



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta  
National Economic & Social Council

# **Transition to a Low-Carbon and Digital Future: An Overview of Proposed Work**

## 1.1 Background

The Government Strategy *Future Jobs Ireland 2019* includes a significant request to NESC to carry out work to support Ireland's transition to a lower carbon and digital future (Appendix 1 outlines the Action and deliverable). Future Jobs Ireland is a framework of focused ambitions which will form a key part of Ireland's future economic agenda over the medium term (Government of Ireland, 2019).

The strategy notes the need to exploit the opportunities that arise on foot of technological and environmental developments while also accepting that these changes will inevitably cause challenges for enterprises and workers. It highlights that some enterprises will be capable of transforming their business models and adapting to new realities but that there is a real danger that workers in some sectors may find their roles becoming redundant. The request made to NESC is to:

- First, look ahead and identify which sector and job roles are vulnerable—that is workers in declining sectors or potentially obsolete or transforming job roles.
- Second, develop a framework which supports workers to upskill or retrain so that they have jobs and roles that have a long-term future.

The strategy states that it is expected that this work would provide a basis upon which relevant Departments and stakeholders can deliver a model of support based on transition teams.<sup>1</sup>

The Secretariat propose that a NESC project will:

- Outline a clear perspective on the nature of the transition challenge.
- Develop an analytical process to identify transition needs.
- Assess the available support and protection that is available.
- Provide practical guidance and support.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Transition Teams will complement the focus of Top Teams which will be established to help realise opportunities presented by technological changes and the move to low-carbon. In 2019 Top Teams will be established in three areas: Artificial Intelligence, GovTech and offshore renewables.

## *Nature of the Just Transition Challenge*

The transition as just, meaning that nobody is left behind, is a key principle which this work will seek to reinforce. The project will examine conceptual thinking, empirical work and practice in Ireland and internationally, to develop a greater shared understanding of the ways in which this principle can guide Ireland's transition. Ireland is a signatory of the Silesia Declaration on Solidarity and Just Transition.<sup>2</sup>

The project will also examine how other countries are managing the transition process, the thinking and the practical tools which are being used to support transition, and in particular how others manage downside risks which impact disproportionately on specific cohorts of workers or communities.

## *An Analytical Process to Identify Transition Needs*

A key challenge is to identify those groups of workers or enterprise sectors where help is needed, and to do so earlier before closures and jobs losses are announced.

To do so work will focus on the role of quantitative analytical and modelling work, including recent work by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, Digital Automation Study, and the ILO (EGFSN, 2018)(Doyle & Jacobs, 2018)(ILO, 2015); and forthcoming work on the regional impact of the being carried out by the ESRI for DCCAIE. It should be noted that in terms of carbon, while it is relatively easy to identify the most vulnerable sectors, such as peat in Ireland, it seems less clear how to predict its impact on other sectors and sub-sectors or cohorts of workers or roles over time. There is a need to explore the measures that might be available, for example energy intensity, that could guide an assessment of the sectors and sub-sectors which are most vulnerable.

An initial review of the literature and models suggest that it will be necessary to supplement any quantitative analysis with qualitative research with stakeholders; representative groups and people impacted. This is needed to further narrow the assessment or prioritisation of need, for example, while the quantitative assessment on the impact of digitalisation highlights vulnerabilities for construction workers, further engagement would be required to identify which specific skills or roles are most vulnerable, where are the growth opportunities, and what supports are needed to help people take advantage of these.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Declaration underlines that Just Transition of the workforce and safeguarding and creating sustainable employment and decent work are crucial to ensure public support for long-term emission reductions, as well as to enable countries to reach the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement (Just Transition, 2018).

It is worth noting that the response to significant transformational change, such as Ireland's entry to the EU and indeed Brexit, required similar in-depth qualitative assessment to identify the specific risks and opportunities facing particular sectors.

### *Available Support and Protection*

The project will identify relevant supports and protections provided by various Government departments and agencies. It will include a review of the supports provided by Department of Education and Skills; Department of Business and Innovation; Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the various agencies including SOLAS, ETBs, Enterprise Ireland and the Public Employment Service.

One element of the project will be to identify funding streams and explore how national and international sources could be used to support enterprises and workers.

The project will also examine the work underway in Bord Na Mona. A transition team approach is being used and while it is a work in progress it can provide valuable insights on how to support vulnerable workers.

### *Practical Guidance and Support*

The objective of this project is to provide policy guidance to Government on how to assist workers and sectors most challenged by the changing economy. This will include:

- Recommendations about the process by which needs are identified and how this might be improved such that it can support the ongoing transition.
- Practical guidance in relation to the supports and funding available, including ways in which these could be used more effectively.
- Specific areas of focus for a small number of Transition Teams to be established in 2020.

## **1.2 NESC Working Group & Project Management**

It is proposed that a Working Group would be formed to support and inform this work. The members of the group would be Council members or nominated experts.

It is proposed that the research and work will be initiated in Q2 2019 and that papers will be discussed by the Council at meetings in Q3 and Q4.

A NESC council report and recommendations will be produced at the end Q4 2019.

## Appendix 1: Future Jobs Ireland 2019: NESC Work

### Ambition 1.7: Develop Transition Teams to assist workers and sectors likely to be most challenged by our changing economy

<i>No.</i>	<i>Deliverable</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>2019 Output</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Other key stakeholders</i>
(i)	Commission the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) to develop policy recommendations for consideration by Government for the operation of Transition Teams to manage the impact of economic transition on vulnerable workers and sectors which might include:	Q2 2019	Research initiated	D/Taoiseach	NESC, DES, DEASP, DBEI, DAFM, ETBs, SOLAS, EGFSN, agencies, industry representative groups, trade unions
		Q3 – Q4 2019	Council Discussion		
	a) developmental supports for enterprises and sectors faced with challenges arising from the move to a low carbon economy, sustainable business models and new technologies;	Q4 2019	Council report & recommendations		
	b) career advice and training guidance to managers and workers in sectors and job roles affected by future changes;				
	c) accessible training to upskill and retrain such workers including through Skills to Advance as well as tailored development plans for them; and				
	d) potential EU financial assistance opportunities for such a programme.				

## **Bibliography**

- Doyle, E. & Jacobs, L. (2018), *Analysis of the Impact of Automation on Occupations in Ireland*, Economic Policy Unit in the Department of An Taoiseach, Technical Paper, Dublin: Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service. <https://igees.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Automation-and-Occupations-Technical-Paper.pdf>.
- EGFSN (2018), *Digital Transformation: Assessing the Impact of Digitalisation on Ireland's Workforce*, Dublin: Expert Group on Future Skills Needs. <http://www.skillsireland.ie/Publications/2018/EGFSN-Digital-Transformation-Report.pdf>.
- Government of Ireland (2019), *Future Jobs Ireland*, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Dublin: Government Publications. <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Future-Jobs-Ireland-2019.pdf>.
- ILO (2015), *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all*, Geneva: International Labour Organization. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_ent/documents/publication/wcms\\_432859.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf).
- Just Transition (2018), *Solidarity and Just Transition: Silesia Declaration*, COP24. [https://cop24.gov.pl/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/Solidarity\\_and\\_Just\\_Transition\\_Silesia\\_Declaration.pdf](https://cop24.gov.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Solidarity_and_Just_Transition_Silesia_Declaration.pdf), 25/03/19.