

Participating People

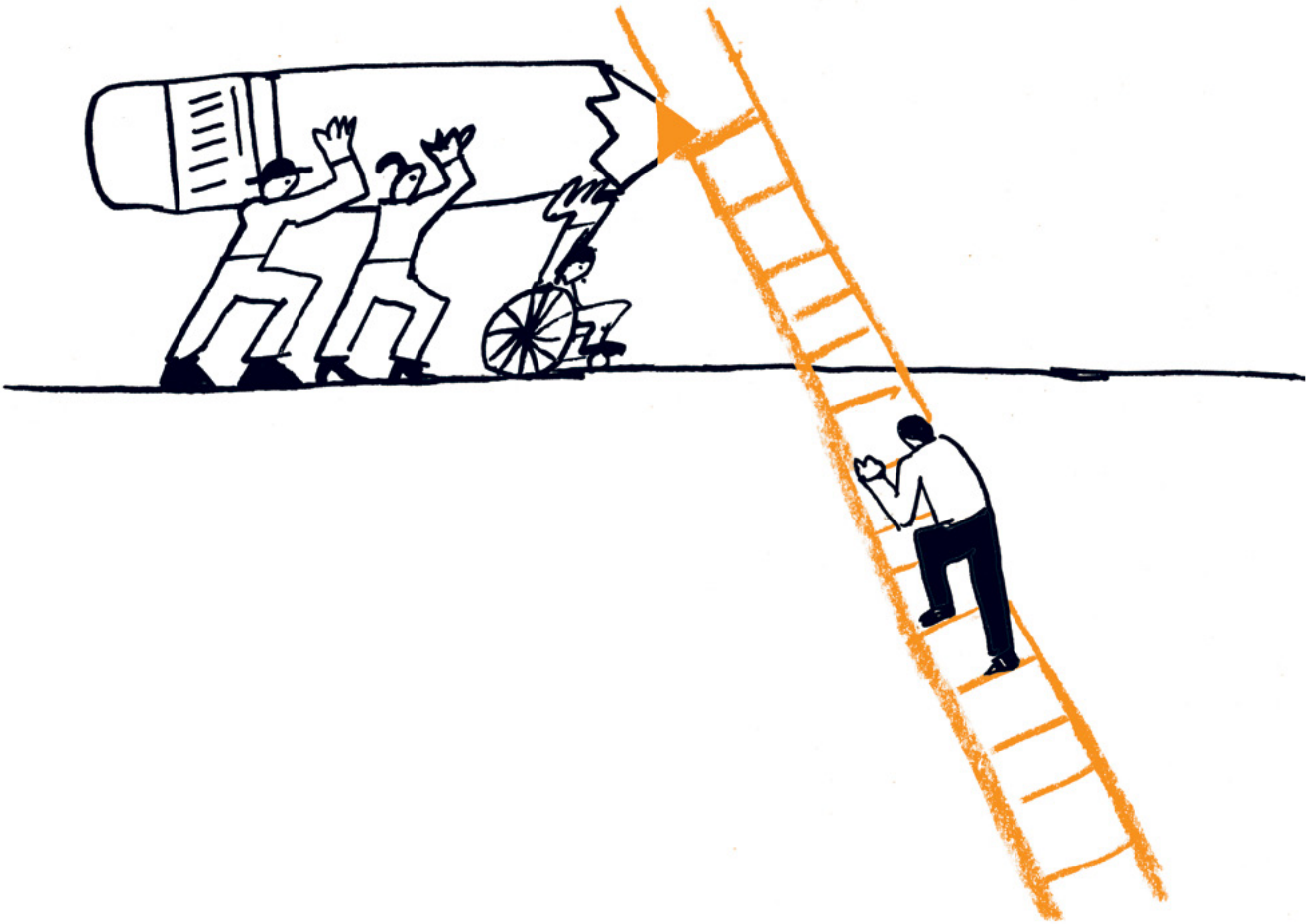


**Enabling Active Citizenship in
Twenty-first Century Ireland**

The Wheel is Ireland's national association of community and voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises. We are a representative voice and a supportive resource that offers advice, training, influence and advocacy for the sector. Our membership, of over 1,600 organisations, includes Ireland's top charities, community and voluntary groups and social enterprises.

The Carnegie UK Trust was established in 1913 by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and it seeks to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and the Republic of Ireland through influencing public policy and demonstrating innovative practice.

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Enabling Active Citizenship in Twenty-first Century Ireland

Report by Ivan Cooper

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Stronger Communities.



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Foreword

Foreword

Carnegie UK Trust

For over 100 years the Carnegie UK Trust has invested in people and communities, recognising their capacity to create transformational change. Over the past decade we have undertaken a programme of research and development aiming to examine the shift from a welfare state to an 'enabling state', an approach to governance based on the principles of participation, co-production and collaborative working.

In 2015, the Carnegie UK Trust were delighted to collaborate with The Wheel, embarking on a project called the People's Conversation. The People's Conversation aimed to engage with a diverse and representative group of citizens in Ireland, to learn about the enablers and barriers to their participation in Irish democracy.

Whilst a lot has changed since we first embarked on the People's Conversation, and challenges undoubtedly lie ahead, it has been encouraging to have so many people engaged in lively discussions about what meaningful participation should and could look like.

From participatory budgeting to citizens' juries, this final report from the project highlights a range of next steps to build frameworks that place citizens at the centre of policy-making processes. The recommendations highlight the potential positive impact of putting societal wellbeing at the heart of governance structures, to better involve and enable communities to engage in the decisions that affect their lives now, or in the future.



Sarah Davidson
Chief Executive, Carnegie UK Trust

The Wheel

Since The Wheel was founded in 1999, we have worked to enable a thriving community and voluntary sector at the heart of a fair and just Ireland.

Supporting people to participate in society is the essence of the community and voluntary approach, so when we began our collaboration with the Carnegie UK Trust, we were excited to begin visualising what is needed for everyone in our society to participate and to realise their potential.

This project has seen hundreds of people take part in discussions about what needs to change to create a truly inclusive and participative Ireland, and has resulted in the publication of four influential reports – *Citizens Rising*, *Money Matters*, *A Two-Way Street* and *Powering Civil Society*. This final report draws together the thinking from all of this work and presents a blueprint of actions to support a more inclusive Ireland with a vision for a more enabling state.

Wide ranging actions identified in this report include the need to ensure a minimum standard of living that no one should fall below, good quality public services, participatory budgeting and government structures that better involve people in decision-making processes.

The Wheel will work in the months and years ahead to realise the vision outlined in *Participating People*, and we look forward to building new coalitions to advance towards a fairer and more inclusive Ireland. We would like to thank the many people and organisations that gave their time to working with us on this model of collaborative thinking and engaged decision-making. We hope this model will inspire people and policymakers alike to work together to shape a positive future for all the people of Ireland.



Deirdre Garvey
Chief Executive Officer, The Wheel

1. About the People's Conversation

Over the last five years, The Wheel and the Carnegie UK Trust have organised group conversations that challenged people across Ireland to consider three big questions:

- **What is shaping our future?**
- **What do citizens expect?**
- **What is expected of citizens?**

We called it the People's Conversation. Hundreds of people took part in small group dialogues, with participants taking the time to get to know and respect each other over the course of three conversations, which were held a few months apart. Once they began talking about their shared future, people naturally focused on the great challenges of our time: the climate crisis; the persistence of poverty; growing inequality; the refugee crisis; the future of energy; pollution; and the threat posed to biodiversity by our agricultural and fisheries practices. This is what people talked about when they had the chance to consider these big questions and discuss their collective priorities.

The conversation turned to what we can do in response to the above-mentioned issues as individuals, communities and as a society. That's where deep consideration was given to the importance of enabling people to participate in making decisions that affect our collective future.

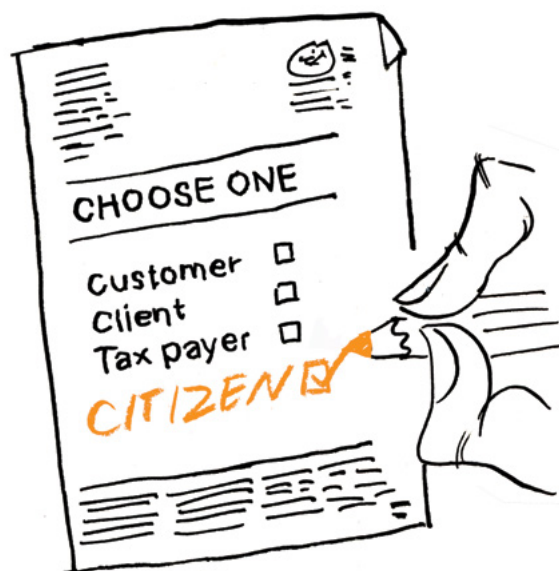
The people who took part in the People's Conversation acknowledged that there are many positive things about the social and economic transformation that has taken place in Ireland over the last fifty years: we are nearing full employment, have world-class infrastructure, as well as an abundance of material goods, high educational attainment and long life-expectancy. Yet, participants also noted that many people are excluded from these positive developments, without the means to participate in day-to-day life. Some of these positive developments are also

associated with unsustainable economic, social and environmental impacts.

The inadequacy of our democratic processes in involving people in decision-making, the changing nature of media and the powerful commercial forces shaping public opinion, were also central themes of the conversation. It all related to the perceived powerlessness of the individual in the face of such realities. Participants identified the need for a counterbalancing communal response to counterbalance the great challenges we face. The forces that are pulling us apart need to be counteracted by investments in the community activities that bring people together.

