



# EQUALITY FOR YOUNG JOBSEEKERS



SINN FÉIN  
POLICY PAPER





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## Introduction

**“Young people coming to Ireland get off the plane from Eastern Europe, from countries such as Poland, probably with neither good English nor good qualifications, and within a week or two they find a job. Even a job at or just above the minimum wage in Ireland pays €400 a week, and we must ask why any young person in Ireland, particularly in this economy where jobs are not that hard to find, is in a situation whereby he or she cannot find employment. Such a person may well have personal or individual issues, but he or she also may not wish to take up employment. I do not want to be the right-winger at the table here, but somebody needs to say that.”**

This is what our Taoiseach (the then Minister for Social Protection) had to say about young jobseekers at a Committee meeting back in 2016<sup>1</sup>. His comments not only generalised an entire cohort of jobseekers but also showed utter contempt for an entire generation of young people who certainly did not choose unemployment. While this viewpoint cannot be assumed to be the Fine Gael position when it comes to the young unemployed, it was not the first time such comments came in for criticism. Four years earlier the Taoiseach’s colleague and former Minister for Finance Michael Noonan argued that soaring emigration levels was down to lifestyle choice<sup>2</sup>:

**“It’s (emigration) not being driven by unemployment at home, it’s being driven by a desire to see another part of the world and live there.” – Minister Michael Noonan (January 2012)**

Young people were among the very first to be targeted for cuts when the emergency budget was announced by Fianna Fáil and the Green Party in April 2009. Following that, the young unemployed saw cuts in their jobseekers

<sup>1</sup> Comments made by Leo Varadkar taken from Committee Meeting transcripts on 7/9/2016  
<sup>2</sup> The Journal report on comments made at a briefing by Minister Michael Noonan available here: <https://www.thejournal.ie/noonan-young-emigrants-not-driven-away-by-unemployment-331911-Jan2012/>



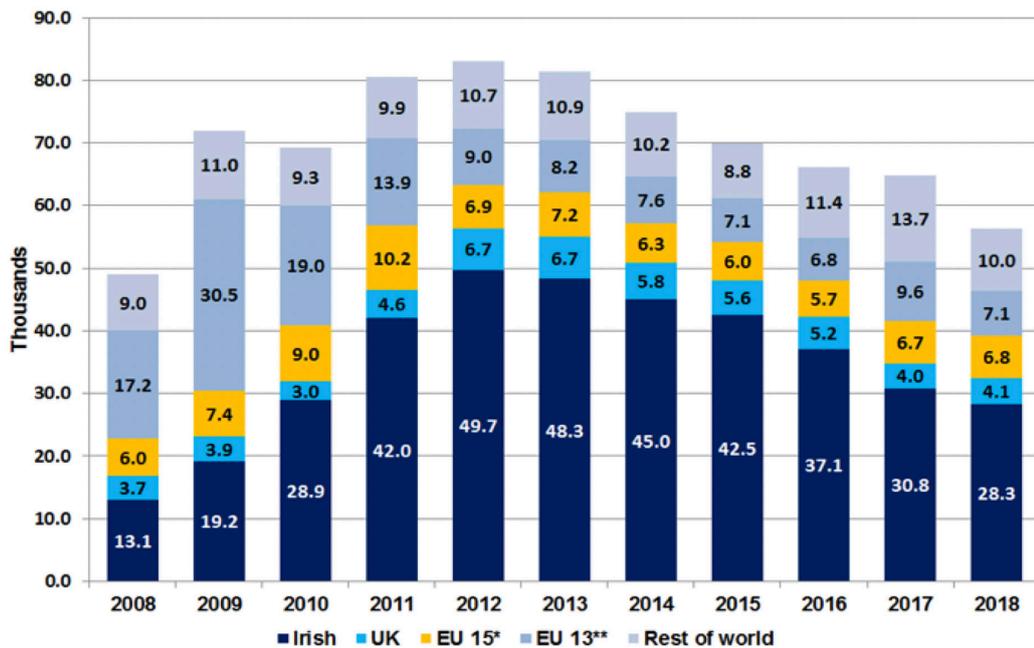
payment for three consecutive years. In comparison to all other social welfare cuts at the time, cuts to jobseekers' payments were unique in that they broke the payment rates down by age. We were told that the rationale for these cuts was "to tackle high youth unemployment and to prevent long term welfare dependency."<sup>3</sup>

This begs the question as to how reducing the only source of income that young jobseekers had to €100 per week could assist in reducing youth unemployment (which was well above the EU average at that time) and at the same time, help to reduce dependency on social welfare supports. This reduction in payment did not make it easier to find employment at a time when there simply were no jobs.

