



Valuing Social Dialogue

Social dialogue is part of a good democracy that functions for the benefit of all its citizens. To be effective and meaningful, social dialogue must involve participation of all sectors of society, including marginalised and excluded communities, in a genuine process of co-creation and co-monitoring of policy and practice. This is particularly important as we move forward in finding solutions to the current crisis, while addressing long-term inequalities and creating a society that benefits everyone. This requires sustained social investment. The Programme for Government – Our Shared Future – commits to social dialogue and creating new models of sectoral engagement. These new models must learn from past experiences of social dialogue processes. This document outlines the values, principles and practice that need to be in place if social dialogue is to achieve an acceptable standard for genuine participation.

Values

The Community Platform strongly supports a values-based approach to social dialogue. These values are:

Community:

Meaning people looking out for each other and having a sense of belonging; communities that are welcoming, inclusive, and nurturing; and building communities that are socially, economically, culturally, and environmentally sustainable.

Participation:

Meaning people speaking up and having a say, with their views being heard and valued; different voices and the perspectives of different groups in society having an influence to advance equality, social justice and sustainability; and active engagement in decision-making, rebalancing of power in this process, and investing resources to support this engagement.

Decency:

Meaning valuing people's shared humanity and human dignity, and having mutual respect; compassion and mutual support; everyone having a quality of life, with their needs met and a capacity to choose the life they wish to lead; and decent work, accommodation and services for everyone.

Principles

Social dialogue is about:

- **Working collectively** towards the progressive realisation of rights and addressing poverty, exclusion and inequality.

- **Ensuring participation** of marginalised and excluded communities in the co-creation and co-monitoring of key policies, policy strategies, programmes, and public services that impact on their lives at local, regional and national levels.
- **Autonomous community development** resourcing and respecting local and national organisations as key to ensuring that marginalised and excluded communities can effectively participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- **Centring processes that are inclusive of diverse voices and experiences** in addressing key issues such as a just transition and economic and social recovery.
- **Collective action** that promotes the campaigning and advocacy role of the community and voluntary sector.
- **Critical approaches** that uphold respect for critical advocacy, critical voice and action.
- **Parity of esteem** between community and voluntary sectors and all other sectors with equal respect for all participants. There is an imbalance between the power held current by other non-state actors (business, trade unions). There is also a low level of representation of women from those sectors at the most senior level that affects decisions and outcomes.
- **Right to contribute to setting the agenda and priorities** rather than having them set in advance.
- **Transparency** so that everyone can see how decisions are made, who participated and the impact of participation on decisions.
- **Accountability** structures to ensure transparency of the state and decision makers in the implementation of policies, strategies and programmes.
- **Accountability** by community and voluntary organisations to those they represent and taking strong positions.
- **Equality** – need for understanding the cross-cutting nature of gender and the multiple discrimination experienced across a number of equality grounds.

Practice

Here are some examples where social dialogue can be strengthened.

- **Consultation:** All relevant groups impacted on by policy must have an opportunity to be represented in policy consultations and engagements that impact on them.¹
- **Representation:** The membership of the Community and Voluntary Pillar must be broader and include a wide range of organisations representing those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and inequality.
- **Participation:** The Five-year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024 commits to ‘support participative and deliberative approaches for developing public policy, including establishing a Civic Forum for formal dialogue between the sector and local and

¹ For example, the DPER Equality Budgeting Advisory Group, the Vulnerable People Sub-Group of the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE) excludes representatives of some of the groups in society most vulnerable to Covid-19 including Travellers, Roma and asylum-seekers or those experiencing poverty and socio-economic disadvantage.

central government'. The process to implement this action itself needs to be carried out in a participative and inclusive manner.

- **Resourcing:** autonomous community development and local development, including employment of professional community workers. The Government must provide adequate resources and core funding for local and national community organisations involved in advocacy and critique approaches.²
- **Accountability:** A higher and consistent standard needs to be set for public consultations on policy. Consultations limited to an online response to set questions is not sufficient and often leading. Where possible, particularly on major reforms or the development of national strategies, opportunities must be provided for face-to-face consultation events to get the input of those most impacted by the policy, with those from marginalised and excluded communities being facilitated to participate.
- **Two Way Dialogue:** Feedback on inputs from consultations must be provided, explaining why some measures or policies approaches are being adopted and others not.
- **Implementation:** There needs to be improved implementation of key policy addressing poverty social exclusion and inequality, including anti-poverty/social-inclusion strategies, National Strategy on Women and Girls, equality budgeting and so on.
- **Review:** Existing forms of social dialogue e.g. National Economic Dialogue, Social Inclusion Forum etc., need to be reviewed to ensure they are achieving their goals and identifying how they can be improved. This review needs to be done with the input of the relevant stakeholders.

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The Community Platform is an alliance of 30 national networks and organisations in the community and voluntary sector working to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality

- Age Action Ireland
- All Together in Dignity (ATD) Ireland
- Community Action Network
- Community Work Ireland
- Cairde
- Debt and Development Coalition
- European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland
- Family Resource Centre National Forum
- Focus Ireland
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Independent Living Movement Ireland
- Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
- Irish Penal Reform Trust
- Irish Refugee Council
- Irish Rural Link
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland
- National Adult Literacy Agency
- National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks
- National Traveller Women's Forum
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- Pavee Point
- Rape Crisis Network Ireland
- Safe Ireland
- Sign Language Interpreting Service
- Simon Communities of Ireland
- Threshold
- Treoir
- Vincentian Partnership for Justice
- Women's Aid

² Priority needs to be given to implementing the commitment in the Five-year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024 to a sustainable funding model for the Community and Voluntary Sector.