



Crosscare opening statement to the Joint Committee on Employment Affairs and Social Protection

Thursday 4th July 2019

Introduction

Good morning and thank you for meeting with us today and giving us the opportunity to discuss Crosscare's submission to the Committee as part of our 'Restore the Youth Safetynet' campaign to restore full adult rate Jobseeker's Allowance for disadvantaged young Jobseekers. I'd firstly like to introduce you to my colleague, Gordon Hill who is the Senior Manager of Crosscare Homeless Services, and I am the Policy Officer for Crosscare Migrant Project. Our aim today is to convince you of the importance of this issue and the need to scrutinise policy on this, particularly in the context of the upcoming 2020 Budget. It is our aim with this campaign to remove the barriers set against young people surviving independently and their prevention from consistent poverty and homelessness.

Young adults at risk of, or experiencing homelessness

Briefly to introduce you, Crosscare is the social support agency of the Dublin Archdiocese for over 75 years, working with people in the most vulnerable and marginalised situations. Crosscare provides specialised services in youth work, homelessness, community supports and food poverty.

Crosscare's work with young adults experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness since the introduction of reduced age-related Jobseeker's Allowance in 2014 has driven our campaign to raise awareness of the unfair and adverse impact it is having on their lives. Adults aged under 26 who are unemployed and surviving independently without recourse to family or financial supports to supplement their living expenses are particularly at risk of falling into a poverty trap and long-term homelessness.

The lower rate Jobseeker's Allowance, currently €112.70 weekly for adults aged 18-24 and €157.80 for adults aged 25 are much too low and unsustainable for young adults who are homeless or living independently and are struggling to access work, training or education. They are forced to manage paying the same bills and living costs as jobseekers over 26 and are becoming trapped in a cycle of poverty.

For some, it can be detrimental to their wellbeing, and their capacity to sustain an independent living is being sabotaged by an age-discriminatory and debilitating policy. This policy is essentially working against the Government's social inclusion commitments.

Fundamentally, Crosscare supports the full restoration of the full adult rate Jobseeker's Allowance to all adults under 26 on the basis of equal rights, particularly for young people who are most adversely impacted by this policy.

Crosscare's pre-budget submissions to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection for the 2017, 2018, and 2019 Budgets provided evidence-based analysis on young adults adversely affected by age-related payments. We recommended to restore the full adult rate of Jobseeker's Allowance to all adults under 26 and in particular, young people most impacted by this policy. Each year, the Government's Budget has failed to address this or recognise the significant adverse impact this age-discriminatory policy is having on these young people.

Crosscare therefore, continues to advocate for the review of age-related Jobseeker's Allowance, specifically for two key groups identified as particularly disadvantaged.

The first group are **young people with International Protection who have moved out of Direct Provision and are living independently**. These young people often have come through devastating experiences and family separation. Their first introduction to life in Ireland is in a Direct Provision hostel where they are dependent on the hostel to provide food and facilities. Many are learning English and will go to secondary school or community college. When they receive their permission to remain in Ireland, they are sent on their way to fend for themselves. They do not receive any guidance or support to secure a tenancy or an income. Organisations and services such as Crosscare Refugee Service can provide some support to access services and entitlements, however these young people do not have support networks or family to support them emotionally or financially through this transition. For those who have a language barrier and are learning English, the experience is all the more isolating, intimidating and frustrating. Their first step is to find accommodation from a private landlord, facing various prejudices and disadvantages when competing with other renters. They can experience delays in accessing the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) or rent supplement and rent in advance. They will not have previous landlord references and in Dublin in particular, they will struggle to find any good quality accommodation that will accept HAP or for a

reasonable rent within the HAP rates. Many, are left in limbo in Direct Provision hostels, delaying their overall integration and opportunities to participate in education, training or work. More recently, Direct Provision accommodation is being closed down in Dublin and people are being accommodated outside Dublin, further isolating them from Dublin-based support services such as Crosscare Refugee Service – which has noticed a reduction in the number of young adults accessing the service in the past year.