Instead, it left young jobseekers with one option – leave Ireland. Between 2008 and 2018, 384,900 Irish-born people emigrated to countries all over the world. Emigration peaked in 2012 when 49,700 people left Ireland in that year alone, at the same time youth unemployment peaked to its highest level of 31.6%. The graph below is taken from the European Migration Network<sup>4</sup> and shows the level of emigration between 2008 and 2018 based on nationality.



**Who is Leaving Ireland? Estimated Emigration by Nationality, 2008 - 2018**



\* EU 15 excluding UK and Ireland (before enlargement on 1 May 2004)

\*\* EU 13 Member States that joined in 2004, 2007 and 2013

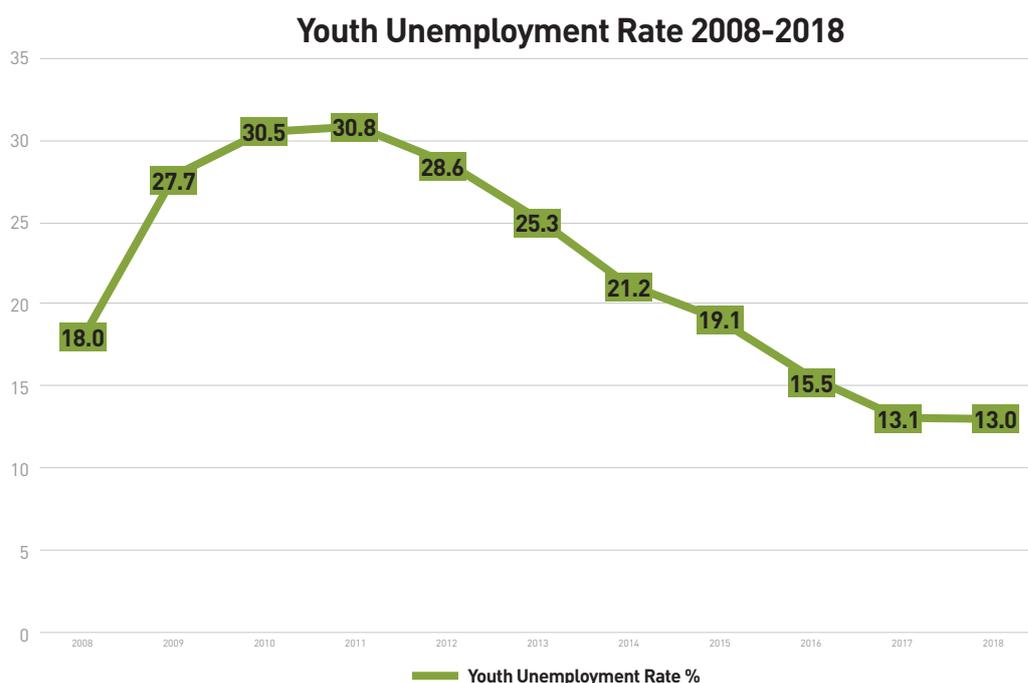
Source: [Population and Migration Estimates, CSO](#). The reference period for population estimates is mid-April of the years shown.

3 PQ Ref. No. 33672/19

4 European Migration Network Ireland available here: <http://emn.ie/emn/statistics>



## Youth Unemployment – then and now



For the purposes of the data collected by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) youth unemployment relates to the cohort of the unemployed who are aged between 15 and 24 years. The above graph shows the youth unemployment rate as it stood at the last quarter of each year from 2008 to 2018<sup>5</sup>. In both February and June of 2012 youth unemployment peaked at 31.6%, well above the EU average of 23% at that time.

While the above graph shows the rate of youth unemployment falling in recent years, it remains stubbornly high and almost an outlier when one looks at the overall unemployment picture. Figures from the monthly unemployment data published by the CSO for July 2019<sup>6</sup> show a youth unemployment rate of 10.3% compared to 10.1% in June 2019. Although this is only a slight increase in youth unemployment it is an increase that will have to be carefully monitored.

In attempting to address high youth unemployment the Government have focused on directing young jobseekers to their local Intreo office to engage with a case worker and failing that, to labour activation schemes such as Community Employment, Tús, JobPath or in subsidies to employers, through JobsPlus Youth. However, it does not appear that any consideration has been given to restoring the jobseeker's rates for those aged 18-25 years.