Following their deliberations, participants in the People's Conversation concluded that there was a relationship between these themes and the way in which people engage, or are excluded from engaging, in day-to-day life. People are increasingly distanced from the power that determines the scope of their choices – and the future of humanity and our planet – in an ever-increasing number of areas.

This report looks at how people can be enabled to reconnect to the power that shapes all of our lives, and be supported in communities of place and interest, so that all of us can take a more active role in shaping our shared future, together.



2. Challenges to participation identified in the People's Conversation

People participate in day-to-day life in many ways, including taking part in community and neighbourhood (associational) life; participating in work and economic life; and participating in local, national, and international (through European elections) democratic life. People need the means to participate in all these arenas (see diagram overleaf). Those who took part in the People's Conversation had much to say, and made many recommendations about how we can maximise participation in all of these dimensions of life.

Those who took part in the People's Conversation felt strongly that if people are to meaningfully participate in community life, and in decision-making processes, they need to be able to live at a material standard that would be acceptable to all in the 21st century. As one participant put it, 'it's hard to get interested in volunteering or in democratic processes when you are worried about where your next meal is coming from'.

The people who took part in the People's Conversation felt that deepening participation in democratic decision-making must extend beyond representative democracy. Participants were clear that we have to find new ways to involve people in decisions about what and how we produce and consume, rather than simply leaving it to the market to passively shape our future. Participants felt strongly that if they were better involved in democratic decision-making processes, then policies and market processes *would be more effectively targeted at the great challenges we currently face*.

This led to the emergence of a powerful conclusion within the People's Conversation: **participating in democratic processes changes people's perceptions of what's possible, empowers people to envision the future together, and gives people a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for taking action on what's needed to change our world for the better**.

The global trend towards individualism has had an impact on Irish society. Participants felt that trust between people is increasingly breaking

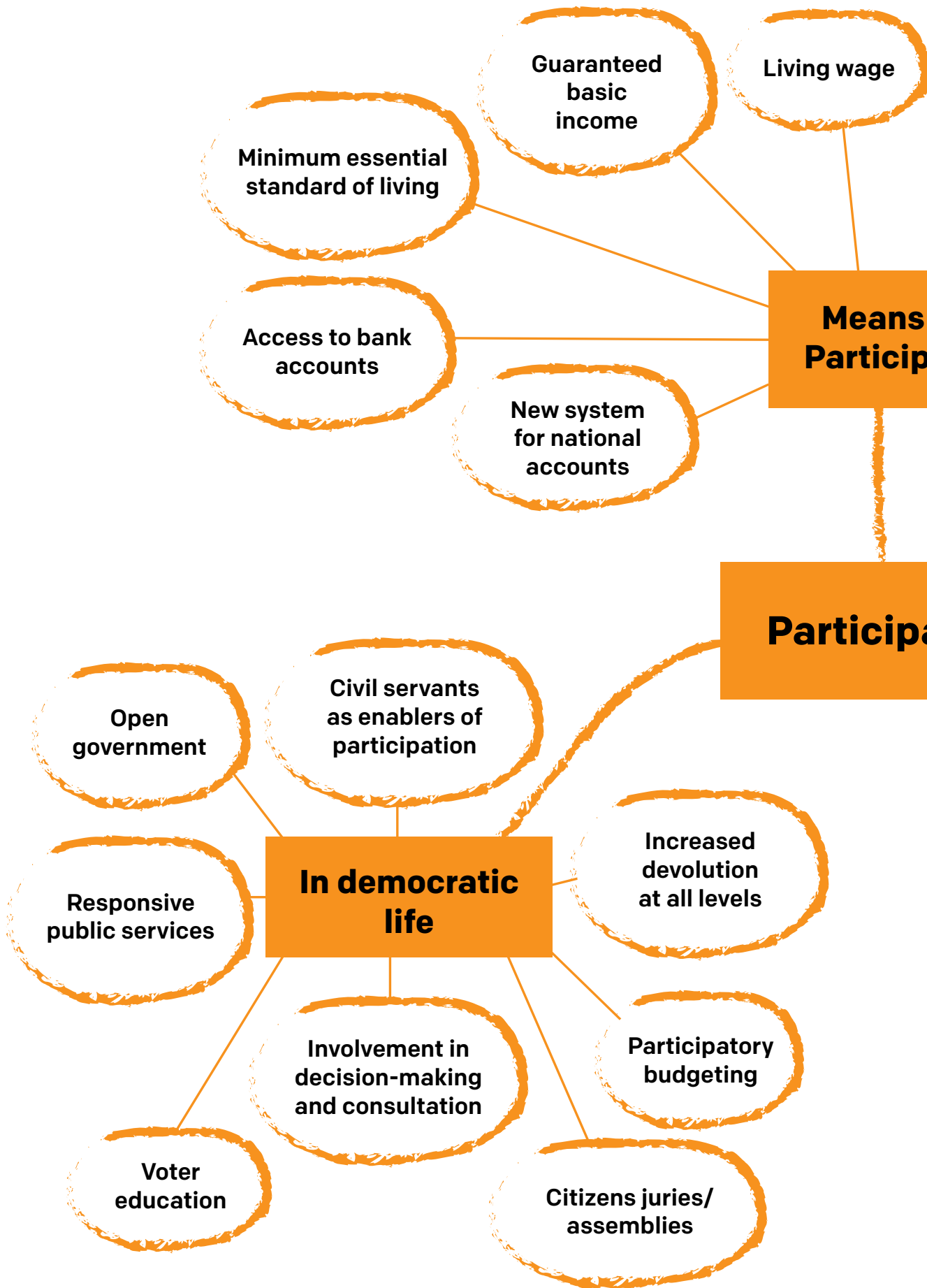
down as many aspects of day-to-day life become subject to conditional or 'contractual' relationships. Rebuilding trust is one of the key issues explored by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) at the request of its member countries.

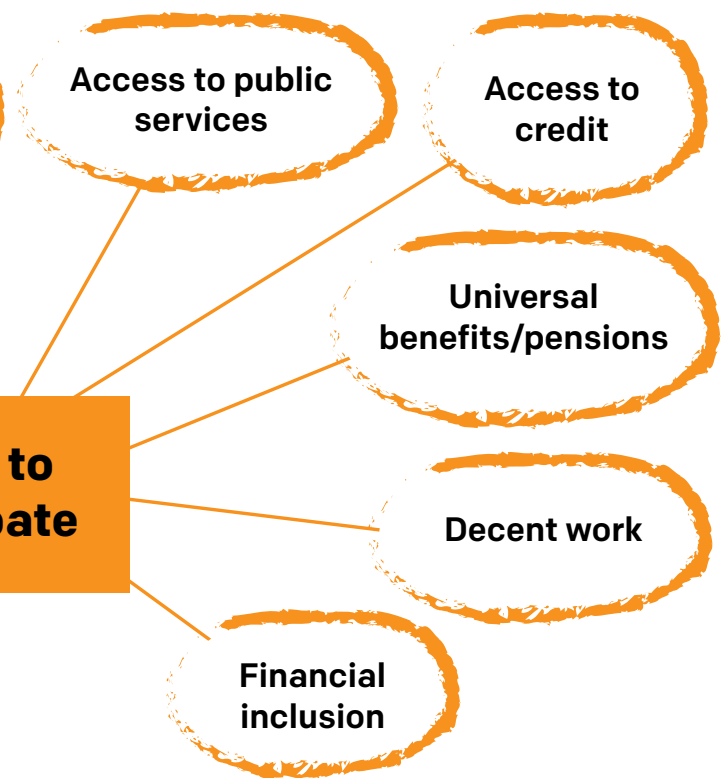
Those who took part in the People's Conversation noted that the outsourcing of public services to the private sector is introducing increasing 'conditionality' into public services. This in turn changes the nature of the relationship between citizens and public services delivered in such commercial contexts. People feel that they are inappropriately regarded as customers rather than as citizens who have a stake in their public services.

Participants in the conversation attested to the fact that racism is still a fact of life in Ireland, and can affect anyone perceived not to fit the 'norm' of settled, white and Irish. Despite this, Ireland has let its strategic approach to racism lapse since the conclusion of the National Action Plan Against Racism 2005–2008. While there must be a strategy at government level that addresses the issue across the spectrum of public policy and public services, there is also a role for community-level action to support integration and anti-racism.

Overall, three themes emerged which provide the structure for the rest of this report:

1. We need to better **engage people in democratic decision-making** processes, in shaping public services and in setting standards on what goods and services we produce and how we produce them.
2. We need to enable participation by **ensuring that everyone has the means to participate and aim at a more participatory work/life economic model**.
3. We cannot take Ireland's high levels of engagement in community activity for granted. We need to invest in **supporting community and associational life**.





3. Engaging people in democratic decision-making

Those who took part in the People’s Conversation understood the many different ways in which people participate in social, economic, community and democratic life.

When they talked about participating in democracy, many took that to mean participation in general day-to-day life. But participants also saw that at the core of our democratic life is **taking part in formal democratic decision-making**: shaping our local, national and international priorities and policies through taking part in both *participatory* and electoral *representative* democratic processes.

New data on active citizenship in Ireland

This report also includes new data on active citizenship in Ireland. It comes from a survey commissioned by Carnegie UK Trust from Ipsos MORI research specialists, with a representative random sampling for approximately 1,000 people in Ireland.