The second group are **young people who are unable to live with family and are experiencing homelessness**. These young people have often experienced family difficulties and can no longer live with their family. They often do not have alternative support networks but are ‘housing ready’ and want to sustain an independent living. They may be dealing with personal, family or social problems, as recognised in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion and the Youth Homelessness Strategy.^{1,2} Some young adults may have mental health, confidence or social support needs which impede their capacity to take up work, training or education. These adults are forced to manage their independent living expenses on a much lower rate Jobseeker’s Allowance, putting them at a further disadvantage and at risk of consistent poverty. Job-seeking supports and training opportunities through Intreo services are designed as ‘activation’ measures to engage adults under 25, with the aim of ensuring that they are made an offer within four months of becoming unemployed. This policy does not allow for the circumstances that some young people are experiencing and where they are at personally, in terms of engagement. Activation measures are also restricted by age, availability, educational attainment and length of time on social welfare.

For those who are staying in emergency accommodation, their weekly rents can be anywhere between €30 and €50 per week; much higher than the weekly HAP or rent supplement payment of €10 to €20 per week. Some of these adults also pay weekly child maintenance for their children – a cost that is not being deducted from their Jobseeker’s Allowance means assessment. For some, this combined cost to their income of €112.70 per week is leaving them with less than €50 per week for basic living costs. Transition to private rented accommodation in Dublin is further hampered by the ongoing housing crisis and high rents. Additionally, like the first group, they are also competing for a HAP tenancy and will be at a disadvantage on the

¹ <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf>

² https://www.dcyd.gov.ie/documents/publications/youth_homelessness_strategy.pdf

lower age-related allowance and will remain extensively longer in emergency accommodation until they can transition to an alternative primary payment.

There are currently nine individuals residing in Crosscare hostels in Dublin who are under 26 and receiving the lower rate Jobseeker's Allowance. They include three females and six males, all of whom must pay a weekly fee to stay in the hostel and are experiencing an extreme disadvantage in securing rented accommodation that is realistic for their budget on the Housing Assistance Payment, and will not push them into debt and homelessness once again.

Crosscare has identified these individuals as at higher risk of long-term homelessness and unemployment whilst trapped in an unsustainable lower rate JSA.

Restore The Youth Safety-net campaign

Crosscare, along with partner organisations; the National Youth Council of Ireland, the Coalition to End Youth Homelessness, the Union of Students of Ireland, Spunout, Treoir Teen Parents Support Programme and Uplift started a campaign over a year ago to raise awareness of young adults experiencing homelessness and poverty traps. The **#Restoretheyouthsafetynet** campaign started a petition with two animated videos produced by Crosscare staff and service users to gain support from the public for our recommendations for Budget 2019.³ The petition raised 1,922 signatures and presented at a photo-call outside Leinster housing on 4th October. However, the Budget announcements did not bring about any changes to support this group of adults.

Following this, we sent our submission to the Joint Committee in January this year.

The campaign group advocate that the age-related Jobseeker's Allowance policy is based on an unfair assumption that young jobseekers have fewer needs and costs than older jobseekers, but it is disguised as an 'incentive' for young adults to find employment or enrol in training or education. The 'one-fits-all' policy approach is not cognisant of the nuances of young people's needs. It is, in fact, discriminatory and this is resulting in groups of young adults being put at risk, left behind in the economic recovery, and left behind in a society that does not hear their voice.

³ <https://my.uplift.ie/petitions/restoretheyouthsafetynet>

There is an option open to the government to review this policy and protect these groups of young adults fairly within the Jobseeker's Allowance current exceptions to the age-related rates for a number of groups of young adults who include:

1. People with dependent children living with them
2. People who have left State care and do not qualify for the Aftercare Allowance (as amended by Budget 2019), and:
3. People transferring from Disability Allowance to Jobseekers Allowance.

These three groups of people have exceptional needs that have been recognised and therefore provided with a more appropriate full adult rate payment. The two groups concerned in this submission are missing from these exceptional categories in the assessment for age-related Jobseeker's Allowance.

We are advocating the extension of recognised exceptions to the age-related payments for adults under 25 who are experiencing homelessness, people at risk of becoming homeless and people living independently with International Protection. We are asking the Government to issue the full adult rate (€203 per week) for these groups of adults. This would support young adults to move out of homelessness and sustain an independent living. It will prevent risk of isolation and consistent poverty and enable them to start a path towards achieving their full potential.

Furthermore, in the absence of reliable research and data on the adults affected, we recommend a government investment for accurate data collection and research to ensure accurate poverty impact assessment for this group. Ireland has a duty to leave no one behind in our economic recovery, especially those at risk, and in compliance with the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion to protect those who are experiencing disadvantage.

I will conclude by thanking the Committee for their interest in the campaign today and we ask that members consider the issues raised and support the recommendations put forward to the Department to restore the youth safety net.