5 CSO Monthly Unemployment data for Q4 of 2008-2018 available here: <https://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp>

6 Monthly Unemployment Data by the CSO available here: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mue/monthlyunemploymentjuly2019/>



## Timeline of Budget cuts

SUPPLEMENTARY  
BUDGET  
**2009**

The personal rate for Jobseeker's Allowance was **reduced** from €204.30 to €100 per week for new claimants aged 18 and 19 years from April 2009

BUDGET  
**2010**

The rate of Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance was **reduced** to €100 per week for new claimants aged 20 and 21 years from January 2010 (making the rate payable for 18-21 year olds €100)  
The same payments were **reduced** to €150 per week for new claimants aged 22, 23 and 24 years from January 2010

BUDGET  
**2011**

The rate of Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance paid to recipients aged 22, 23 and 24 years was **reduced** to €144 from January 2011

BUDGET  
**2014**

Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance **reduced** for people without children aged 18-24 years to €100 per week from January 2014  
Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance for those aged 25 years was **reduced** to €144 per week

BUDGET  
**2017**

Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance were **increased** in line with all weekly social welfare payments by €5 with proportional increases of €2.70 for those aged 18-24 years and €3.80 for those aged 25 years with similar increases for Supplementary Welfare Allowance

BUDGET  
**2018**

Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance were **increased** in line with all weekly social welfare payments by €5

BUDGET  
**2019**

Jobseeker's Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance were **increased** in line with all weekly social welfare payments by €5



## Current rates of Jobseekers' payments

Despite several cuts being reversed in recent years, following improvements in the Irish economy, the age related cuts made to jobseekers' payments have not been reversed. These age related jobseeker's payments continued under the Fine Gael/Labour Government (2011-2016) and remain in place under the Fine Gael minority Government since.

In recent years, we have seen increases of €5 in Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Benefit and Supplementary Welfare Allowance as part of the annual Budget. In some cases, these €5 increases only went to those on the full rate i.e. those aged over 26 years. This meant that those on reduced rates i.e. all those under 26 years only received proportionate increases (of between €2 and €3). However, in the last two Budgets those on reduced rates received the full €5 increase but this has had very little impact as the rates for those under 26 years remain so much lower than the full rate. Indeed, with every Budget increase in these payments the gap between the rate payable to those over 26 years of age and those under 26 years is getting wider and wider.

The current rates payable for Jobseeker's Allowance and Jobseeker's Benefit are as follows:



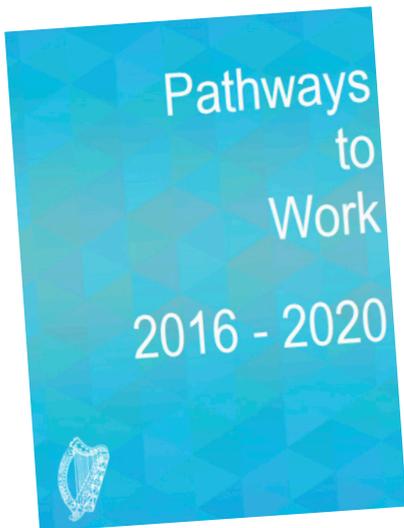
## Number of young jobseekers today

As of the end of June 2019 there were 21,295 people aged under 26 years in receipt of either Jobseeker's Allowance or Jobseeker's Benefit. The following provides a breakdown<sup>7</sup>:

COUNTY	JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE	JOBSEEKER'S BENEFIT
Carlow	476	33
Cavan	402	30
Clare	434	51
Cork	1,230	178
Donegal	1,073	102
Dublin	4,344	741
Galway	793	125
Kerry	551	77
Kildare	696	94
Kilkenny	295	38
Laois	434	43
Leitrim	153	27
Limerick	915	76
Longford	352	32
Louth	890	90
Mayo	522	48
Meath	451	60
Monaghan	237	37
Offaly	496	47
Roscommon	216	20
Sligo	267	20
Tipperary	946	83
Waterford	784	80
Westmeath	529	76
Wexford	943	111
Wicklow	487	60
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18,916</b>	<b>2,379</b>



## Broken Promises - Pathways to Work



In 2016 the Fine Gael minority Government published 'Pathways to Work 2016-2020' which contained a total of eighty-six actions set out under six specific strands. Each action included a timeframe for completion as well as the body responsible for its delivery.