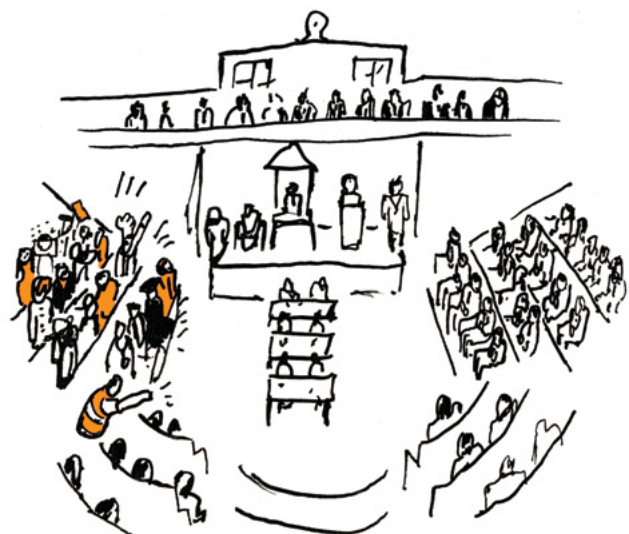
The survey was carried out by telephone interviewing using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) between 15 and 31 March 2018, with respondents selected using random digit-dialling.

To ensure the sample is broadly representative of the adult population, quotas were set on demographic characteristics (age, sex, working status etc.). At the analysis stage, data was then weighted by these characteristics to correct for any differences between the achieved sample and the population as a whole.

In the Ipsos MORI survey we found that almost half (48%) of people in Ireland feel they have too little control over the public services they receive (45% felt that they had about the right level of control).

Ireland scores well internationally on community participation and the spirit of neighbourliness: for example, the high participation rates in the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the 10,000 people who volunteer with the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul (SVP), and all the voluntary clubs, groups and associations in our local communities. However, we score low on participation in democratic decision-making processes at local, regional and national levels. This is a complex area and there are different views as to why this is.

Some participants in the People’s Conversation argued that we prefer to put responsibility on elected representatives and officials, and then complain when they fail to deliver. Others believed that people don’t participate because of the over-centralisation of democratic power in Ireland, the often off-putting nature of party-politics, and experiences of officiousness in people’s interactions with state authorities.



Participants in the People’s Conversation reported that they too often experience no real change as a result of their engagement with public authorities, receive perfunctory responses or feel fobbed off. It was pointed out that it can suit those in power when people don’t participate. And we must not forget that money is arguably the greatest form of power in today’s world; and that private money and wealth is increasingly concentrated and unaccountable.

They were also conscious of the complexity of Ireland’s democratic structures and processes, including:

- **Local democratic structures** such as county councils, Public Participation Networks, local area committees and county councillors
- **Nationally-directed but locally-delivered public service agencies** such as Citizens Information Centres, child and family services, schools and colleges (education and training boards), and the Gardaí
- **National democratic institutions and service organisations** such as Oireachtas committees, central government departments (Education, Health, Environment etc.) and national public-service-providing agencies such as the HSE and Tusla (the Child and Family Agency) that have local, but not locally-accountable, delivery units.

Participants felt that, increasingly, the complexity of our democratic decision-making systems, processes and service-delivery units – and the distance that people feel from them – makes it very difficult for people to meaningfully engage in decision-making to shape these services leading, for many, to a **sense of powerlessness vis-à-vis the state and our public services.**

The survey carried out by Ipsos MORI found that between half and two-thirds of people in Ireland felt that standard mechanisms of engaging with the State were effective (attending public meetings [64%], contacting elected representatives [61%] or making a complaint [53%]). Far fewer saw them as very effective (20%, 21% and 14% respectively).

While these are reasonable responses, the most effective means of improving a local area is considered to be volunteering with local charities or groups: 89% of people think this is effective and 41% of people think this is very effective. Setting up a community organisation is considered by almost three quarters of people to be effective, and by one quarter of people to be very effective. This suggests people believe more strongly in the effectiveness of direct action. Why is this, and how can we ensure that mechanisms of engaging with the state are viewed as similarly effective?

The People’s Conversation concluded that what is needed is a radical transformation of systems, processes and attitudes in order to truly engage citizens in decision-making. People need to be easily able to hold the State and its agencies to account, and be able to participate in shaping policies at all levels.

Government can help with this by opening local and national government to greater citizen participation. It should ensure that statutory service-providing agencies put deliberative structures and processes in place to engage people in shaping our public services and public policy generally.

Public health services in Ireland receive among the lowest citizen ratings in Europe, coming only fifth out of 27 countries in the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) carried out by Eurofound. Ireland is placed only thirteenth out of 34 countries and, significantly, its poor performance on addressing patients’ rights and a lack of access to information is noted.

The participants felt that too many departments and agencies are faceless and engage in perfunctory and inadequate public consultations when developing policies. Many use customer surveys, which some people regard as insincere (or object to in principle as they consider themselves citizens, not customers) when what really works is human face-to-face engagement and care.

We need new, simple and responsive methods of engagement facilitated by developments in technology, but these must not replace human contact entirely.

Below, we address initiatives that could improve the quality of democratic participation within our various political processes, public structures and institutions.

3.1 Participatory local democracy

Before we look at possible initiatives to improve participation we need to briefly sketch out Ireland's complex local democratic decision-making landscape.

Citizens elect councillors to sit on county councils that determine local policy in relation to roads, planning and development. Unlike many other countries, Ireland's local government has no role to play in many public services. There are a number of centralised, national institutions that deal with the provision of education, health and social services, child and family services, community services and

policing, etc. (the HSE, Tusla, education and training boards, and An Garda Síochána, amongst many others).

This has resulted in a disjointedness and a lack of *local accountability*. It can prove difficult to know how or where to engage in order to provide feedback on services and thus shape policy and service priorities.

Government has attempted to bring some coherence to this locally-fragmented landscape by creating **Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs)**. Here, representatives of county councils sit with representatives of central government agencies (such as the HSE and education and training boards) and community representatives to develop integrated **Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs)**. The aim is to better coordinate local services and to help local communities shape public services. LCDCs can be understood as an attempt to support local government to engage citizens and civil society in shaping national and local services.

All agencies participating in these structures are supposed to take local feedback into consideration when tailoring their services to create **seamless responses** to local need. The LCDCs are further open to local citizen participation through an additional structure called the **Public Participation Networks (PPNs)**: local assemblies of community and voluntary organisations active in the county



council areas, which nominate representatives to the LCDCs and other council structures. These PPNs are resourced by county councils to convene local civil society organisations to develop a local **Vision Statement** which will guide the LECP and to involve civil society in shaping county council and service-agency policy across all areas.

Many participants in the People's Conversation knew nothing about these structures, and that is telling of a general perception that there is simply too much complexity and opacity in these processes. There is a view that, unless they are sufficiently demystified, promoted, resourced and communicated, they may actually undermine, rather than enhance, people's sense that they have a stake in determining local democratic priorities.

3.2 What can government do to empower citizens?

The People's Conversation concluded that government should:

1. Invest in and promote Public Participation Networks

PPNs provide a structure where local community and voluntary organisations can engage with their local authorities in shaping policy. These represent an innovative response to public participation, but many people are unaware of their existence. PPNs should be resourced more intensively and promoted widely. The recommendations contained in the Public Participation Network's *Annual Report 2018* (published by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the National PPN Advisory Group) should be implemented in full. Government needs to ensure that the PPNs are the primary vehicle through which local civil society engages with local government – and that they are listened to carefully when it comes to decision-making by councils.

2. Invest in and promote Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) with full engagement by public authorities and agencies

One of the innovations that accompanies the new PPN structure is that all local authorities are obliged to produce a vision-statement for local communities developed by the PPN. PPNs need to be supported to attain the maximum possible public participation in developing these vision statements. We need central agencies such as the HSE, who sit on the LCDCs, to similarly engage with local citizens in shaping and accounting for the quality of local services. Widespread public participation in development of local vision statements should be the aim. LCDCs should be accountable to the general public at local level.

3. Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) need to be ambitious and adequately resourced

LCDCs are responsible for producing an LECP that will deliver the vision set by the PPNs through their engagement with local civil society. Government needs to ensure that these plans are comprehensive in nature, sufficiently ambitious and well-resourced by local authorities. They should include active participation by key members, such as central authorities like the HSE and Tusla, to ensure seamless, joined-up, accountable and responsive services at local level. These developments have the potential to counter and challenge the excessive 'clientelist' bias felt by those who took part in the People's Conversation to be apparent in local politics in Ireland. This will only happen if the agencies concerned grasp the opportunity to better involve citizens in shaping the public services being coordinated through the LCDCs. Local plans should be perceived as living, vital documents supported by engaging processes involving all citizens. Mechanisms to ensure that LCDCs are accountable and answerable to citizens, in addition to the role played by county councillors and community representatives, need to be developed.

4. Pilot participatory budgeting and mainstream citizens' juries

From the above it can be seen that participative infrastructure at local level is complex and it can be difficult to understand where responsibility lies. Participants in the People's Conversation felt that there were more straightforward means of engaging citizens directly in decision-making – including the introduction of pilot participatory budgeting schemes and task-focussed citizens' juries to work on particular local challenges.

