of poverty in Clare; nor on ways to measure and map the nature and extent of institutionalised discrimination and racism within public institutions that operate in the county.

And yet, we can see from the limited information that is available, as well as from first-hand accounts of community activists, service providers, people with disabilities, women's groups, and from members of the Travelling community, that all these issues are real and have a significant effect on households and communities across the county. There is a need for an anti-poverty strategy for Clare that is evidence-based and the result of a real and fruitful dialogue with communities. What follows is an attempt to identify the steps needed to put that principle into practice.

There are three elements to this strategy. The first relates to identifying the gaps in information and data; the second relates to suggested policy measures to tackle poverty in Clare; and the third relates to organisational and campaigning strategies that might assist in bringing those policy measure to fruition.

1. Data

There is a need for information regarding levels of food, fuel, and child poverty in Clare. There is also a need for information regarding work and jobs in the county that is broken down by job, location, and status (employed or unemployed). It is not acceptable that aspects of this information is available only at regional level, if at all, with figures that are released for Clare often incomplete and punctured with significant gaps.

The National Development Plan needs to be reviewed. It sets out a regional solution for the Mid-West, one that overlooks Clare and the needs of its people. It lists five hub cities – Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Limerick and Galway – with Clare mentioned only in relation to Shannon Airport and Shannon Foynes Port. The county finds itself caught between two hub cities (Limerick and Galway) with import/export infrastructure its main 'contribution' to the National Development Plan.

The recent plan for a fossil fuel powered data centre in Ennis is typical of this approach – and worse, is being planned at a time when all sectors are being asked to dramatically reduce their carbon emissions which will entail significant sacrifices from Clare communities. Going on the employment levels in existing data centres, this one would likely provide 30-50 direct jobs and around 200 temporary construction jobs. A proper housing programme for Clare would provide more construction jobs spread across the county and with more long-lasting benefit. This project has been a key aim of Clare County Council who amended the current County Development Plan to zone land for one. It is difficult to see how the population of Clare might benefit from this economic activity.

Similarly, the proposal that Clare becomes a hub for wind energy has now taken the form demanded of it by the NDP, where the emphasis is on the region rather than the county. The recent announcement by Simply Blue energy group of a 1.35GW floating wind farm off the coast of West Clare was accompanied by the confirmation that the jobs will be based in Cork once construction is completed. This is in line with the logic of the NDP as the benefit falls within the Mid-West region, not Clare.

Data and planning must speak to the fundamental human rights of people and communities in Clare. In its *Corporate Plan 2019-2024*, Clare County Council listed 84 national, regional, and local strategies which it said informed the 'strategic framework within which Clare County Council will operate during the lifetime of this Council.'¹¹⁰ It's an impressive array of material, yet they

all share one thing: none of them have been produced with the concept of socio-economic rights as human rights that are legally enforceable and which all arms of the state are legally bound to uphold. The *Corporate Plan* itself states that the Council ‘respects equality and human rights in accordance with Public Sector Duty principle and the relevant equality legislation.’¹¹¹ Yet, as this document has shown, there is no constitutional obligation on any arm of the state to protect the majority of socio-economic rights, and the Irish courts system is loath to take upon itself any interpretation of the Constitution as it currently stands which will see the legal enforcement of socio-economic rights as universal human rights. Data collection is never neutral, and the need to protect and enhance human rights must underpin the methodologies.

2. Policy Measures

Clare needs a dedicated social housing action plan. The income criteria for public housing is too low and needs to be raised to a level so that it includes people and households that currently earn too much to apply for public housing, but not enough to apply for a mortgage. This means that the number of direct-builds by Clare County Council needs to be increased as a matter of urgency. While there is a space for Approved Housing Bodies as part of an overall housing strategy, they are meant to be an adjunct to public housing. They are not designed to replace it, nor are they able to do so. This is an issue of funding as well as policy, and needs to be debated and approved at departmental level (possibly via the Oireachtas) as well as the Council. Although there appears to be a patchwork of housing strategies, there is a shared underlying logic to them: protect and enhance the interests of the private investor. We have tried it and it does not work for communities. A rapid expansion of direct-build public housing for a greater range of households is the only practical solution.

The folly of holiday homes in Clare needs to be tackled. With a 96% vacancy rate, they should be either brought into the general housing stock in the limited number of cases where this is possible, or pushed into the Airbnb market where they belong. The use of domestic rental properties as Airbnb properties should end in areas where domestic rental demand is high, and this should continue until the housing crisis abates. It’s incredible that the Census can identify over 900 vacant rental properties in Clare in the midst of a rental crisis, with only ten properties advertised for rent on the leading rental site in the country Daft.ie and yet Airbnb is mostly unchallenged despite its socially dis-cohesive business model.¹¹²

Health services need to be localised, and in some cases re-localised, to the greatest degree possible. The practice

We need to end the charity model of social services, and replace it with a human rights model

of discontinuing health services in West and North Clare and moving them to Ennis, Limerick, or Galway, is slowly destroying the life of communities in those regions. The county of Clare, as a whole, needs a 33% increase in GPs, and a 50% increase in dentists, simply to arrive at the national average per population.

