



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta National Economic & Social Council

Minutes of the 447th NES C Council Meeting (in person), 15th December 2022 @ 10am

Printworks 1, The Morrison Hotel, Dublin 1

Attendance: John Callinan, Liz Canavan, Nat O'Connor, TJ Flanagan, John Enright, Hubert Fitzpatrick, Ian Talbot, David Hegarty (DBEI), David Hughes (DoF), Caroline Whyte, Jerry Mac Evilly, Karen Ciesielski, Noelle O'Connell, Graham Doyle, Diarmuid Torney, Chris Van Egeraat, Colin Scott, Seamus Coffey, Niamh Moore Cherry, Kevin Callinan, Nicola Mallon, Marguerite O'Flanagan, Colette Byrne, Owen Reidy and; Andrew Forde and John Ryan (DRCD).

Secretariat: Larry O'Connell, Helen Johnston, Cathal FitzGerald, Damian Thomas, Anne-Marie McGauran, Jeanne Moore, Noel Cahill, and Mary Clare O'Sullivan.

Apologies: Gerard Brady, Damian McDonald, Brid O'Brien, Seán Healy, John Hogan (David Hughes attending), Orlaigh Quinn (David Hegarty attending), and John McKeon (Marguerite O'Flanagan attending).

- 1. Administration.** The minutes of the September 2022 meeting were agreed.
- 2. Social Enterprise.** A draft report was introduced by Helen Johnston. Colleagues from DRCD, working on social enterprise, noted that the work is aligned with significant international work, in the EU, ILO and OECD; and, that it is timely in an Irish context as social enterprise policy is under review.

Council members noted the importance of social enterprise in terms: of creating jobs, often for more marginalised people; provision of vital social services; community based funding and community wealth-building; delivering important climate, biodiversity, circular economy and energy projects; and as a means of driving regional and place-based development.

They noted the challenges in defining social enterprises with issues raised including: the challenge of clearly defining boundaries; the possible range of activities; variations in terms of scale; the relative emphasis on profitability or non-profitability; the meaning of social value; social enterprise as an 'in-between entity' and the idea of identifying 'degrees of social enterprise'; distinguishing between social enterprise and social economy; treatment in national accounts; links to enterprise policy, including how business, for example through CSR, might link with social enterprises.

In addition, Members highlighted a number of issues: the range, and often complexity of reporting structures and requirements; the potential of the co-operative model in social enterprise, and work on the Co-operative Societies Act; availability of funding, particularly EU funding, though noting this can be difficult for social enterprises to access; the role of the sector during Covid; the affinity of young people to social good and the need to work to ensure the sector can offer viable careers with good jobs; the reliance by the State on social enterprise to deliver services, and challenges in these organisations of retaining staff without better terms and conditions; role of public procurement, social clauses and the work of the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Board, which brings trade unions, employers and social enterprises together.

It was agreed that a revised version of the Report would be brought to the Council in March 2023. This would include the findings of further research and dialogue with stakeholders, in the North and South.

- 3. Economic Resilience and Vulnerability.** A draft report was introduced by Cathal Fitzgerald. Members welcomed the report's discussion on the main forces causing turbulence around Ireland's economy, namely the climate and biodiversity emergencies, demographic shifts, geopolitical change, the rising cost of living, and the continuing challenge maintaining national competitiveness. They also endorsed the overall vision of resilience and sustainability for Ireland's economy, environment, and society, with policy action in three core areas: fiscal sustainability and investment; acting to realise net zero; and making work attractive.

Members raised a number of issues, including wider framing of the economy lens and the scope to emphasise sustainability and prosperity; reliance on FDI and corporation tax; ensuring report includes most up-to-date data, and recent developments, such as measures on sick-pay and living wage; prioritising the inter-generational and eldercare challenge; magnifying the links to social enterprise; provision of verifiable, objective and independent information on large infrastructural energy projects; and, the potential value of enhanced foresight capacity in the Irish system.

It was agreed that the Report would be finalised by Written Procedure.

- 4. Work Programme 2023.** The work programme for 2023 was agreed.
- 5. Any Other Business:** The Chair noted that NESC will be 50 next year, with a programme of events to mark this, culminating in a conference in Dublin Castle, 23rd November 2023.

The Chair acknowledged with sadness the events that took place in Lebanon the previous day, 14th December 2023, resulting in the tragic death of a member of the Irish Defence Forces and causing serious injury to one of his fellow comrades. Condolences and support were offered to their families, friends and colleagues.

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, 30th March 2023.