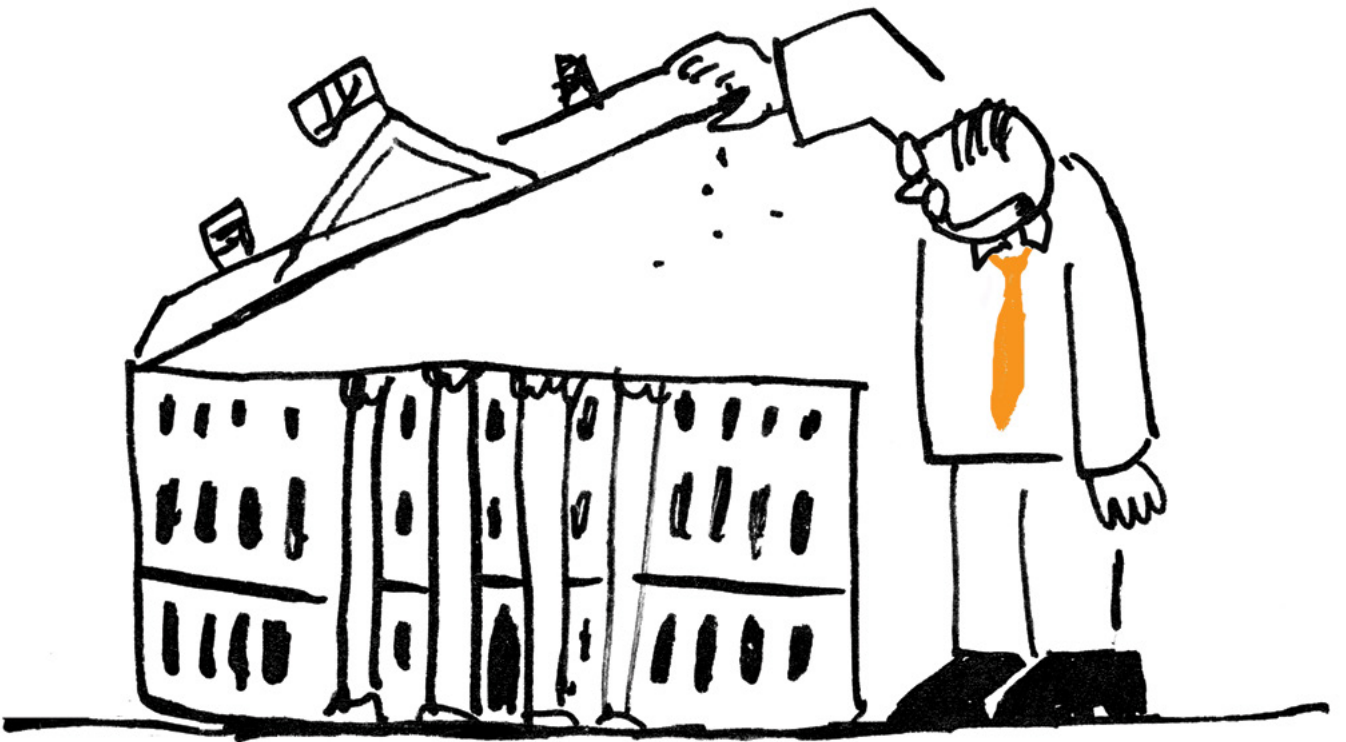
Participatory budgeting is a process of democratic deliberation and decision-making where people decide how to allocate part of a public budget. Participatory budgeting allows citizens to identify, discuss and prioritise public spending projects, giving them the power to make real decisions about how money is spent. Participatory budgeting processes are typically designed to involve those left out of traditional methods of public engagement, such as low-income residents, non-citizens and young people. There is evidence from Brazil that participatory budgeting results in more equitable public spending, greater government transparency and accountability, increased levels of public participation (especially by marginalised residents) and increased democratic and citizenship learning. A flagship initiative in Port Alegre was commended by the World Bank in several analyses of participatory budgeting programmes.

Closer to home, the Scottish government has invested over £4.7 million in a range of measures to support the introduction and development of participatory budgeting between 2014 and June 2017 (*Evaluation of participatory budgeting activity in Scotland 2016 – 2018*, www.gov.scot/publications). This includes a national programme of support to build expertise, knowledge and resources, match project-funding for local authorities and introduce a Community Choices Fund. The Scottish government set out a commitment in their 2016 – 2017 Programme for Government to work in partnership with local authorities to ensure that at least 1% of local authority budgets (£100 million) would be allocated for participatory budgeting. We could learn much from this approach.

Citizens' juries are another way of engaging people in shaping their communities. They involve time-limited groupings of people who are invited by public authorities to reflect on and make proposals for tackling particular challenges. An example is the **PeopleTalk Citizens' Jury** that sought to rebuild trust in public life by giving citizens a say in public service reform. The citizens' jury was initiated by Galway County Council in March 2013 to 'develop practical proposals for public service reform' over a two-year period. The jurors (members of the public who put themselves forward to take part following a public call) requested engagement with public servants from five different state agencies with a view to learning how public administration worked. Their request was granted by the public-service agencies that took part and the end process resulted in the identification of a specific problem and a call for inter-agency collaboration. The jury then made a recommendation which has been implemented by both Galway County Council and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Creative use of such citizens' juries would go a long way to engaging people in decision-making processes.

5. Involve young people in governance of educational institutions

The importance of involving young people in shaping their futures was considered of paramount importance to transforming our collective understanding of ourselves as citizens and in modelling good participatory democratic practice into the future. Indeed, in recent times, young people have started the process of wresting control for themselves and leading on issues such as climate change and environmental policy. Participants in the People's Conversation felt strongly that children and young people should be centrally involved in the governance of their educational institutions through student participation on governance boards and in curriculum development. More radical transformation around self-directed learning and conceptions of schools as self-governed democratic communities was also suggested, with Sudbury schools providing a welcome example to be followed by mainstream schools.



Sudbury schools

A **Sudbury school** is a type of school where students have complete responsibility for their own education. The school is run by direct democracy in which students and staff are equals. There are two Sudbury schools in Ireland (in Wicklow and in Galway). Students independently decide what to do with their time, and tend to learn as a by-product of ordinary experience rather than through coursework. There is no predetermined educational syllabus, prescriptive curriculum or standardized instruction. This is a form of democratic education. Daniel Greenberg, one of the founders of the original Sudbury school, writes that the two things that distinguish a Sudbury school are that everyone – adults and children – are treated equally and that there is no authority other than that granted by the consent of the governed. While each Sudbury school operates independently and determines their own policies and procedures, they share a common culture. The intended culture within a Sudbury school has been described with such words as freedom, trust, respect, responsibility and democracy.

3.3 Participatory national and international democracy

Ireland's national democratic institutions include the Presidency, the Houses of the Oireachtas (Dáil and Seanad Éireann), the government and its departments, and the institutions of the European Union with which we pool sovereignty in important areas of national policymaking (such as the Common Agricultural Policy, trade policy and monetary policy).

Many participants argued that our multi-seat constituency electoral system – while it keeps politicians in touch with local constituencies – can turn citizens into dependent clients. It may also reduce incentives on statutory services to respond to or involve citizens in developing and shaping services (because constituents often turn to politicians to secure access to public services/entitlements they officially have a right to, but find difficult to access).

Additionally, Ireland's statutory services are very centralised in comparison with our European peers (local government doesn't have a role in education, health or social services for example – these are all delivered by centralised agencies and departments). Decision-making power is thus distanced from citizens who find it difficult to meaningfully take part in shaping services or hold service providers to account. When they have this experience people frequently turn to elected officials to make representations on their behalf, thus re-enforcing the vicious clientelist circle.

Participants in the People's Conversation talked about the complexity of government, about the distancing of citizens from shaping the public services they rely on, the often-felt 'facelessness' of public services when citizens attempt to engage, and the apparent unaccountability of services. There was a growing appreciation of the crucial role of the public servant in mediating between ministers and elected officials with responsibility for policymaking, and people seeking to have a say in how public services are designed and delivered. It was pointed out that public servants are 'our public servants, and citizens too' and they are more than just the executors of the will of elected officials. A new paradigm for the role of the public servant was suggested.

They also discussed the importance of European and global institutions in facing such immense challenges as climate change and rising inequality, noting an increasing sense of distance from, and lack of general trust in, such institutions among the population.

The pooling of sovereignty that is necessary to achieve change in critical areas of policymaking (such as climate action) was felt nonetheless to be increasing people's sense of detachment. The well-understood democratic deficit in the European Union was identified as an issue requiring urgent attention by participants. This has been recognised by the EU itself in the 2016 Bratislava Declaration, through which it presented a clear diagnosis of the reasons for citizens' current disaffection regarding

the EU: *'Members of the general public are worried about what they perceive to be a lack of control and influence over what is going on around them; and they are concerned about global issues such as migration, terrorism, security and economic and social insecurity. The European Commission's 2017 work programme focusing on "Delivering a Europe that protects, empowers and defends" is a direct response to these concerns.'*

Somehow, the areas of national sovereignty that have been pooled (including monetary policy through the European System of Central Banks) are not considered to have been adequately counterbalanced by new participatory initiatives. A strong narrative (contested, but legitimate nonetheless) that emerged in the People's Conversation was that Ireland was saddled with the consequences of morally hazardous lending when private European bank loans made to Ireland's private banks went bad and were socialised onto Irish citizens. Reform of our national democratic institutions to deepen engagement of citizens in shaping public policy and public services needs to be accompanied with reform in European and global democratic and monetary governance to ensure that economic justice prevails.