We need to end the charity model of social services, and replace it with a human rights model. This means a change in legislation up to, and including, the constitution, to ensure that services provided by public and publicly-funded bodies are designed to realise the human rights of both individuals *and* communities. In order to avoid the individualisation of social rights, any future human rights legislation must allow a community to use the law and the constitution to protect its *communal* human rights with regard to health, housing, infrastructure, and climate action.

Clare needs a jobs investment plan that is centred on well-paid, stable employment and which aims to open pathways to gainful employment for disabled people and people from the Traveller community. Where training is provided, it must be free and to the appropriate level for the work provided. We have an identifiable situation where people are needed in West Clare to work in social services, and where people in West Clare need jobs. The solution is to train local people to do the work, and to make those jobs well-paid, secure, and socially beneficial.

A fully functioning, county-wide, public transport system is needed for Clare. This means a community-focused rural public transport infrastructure and proper and affordable access to routine and emergency health care.

In the short term, funding must be increased to service providers and community organisations, allowing them to design and implement multi-year projects and plans. Home care, day care, child care, family support, addiction supports, dementia services, migrant support, Traveller community development and disability services led by and responsive to the needs of disabled people are some of the areas that are desperately in need of increased funding for proper, well-paid, full-time positions that are open-ended in contract.

As agreed in the programme for government the Direct

Provision System must be phased out and replaced by adequate supports for those seeking protection here to live independent lives – it in itself is a cause of poverty and marginalisation particularly in rural areas.

A proper overall strategy and structure is needed to encompass the needs of everyone with regards to the full services that are currently the responsibility of public and publicly-funded bodies. These services must be rights-based and have accessibility for all. The strategy itself must be designed by the communities for which it is meant to serve. In the words of one participant at the Ennis group session,

‘The lack of representation is a key part of all of this. It’s on purpose. It’s part of their strategy. They don’t want our voices at the table because we might ask “well why is all that money going on consultancy fees and not on washer/dryers for families?” And yes it could be argued that the voluntary sector does that representation but really all we’re doing is managing a series of impediments between the people and the council. And they’re impossible roles. It’s a hostile situation and they’re not set up to listen to whatever representatives of communities and women have to say. Everyone you’re facing is a paid professional and they can just wait down the clock.’

We need an end to the practice of waiting down the clock when it comes to the communities of Clare.

Finally, a Just Transition for the farming communities of Clare is needed. The county has the largest concentration of cattle farms in the State, and the national herd needs to be cut in order for Ireland to meet its climate targets and avoid fines from the EU. The danger is that, in the absence of a genuine Just Transition, government inaction will see smaller, family-orientated beef farms selling up with no replacement industry, while the dairy herd consolidates itself. Given the concentration of smaller farms in West and North Clare, such economic Darwinism will be a disaster for the regions and must be avoided.

3. A Campaigning Strategy

A local strategy for Clare requires will require changes to the National Development Plan and the acting philosophy of central and local government which is to treat Clare as essentially a feeder county for the needs of Limerick, Cork, and Galway.

This means that alongside more traditional forms of local campaigning, a national campaign to amend the assumptions of the NDP is needed.

A similar collaborative approach will be needed with regard to human rights legislation, and ensuring that any



improvements in human rights and policy allows scope for communities to use the law to protect their rights, not just individuals.

This requires some level of campaigning at Oireachtas (and possibly European) level, and not just lobbying the County Council which is limited in the actions it can take by national and European policy decisions.

Such a campaign will mean reaching out to other voluntary organisations and civil society groups in counties across Ireland who are facing the same issues with national policy as those identified in this report.

It would also mean working with national NGOs and possibly the trade union movement where there are shared goals and objectives, such as in human rights legislation and decent pay and conditions.

There is a danger that as Clare-based groups move into national issues, the voice of Clare will become watered down and weakened.

However, as there are issues facing Clare that can only be tackled at national policy level, it is hard to see how such alliances can be avoided.

Although the challenge to develop and implement an anti-poverty strategy for Clare seems daunting, we should remind ourselves that the current situation was created by policy, and so can be changed by policy. At the same time, Clare is not alone in experiencing these inequalities and so the potential for alliances is there. It is not easy, but it can be done.

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