**Action 7.5<sup>8</sup>** gave the following commitment:

*"Review and report on the impact of the reduced jobseeker payment rates for jobseekers aged 18 – 25"*

This action was due to be completed and published by the Department of Social Protection in Quarter 2 of 2016 yet, three years later, the report is no-where to be seen. At no stage over the past three years have we received a clear update as to the stage at which this report is at. We have asked Minister Doherty about this report on several occasions however, to date we have never been given a date for its publication.

When asked for a publication date for the report, these are some examples of the Minister's responses<sup>9</sup> between 2016 and 2019:

**"Some preliminary analysis has commenced and I hope that this review will be completed later this year"** – Minister Varadkar (June 2016)

**"This review will be finalised this year"** – Minister Varadkar (May 2017)

**"The review will be finalised shortly"** – Minister Doherty (December 2018)

**"I expect it will be completed in the coming months"** – Minister Doherty (July 2019)

8  
9

Pathways to Work 2016-2020 available here: <https://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/PathwaysToWork2016-2020.pdf> (pg.46)  
PQ Ref. Nos. 16698/16, 23229/17, 53420/18, 33672/19

## Youth Employment Support Scheme

The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) was introduced by Minister Doherty in October 2018. It is described as “a work experience placement programme” and is specifically aimed at young jobseekers (aged 18-24 years) who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment. The aim of the scheme is to “provide jobseekers with the opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement.”<sup>10</sup>



Participation on the scheme is voluntary.

Those who participate on the scheme receive a payment of €229.20 per week. They are required to work 24 hours per week with placements lasting three months initially, with the option to extend to six months.

### Update on the YESS: July 2019

**“Since the scheme’s inception, a total of 348 people have commenced a placement to date. The type of work experience undertaken by participants involves roles across a number of different sectors including - community and voluntary, hospitality and food, ICT and telecoms, manufacturing, retail, sales and marketing and construction.” - Minister Doherty (PQ Ref. No.33681/19)**

All available YESS placements are advertised online on the Jobs Ireland website. There are currently 31 vacancies online (August 2019) ranging from Pharmacy Assistant to Youth Centre Worker and Housekeeping Assistant.

Given the fact that the scheme is only in place less than one year, the success of the scheme cannot yet be determined. It will be important to examine how long placements last and how many of these placements lead to employment for participants either where they complete their placement or elsewhere.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection website - Youth Employment Support Scheme available here: <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Youth-Employment-Support-scheme-YESS.aspx>



## Recommendations

- ▶ Immediate publication of the report into the impact of reduced jobseeker rates for 18-25 year olds
- ▶ Reversal of cuts to jobseekers' payments by ending the age related nature of the payments and placing all jobseekers on the same rate (currently €203)
- ▶ Establishment of a Social Welfare Commission to ensure that all social welfare recipients including jobseekers receive an amount that is (a) adequate and (b) allows them to meet a decent standard of living
- ▶ Review of the Youth Employment Support Scheme in October 2019 (in place for one year) including engagement with participants to seek feedback on the length of their placement and their current employment status

▶ Engagement between the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection and key stakeholders such as the National Youth Council of Ireland with the aim of compiling key actions to be taken to tackle youth unemployment

▶ Consultation between the Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection and the Department of Education & Skills to examine ways in which barriers to returning to education can be tackled including the possibility of greater financial incentives for jobseekers



## Conclusion

Young jobseekers have suffered immensely over the past decade.

The slashing of social welfare supports for the young unemployed forced many young people to emigrate. Those that remained in Ireland were left in a impossible situation – they saw a huge drop in their income support (in many cases their sole source of income) and there were no jobs.

While the economic picture for Ireland has undoubtedly improved, young jobseekers have not felt the recovery. For jobseekers, the austerity shouldered on them was not as straight-forward as cuts to their income, instead they saw the emergence of three new payment rates based on age.

These various rates remain in place and the Government do not appear to have any intention to reverse them. In fact, every year they make ending the various payment rates even more difficult as they continue to increase the full rate by €5 almost annually. This has created an even wider gap between what a twenty year old jobseeker will receive compared to a twenty-six year old.

Unlike our Taoiseach, we do not believe that any young person chooses unemployment or takes pleasure from being in receipt of a jobseeker's payment. Living on €112 per week is hardly enticing.

We need to see an end to age discrimination in our social protection system and we need to see jobseekers treated equally. Jobseekers, regardless of age need to be assisted and supported in seeking employment, not punished and left to struggle on an inadequate weekly payment.





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