The big issues of today – climate crisis, food security, poverty in the global south, inequality and poverty in the global north, the destruction of biodiversity, the refugee crisis, and continuing war and conflict – can only be addressed by greater global cooperation and the pooling of sovereignty in new global institutions. The challenge is how to achieve such pooling of sovereignty without increasing the sense of unaccountability and unresponsiveness that all too often accompanies it.

The People's Conversation concluded that the government should:

1. Develop a comprehensive framework for participation in governance

Participants were clear that government needs to develop an innovative **participation** framework to apply across all departments and agencies to involve people in policymaking.

New processes and opportunities for participation are needed to introduce new thinking into our national deliberations – not to usurp the decision-making responsibilities of government and elected representatives but to bring fresh and innovative thinking from people who want to participate in addressing the challenges we face.

2. Support civil servants to engage with citizens as part of the policymaking process

Crucial to such new participatory processes and frameworks will be a re-understanding of the role of the civil servant as an enabler of public participation in decision-making.

As set out in the code of conduct of the civil service, its mission is the achievement of an excellent service for government and the other institutions of state, as well as for the public as citizens and users of public services. This mission is based on principles of integrity, impartiality, effectiveness, equity and accountability.

However, if impartiality is interpreted too stringently, it can mean that marginalised voices are not supported to take part in the policymaking process. Where people's interests are not easily identified and advocated by organisations and bodies, there is a risk that marginalised voices are not heard. This is the case for a number of 'seldom heard' groups in society, but also where our interests as citizens are not immediate or clear, such as around the influence of globalisation and climate crisis. The new framework for participation in governance needs to ensure that marginalised voices are brought front and centre in democratic processes – and resourced to achieve this objective.

Alongside the development of a comprehensive framework for participation in governance, an extensive programme of training and support to civil servants in their role as facilitators of engagement with citizens is needed.

3. Encourage people to engage in political life

Many people choose not to engage in the political world or in our democratic life at all. Many prefer to withdraw to the private world of pastimes and pursuits, shaping the world through their consumption choices and the contribution they make through their work, their family commitments, or their interests. All of this is understandable – and while most if not all of us do these things – participants in the People’s Conversation emphasised the importance of staying engaged in political life to ensure that market processes alone do not determine our future. Many participants argued that if the market is left to its own devices, it is likely to give those of us who can pay for it whatever we want without sufficient heed of the consequences for others, for the environment and for future generations. We all need to stay engaged in actively shaping our collective future.

Investment in **voter education programmes** is needed to support all people (and those in marginalised communities in particular) to understand the power of their vote, and to ensure they participate in electing representatives to parliament. In addition, we need investment in civic education in schools and colleges to teach critical thinking skills and raise awareness of the market forces passively shaping people’s individual choices and the power of collective action in proactively setting standards in products, services and markets. The plastics crisis, for example, will not be resolved by people exercising their choice to recycle; it requires a major public policy shift.

4. Convene regular National Citizens’ Assemblies

A strong theme that emerged from the People’s Conversation focussed on the need for people to be facilitated to take a greater part in the development of our national laws and policy priorities. The example of the Citizens’ Assembly and its work to consider amendments to the constitution provides a shining example of what is possible when citizens participate in deliberations to shape national policies. Participants felt that the time is right to commit to convening regular citizens’ assemblies and move their focus beyond constitutional matters to more wide-ranging policy challenges.

A Citizens’ Assembly could, for example, be tasked with considering the adequacy of Ireland’s progress in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment), national policies relating to human rights, the possibilities of a guaranteed basic income (www.basicincome.ie) and myriad other issues. It could become a radically energising forum for considering the challenges facing our society, for energising and inspiring public participation in policymaking and for making recommendations to government.

Selection would have to be rigorously independent and party politics would need to be kept out, but such an assembly could mirror the idea of citizens’ juries, which focused on similar ‘wicked’ challenges at local level. It could also act as a catalyst to much wider citizen engagement nationally in our political priorities and make a transformative contribution to creating the participatory democracy envisaged in the People’s Conversation.

5. Renew Open Government Partnership

The Open Government Partnership is a United Nations initiative to increase public participation in government through making government more open and accountable. This can only be realised if government goes beyond seeing the Open Government Partnership as it currently does – as being about making government processes more transparent – and sees in it the opportunity to reform *the way we do government*. Something can be transparent but still be closed to influence. The goal should be making participation in government and governance more open, involved and inclusive. The Open Government Partnership should be about more than simply creating consultative opportunities (which the current plan is overly focussed on) and should instead be about transforming and opening up government to direct participation by citizens. We would encourage government to be more ambitious in the next iteration of the Open Government Partnership.

6. Put wellbeing at the heart of national accounts, not GDP

There is an old cliché that ‘what gets measured gets managed’ and many participants in the People’s Conversation were clear that when it comes to social and economic life, we are measuring, and therefore managing, the wrong things. The current focus on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) exacerbates the current reliance on the growth paradigm and downplays other dimensions of life that are equally important to wellbeing. A number of countries have established wellbeing frameworks that guide their activities, with governments and civil society organisations coming together under a new alliance (www.wellbeingeconomy.org). Societal wellbeing brings in environmental and quality of life indicators as well as economic

ones, as evidenced in the 2016 research carried out by the OECD and Carnegie UK Trust on wellbeing frameworks (*Sharpening Our Focus: Guidance on wellbeing frameworks for cities and regions*). Many of these frameworks also align to the Sustainable Development Goals. Ireland should match at a national level its commitment to wellbeing at a local level and develop (in a participatory way) a framework that puts wellbeing at its heart.

This would allow the unpaid contribution of the people of Ireland to be included as part of our discussion on national priorities. The Central Statistics Office (CSO), for example, has identified that over €2 billion of voluntary work is carried out in Ireland every year, yet this massive contribution to our social and economic life is nowhere reflected in our national accounts. As a result, the development of appropriate policy to support that activity is underdeveloped. There are myriad other areas (think of the value of the work of unpaid carers or the externalised cost to the environment of discarded plastic) where we would benefit greatly from a more accurate description of the true value added (or the invisible externalised costs) to our society and economy every year. We urgently need a new basis for our national accounts. When we have a new picture of what we value, we can better develop policies that progress towards that.

7. Address democratic deficit in EU decision-making

The financial crisis a decade ago raised or heightened fundamental issues for the European Union: the level of public hostility to austerity; the apparent disjuncture in Europe between north and south; the rise of deep public concern about migration; Brexit; polarised public attitudes towards re-distributive policies; the rise of extreme nationalist and sectarian political parties. All these and other factors demonstrate the need for a reappraisal of what the European Union is, what aims and values it expresses and how well it achieves them.

Participants in the People's Conversation viewed the future of Europe, and the extent to which citizens felt themselves engaged in the development of European policy, as crucial determinants of the quality of general democratic participation in Ireland. Participants were of the view that developing a new narrative for Ireland's future within the EU will be a challenge. This narrative must go beyond the economic advantages of EU membership to demonstrate the uniqueness of the European social model, which aims at building fairer societies and preventing a race to the bottom in social provision. Irish citizens and civil society organisations must take the opportunity for their voices to be heard on the critical issues facing the union, such as:

- Whether to guard national autonomy or further share sovereignty to expand it.
- Whether to continue with the prevailing economic policy or to embrace and redefine a more classic European social model.
- If the latter, how to finance it sustainably, ensuring that social policy is not viewed as a cost but as an investment which strengthens our ability to compete economically and ensure social sustainability.
- Whether to work within existing political models or to engage in a fundamental public debate across all levels of citizen representation, aiming to develop more radical models of engagement and consultation.

8. Better engage people in the Sustainable Development Goals and the work of the United Nations



The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals set targets to be achieved across 17 themes, including education, environment and poverty, to ensure a sustainable future for all. Increasingly, government departments in Ireland are adopting the Sustainable Development Goals as their framework for measuring domestic policy progress, and this is to be welcomed. The Sustainable Development Goals have become more central to domestic policymaking, and a key international vehicle for addressing the great challenges of our times: climate crisis, sustainable food production, inequality, biodiversity, etc.

As these issues correspond with those identified by the People's Conversation, it is critical that there is a high level of awareness of the goals across all levels of government, and in the public mind too. In addition to its own work to achieve the goals, government should support civil society organisations who mobilise communities making local efforts around advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. We are increasingly seeing the crucial role played by informed and engaged citizens around the world in holding governments to account over the adequacy of climate-related policies. Additionally, government should support civil society to connect local communities with the United Nation's broader work and the accountability channels associated with implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. This would ensure that they do not come to be seen as foreign policy, rather than domestic goals.

4. Ensure everyone has the means to participate fully in society

At its most basic, participation in society means feeling included and connected as opposed to being isolated or severely disadvantaged. It means being able to live life with dignity, and not feel dependent or stigmatised in any way. People have the same basic needs: shelter, housing, food, water, clothing, services, friendship, a sense of togetherness and to feel that we are making a valued contribution. Participants in the People's Conversation were clear that everyone should be enabled to participate in society by possessing the means, and the access to services and supports, required to live life with dignity.

In recent decades, participation has also been used with regards to engagement in the labour market. Indeed, for the majority of us, work is foundational to our economic security and helps us to form social connections and maintain a sense of purpose. Being able to access work which allows us to meet basic economic needs and has the potential to be fulfilling is therefore also a key enabler of social participation. This is addressed in Carnegie UK Trust's 2018 paper *Measuring Good Work: The final report of the Measuring Job Quality Working Group*.

Participants in the People's Conversation noted that too many people in Ireland are living in poverty and are unable to participate in day-to-day life to a standard that would be regarded as acceptable in wider society. One in six people (over 780,000 people) in Ireland are living below the poverty line, while more than 100,000 people with jobs live in poverty. Social Justice Ireland note in their *Poverty Focus 2018* report that the number of 'working poor' – defined as people with jobs who are still in poverty – has continued to rise since 2009 despite economic recovery and growth. This means 16.5% of the Irish population lives below the 60% median income poverty line. People in these circumstances cannot participate in day-to-day life in a manner that most people in Ireland take for granted (such as having two pairs of shoes or a winter overcoat, being able to buy new clothes now and again, or having a roast dinner once a month). It is hard to imagine that work which does not lift you out of poverty has much

potential to be fulfilling, or to deliver the quality-of-life benefits which have been core to our social contract.

The People's Conversation concluded that, in order to maximise people's participation in everyday life, Ireland's poverty rate needs to be urgently addressed, and a number of inter-related issues need to be tackled. Central to these issues is ensuring that everybody enjoys a minimum essential standard of living.

Minimum Essential Standard of Living

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice has developed a methodology for assessing a Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) – one which meets an individual/household's physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum level. The research is derived from a negotiated social consensus on what people believe is a fair minimum and draws primarily on the engagement of focus groups which consist of representatives of the household types under consideration, drawn from different socio-economic groups. This research is the basis of the Living Wage campaign in Ireland (www.budgeting.ie).

The People's Conversation concluded that the government should:

1. Establish a minimum essential standard of living for all (supported by a 'living wage')

To address poverty in Ireland and ensure people are able to participate at the most basic level, those who took part in the People's Conversation were clear that government should commit to increasing all benefits to the level of the Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

To address the issue of poverty amongst employed people (the working poor) – employers should commit to a timeline to ensure all employees are paid a **living wage**, and government should increase the national minimum wage to the level of the living

wage. Additionally, government should target more resources and programmes at people experiencing poverty and exclusion in housing, education and healthcare. Civil society has a key role to play in acting as a voice – with and for – excluded people and communities. Government should invest heavily in the social inclusion programmes implemented by the Department of Rural and Community Development and ensure organisations employing people through the *Community Employment Scheme or Community Service Programme* are funded to a level that enables them to pay the national minimum wage.

2. Protect the principle of universality

The principle of universality in child benefit and the old-age pension is sometimes questioned. It is suggested that more conditionality through means testing for benefits should be the way forward. Participants were strongly of the view that such an approach would undermine the sense of fellowship that comes from membership of a community of people that commit to sustain each other at a level acceptable to all.

Participants felt that we need to protect the principle of universality in child benefit so that it continues to be perceived as a right rather than a conditional, means-tested support that may be accompanied by stigma and shame. Universality demonstrates to everyone that they are valued whether they 'need' the support or not (and the vast majority do).

While most older people who have worked in Ireland are entitled to the State pension, and it is popularly understood to be a universal benefit, there are many people who are not entitled to a pension when they reach retirement age. We need to reform the old age pension so that it too is a genuinely universal benefit. This initiative, when coupled with our proposals that employers pay a living wage and that all statutory benefits support a minimum essential standard of living, would result in a de facto universal acceptable standard of living in Ireland – a universal participation standard/level of income for all.

3. Explore the idea of a guaranteed basic income for all

The idea of paying all citizens a guaranteed basic income has become mainstream in recent years. Proponents argue that such a guaranteed income (replacing all benefits) set at a level sufficient to lead a modest, if frugal, lifestyle would remove poverty traps, empower people, increase people's sense of security, free people to do jobs that are uneconomic at present (such as caring for the environment), and reward unpaid work (such as the work done by many carers). Perhaps most importantly it would act as a powerful corrective to one of the strong themes that ran through the conversation: it would reduce the ever-increasing conditionality that people experience in their lives, and reinforce a feeling that people are 'in it together'. The People's Conversation thinks it's time for Ireland to pilot a scheme looking at the feasibility and impact of introducing a universal guaranteed basic income for all.

4. Address financial exclusion

Increasing numbers of people in Ireland experience financial exclusion. As we move towards a cashless society, many people are finding themselves excluded because they don't have a bank account. Most of us take for granted an ability to borrow money if we require it for a big or unexpected expenditure, but a large proportion of people are excluded from accessing finance. We need to work to reduce financial exclusion by ensuring everyone has access to basic banking facilities. This will become even more important as we move rapidly towards a cashless society, where many people will be excluded if they don't have a bank account. Promoting the *basic bank account* and the *personal micro credit scheme* (operated by credit unions) will go a long way to ensuring people can access credit when they need it, and that they don't need to turn to expensive money lending options for their financial requirements.

5. Re-understand the social contract and the role of tax

As the economy improves we regularly hear calls in the media for tax cuts, which will come at the expense of future investment in social housing, health, social and community services. More attention needs to focus on the fact that it is through paying tax that we make a major contribution to our shared *common wealth*. Calls for tax cuts effectively undermine the extent of the commitment we make to one another. Participants in the People's Conversation strongly felt that the interests of private wealth creation (such as reducing taxes) are increasingly dominating the interests of the public good, with insufficient policy priority placed on achieving equity of outcome for all citizens.

6. Respect and invest in public services

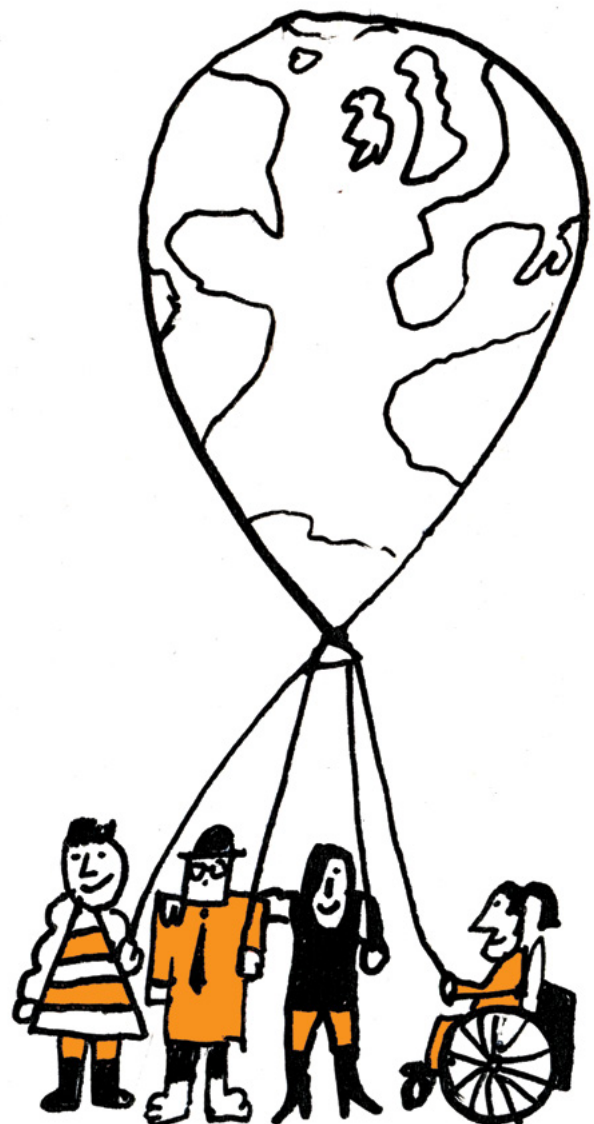
The people who took part in the People's Conversation identified a long running and intensifying trend they considered central to the participatory question. As our society becomes wealthier, the market increasingly promotes private schools, private health insurance, private hospitals and clinics, private transport, private sports clubs and private property in the form of aspirational home ownership.

Public schools, the public health system, public transport, municipal sports facilities and public housing are subliminally signalled as 'inferior', viewed within current market ideology as being less efficient and effective. Participants felt that, increasingly, private interest trumps the public good: in this ideology, public services are seen as being for those who cannot afford to pay for the superior private option. We have to find a way to change the understanding of public services and overcome these false dichotomies. Sufficient investment in the public realm and better understandings about the nature of tax and the importance of universally-available public services is key.

7. Invest in rural Ireland

People living in rural Ireland face increasing challenges in meeting their day-to-day needs. Access to services and isolation are major issues. Rural Ireland faces profound challenges and we need to urgently address the requirements for sustainable rural living and participation.

Government really needs to invest in rural transport, rural broadband and packages of targeted support for local economic activity. These include social enterprises, cooperative services, independent living and home-care supports, rural policing and retail solutions. Without this focus our strong rural communities will be profoundly threatened and perhaps irreversibly undermined. Rural Ireland needs urgent attention and support.



5. Participatory work and economic life



Participants in the People's Conversation understood the importance of work to people's sense of wellbeing, and to their feeling that they are participating in community life. One participant noted that it was 'through work that man tends the planet', and participants felt that many people never stop working. Work, whether paid or unpaid (remunerated or voluntary), is a distinguishing characteristic of a fulfilled life of participation.

Work is important for a sense of purpose

Having a sense of purpose is one of the most important factors in our wellbeing. One of the most insidious consequences of unemployment and, for some, of compulsory retirement, is the sense of day-to-day purposelessness that it can induce.

The People's Conversation concluded that government should:

1. Ensure everyone who wants to can access a paid job

Participants strongly felt that government should introduce reforms to ensure that everyone who wants to participate in the labour force can access a paid job if that is what they want. Eligibility criteria for participation in Community Employment Schemes and the Community Services Programme could be relaxed, for example, to enable more people who want to contribute and be paid modestly for it, to participate in the labour force. Mandatory retirement ages should be abolished, as they have been in other countries.

2. Recognise and value unpaid work

Many people in Ireland are busy working day in and day out in the service of others but they are not paid for it. They are doing vital unpaid work without which our society couldn't function. Think of all the carers looking after relatives and friends; think of all the mothers and fathers; think of the army of volunteers out every day. We need to properly recognise this effort and find ways to effectively value and honour this work. We need a discussion about where responsibility for caring for each other lies, and then share that responsibility in a fairer manner. The role a guaranteed basic income could play in 'freeing people to care' is important.

3. Pay a living wage, and encourage other sectors to do so

The public and private sectors should work towards ensuring that all employees are paid the well-publicised living wage. The 2017 report *Fulfilling Work in Ireland*, undertaken by Ipsos MORI for the Carnegie UK Trust, shows that Ireland has more low-paid workers than the EU average. 21.6% of workers are classed as low paid and minimum wage rates predominate in sectors like the service industry, where four out of five workers are on the minimum wage or lower. People shouldn't have to double-job or work long hours to live life to an acceptable standard. In line with this, government (as noted earlier) should set out a timeline towards increasing the national minimum wage to the level of the living wage.

4. Support higher quality employment for all

The terms and conditions by which people are employed should be fair and reasonable: *all jobs should be decent jobs*. Government should introduce further reforms to counter the growth of precarious forms of work such as 'if and when' contracts, which undermine the security and ability to progress that good quality work should provide. The *Fulfilling Work in Ireland* research shows that insecure forms of work increased exponentially during the recession (involuntary temporary and part-time work increased by around 28% and 27% respectively). Now that the unemployment rate has significantly lowered, young people – who were most likely to be out of work during the recession – are now the most likely to be employed in work that is low-paid and insecure. This points to the need for government to address the *quality* as well as quantity of employment.

5. Invest in childcare

Parents and families face increasing pressure in reconciling caring responsibilities with the requirements of work. While many men play an increasing role in caring for children, the responsibility for childcare still disproportionately rests with women. Many women participating in the labour force today are precluded from returning to work following maternity because of the prohibitive costs of childcare (currently between €700 and €1000 per month). Government should urgently address Ireland's inadequate childcare provision and paternity leave should be introduced that is equivalent to maternity leave for couples that wish to share parenting responsibility.

6. Support worker-participation in governance of firms

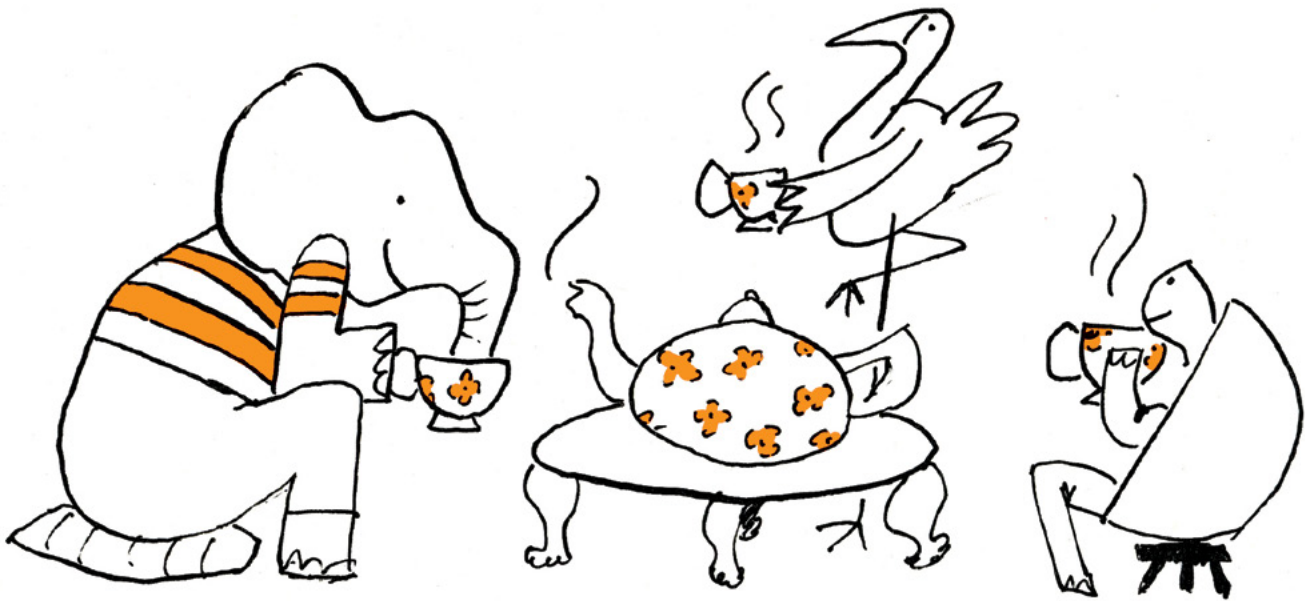
Employees should be enabled to take a greater role in the governance of the organisations that employ them, be they private, public or voluntary. Government should conduct and publish research into new models of corporate governance in Ireland that accommodate worker directors and 'works councils'. Participation by employees in corporate governance might be a primary way that firms could be supported and encouraged to become more accountable for the wider societal and environmental impact of their work. We urgently need a new paradigm for business that better balances private-profit and public-good. Involving employees in the governance of their firms could be a very good first step in that democratising direction.

7. Support alternative business models

Government needs to put a much greater emphasis on growing the social enterprise sector approach to doing business. We need comprehensive local, national and international policies to support and nurture this growing movement which is democratising business, placing greater attention on the social impact of private sector practices.

Supports for community-owned businesses (in the area of wind energy generation for example) and for non-financial inputs into economic activity (such as 'time-banking') are practical examples of the myriad policy changes that could make this new paradigm a reality. The Department of Rural and Community Development has recently published a national policy to support social enterprise. This should be prioritised for full resourcing by government and 'mainstreamed' into the state's commercial enterprise policy.

6. Participating in community and associational life



People in Ireland have a healthy involvement in local community, in neighbourhood life and in voluntary activity. In the Carnegie UK Trust/Ipsos MORI poll we found:

- **97%** report that people living in their area are generally kind;
- **85%** make time to speak to their neighbours;
- **82%** have helped someone who needed it in the last 12 months;
- **88%** feel there is someone they could turn to if they needed help or advice; and
- **71%** felt that emotional support would be available locally.

The OECD's Better Life Index research shows that out of 37 OECD countries, Ireland has the second highest score for 'quality of support network', which means people feel the quality of help available to them is among the highest in the world.

We participate more frequently in social activities than any other European country including many of the Nordic states. More

than a third of our young people, the highest number in Europe, are involved in local organisations and a similar proportion are involved in a youth clubs or organisations, representing the second highest figure in the EU. Additionally, more than half of Ireland's young population are involved in a sports club, which is the second highest figure in Europe.

16% of Irish people regularly volunteer and around a quarter to one third are involved in some community activity which may overlap with informal or occasional volunteering. Half the population of Irish people aged over 18 years are involved in unpaid voluntary work compared to an EU average of less than one third. This is the third highest rate in Europe after Austria and Sweden, again putting Ireland among the Nordic states.

While these statistics are very reassuring and Ireland scores very high on neighbourliness and community activity, participants in the People's Conversation felt that **there are changes taking place in Irish society which may undermine these positive realities if left unchecked.**

In trends that are similar to other countries, it is becoming increasingly difficult for people to find the time and space to interact with their neighbours. Furthermore, as our population ages, increasing numbers of older people will find themselves living alone, perhaps dependent for social interaction on brief encounters with professional care assistants. A strong theme that emerged from the People's Conversation was the need to combat loneliness and reinforce the human connection in our everyday lives. It was considered important that we don't take Ireland's high levels of community-connectedness for granted and assume they will persist in the face of these trends.

Additionally, those that took part in the conversation noted that participation in everyday life is becoming increasingly commercial and transactional – conditional on the ability to pay. As has been noted elsewhere in this report, increasing **conditionality** in day-to-day life was an important theme in the conversation. As our society has modernised and become wealthier, inclusive and relatively inexpensive 'public' places and spaces where people gathered, participated and communicated have been supplanted by more exclusive and expensive places and spaces that are generally more conditional on the ability to pay.

Taken together, these developments present a potential long-term risk to the quality of people's participative lives. If we are not careful, these trends could undermine our currently high levels of neighbourliness and community activity.

Participants felt that it is time for government and civil society to work in partnership to sustain, and where necessary create anew, the conditions for healthy, thriving communities to counter prevailing trends towards greater individualism and conditional participation. This will involve investing in community assets to create public wealth as opposed to private wealth, as well as investing in volunteering, and in community and voluntary sector infrastructure.

1. Invest in community assets to create public wealth

Participants in the People's Conversation were clear that everyone should have a right to live in a high-quality neighbourhood, with community centres, day-care centres for older and vulnerable people, childcare facilities, resourced neighbourhood groups and associations, primary health care centres and good public transport links. These should be available to all and not conditional on the ability to pay.

These are the manifestations of public wealth that participants felt we need to invest in. Many can be community-led through the community and voluntary sector, with the people who live in neighbourhoods and communities directly engaged in their governance and operations.

We need better integrated planning, greater public investment in community facilities and deeper engagement by citizens in their governance. This will in turn deepen engagement in democratic life and in shaping local public services.

2. Respect voluntary activity as a form of public service and an intrinsic part of Irish culture

Volunteering plays a vital role in how we sustain our communities today, and in its absence the state would be obliged to seek alternative, costlier and less effective ways of serving its citizens. Voluntary service, based on free personal networks, is a particularly effective expression of this responsiveness. The people who took part in the People's Conversation viewed the motivation of public service as an expression of basic human solidarity without which no society can survive. Public service and voluntary service plays a pervasive role in building up trust both in society at large and in the relationship between citizen and state. Enabling participation in everyday life is about demonstrating respect for the various participants and facilitating essential community life.

3. Support volunteering

High levels of community wellbeing are associated with high levels of community participation and volunteering. People are short on time, and our society owes a great deal to the two million people who volunteer every year for community clubs, groups and associations; to the 350,000 who volunteer for charities; and to the 50,000 people who volunteer on the committees and boards of Ireland's 10,000 charities. We need to ensure that public policy better supports volunteering and community activity. How can we do this?

6.1 Participation in associational life

If people are to volunteer, there needs to be a thriving ecosystem at local level, comprising community groups, clubs and associations for people to get involved with.

Underpinning people's ability to participate is a requirement for a strong and healthy associational life. Indeed, community and voluntary organisations form a key component of our national democratic life; they are the incubators and nurseries of our democracy. In particular, they are often the places where otherwise excluded or marginalised people and communities come together as active citizens to give expression to their collective voice.

An active citizen is quite simply anyone living within the state doing anything to express their values or working to achieve something for the common good. Active citizenship can be done individually but more often it is about collective activity and working together as part of civil society organisations, which are a manifestation of active citizenship.

At work across all sectors of society, Ireland's 29,000 community, voluntary and charitable organisations work day in and day out, alongside volunteers, to support people to participate to the full. Every single one of us has been positively affected by the work of our community and voluntary organisations over the years.

They are supporting people to live independent lives, supporting people with disabilities and medical conditions, supporting older people, children and young people to realise their potential, and campaigning for change in social, health and environmental causes. They form a vital part of Ireland's vibrant **civil society**.

Civil society is the association of people in pursuit of common interests and values through formal and informal organisations. Everything from sports clubs, student groups and community associations through to trade unions, professional representative bodies and religious organisations are part of civil society, alongside what we understand as *traditional charities*. Civil society organisations express the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations.

Civil society organisations:

- Are a legitimate expression of people exercising their fundamental human rights.
- Express interests and values.
- Are independent and autonomous.
- Involve and facilitate voluntary as well as collective action.

A strong, active, diverse and independent community and voluntary sector thus forms an essential part of a healthy democracy. These independent organisations provide an essential public space where, in addition to supporting their own community life, private citizens can participate in tackling specific challenges, setting local, national and international agendas, campaigning for change and shaping the priorities of public authorities.

We need to better appreciate the vital role played by community and voluntary organisations in providing the places and spaces where people come together to pursue change, as well as their role in advocating for that change. Currently, community and voluntary organisations are advocating for environmental causes, campaigning for social justice and rights, supporting people experiencing poverty, supporting migrants, promoting the arts and working overseas for fair trade and climate justice. However, if the sector is to maximise the contribution it can make to people's participation in Ireland it needs support.

Government should develop a set of rules and guidelines (such as a charter or compact) for all public authorities to follow in engaging with citizens and civil society organisations. Under such a framework, people would be empowered, individually and through organisations, to be active citizens who participate directly in deliberations about and implementation of public services. Government's *Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector*, published in September 2019, recognises the need to review consultation guidelines, but significant work remains to be done to move from passive consultation to active participation in decision-making.

At the same time, there is a clear onus on civil society organisations to do more to encourage and empower people to be active citizens.

6.2 What can government do to support the voice of civil society?

The People's Conversation found that government can do much to support a strong civil society voice by:

1. Recognising that organised civil society is a legitimate and authentic expression of active citizenship grounded in fundamental human rights.
2. Encouraging government departments to take a more equitable participatory approach to their dealings with civil society organisations.
3. Ensuring that citizens can participate directly in deliberations and the implementation of public policy and public services.
4. Reviewing laws and regulations that affect civil society organisations to ensure the freedom to advocate and to create a less onerous, more streamlined regulatory regime.
5. Provide funding to support the empowerment of people from minority groups and in disadvantaged localities to take part in policymaking.
6. Create a forum for engagement between the community and voluntary sector and the state.
7. Develop and resource strategies to support the development of the community and voluntary sector.

6.3 What can civil society do to ensure citizens' voices are being heard?

The first role of civil society leadership is surely to foster and support people generally to act out of kindness, sympathy and solidarity with others. But this moral leadership needs to be accompanied by practical leadership. Civil society organisations need to provide pragmatic and evidence-based solutions for society's problems, and they need to ensure that their organisations are managed and governed in such an open and participatory way that the inclusion of people – particularly the most marginalised in society – is facilitated and supported.

The People's Conversation concluded that civil society organisations should:

1. Avoid top-down ways of working and develop organisational cultures of working with people.
2. Be open to multiple ways of working in order to be more inclusive of people who are disadvantaged.
3. Ensure that they support the participation of people from all walks of life and create opportunities for stakeholders to hold them to account.
4. Embody the values that underpin democracy – such as dialogue and respect – and play a role in familiarising people with democratic processes.
5. Conduct diversity reviews and ensure boards are representative of communities and, in particular, new communities.
6. Where relevant to their mission, participate in advancing Ireland's international commitments – such as to fulfil human rights and mitigate climate crisis.
7. Be open to objective review of the efficacy of their work and to considering radical organisational changes where these would increase participation.

7. Conclusion

7. Conclusion

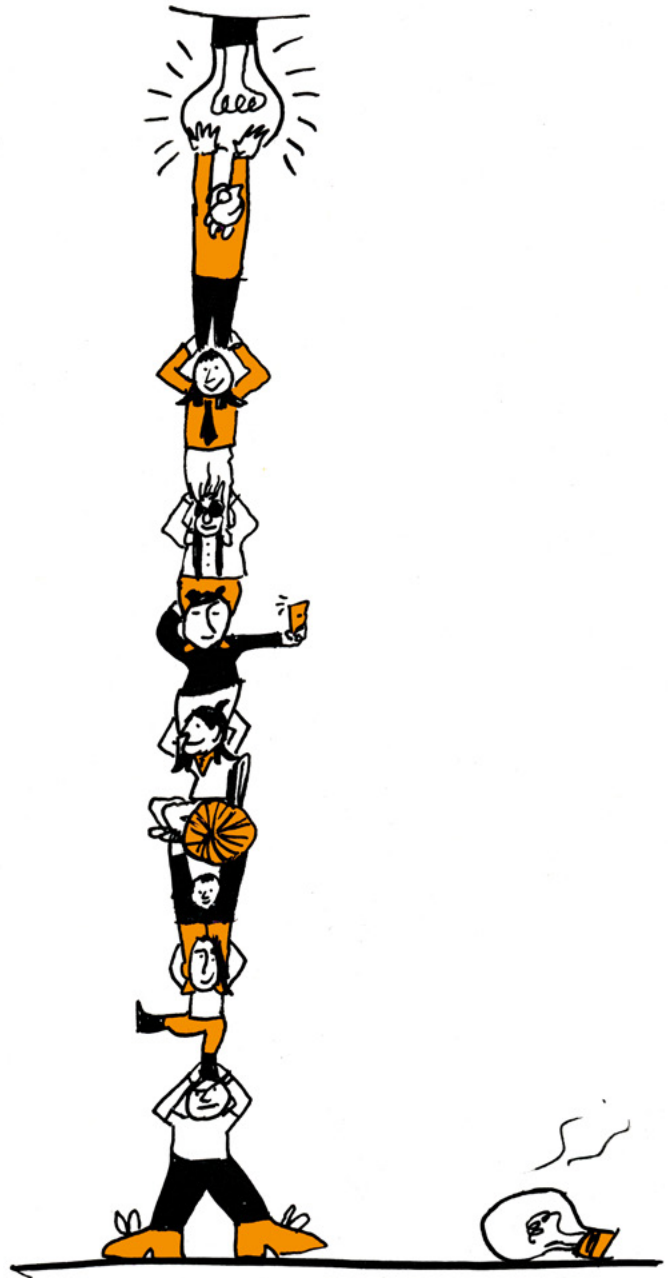
This report has found that people in Ireland continue to be very much involved in their local community, participating socially, giving financial support and volunteering their time to local, national and international causes. It also found, however, that too many people in Ireland are excluded from participating in day-to-day life because they lack the material means to do so. In addition, it identified a big deficit in both the quality and quantity of opportunities for people to engage in setting public policy priorities through our democratic structures and processes.

Encouragingly, the report finds that, when given the opportunity, people are keen to participate in dialogue around the great challenges of our time, and have plenty to say about how these challenges can be more adequately addressed.

Most importantly it found that people want to participate. It is incumbent on policymakers now to ensure that the many recommendations in this report are considered and that the issues to which they relate are addressed in the years ahead.

Ireland benefits from a very high level of community wellbeing and high levels of social capital, but as this report has concluded, we cannot take that for granted amidst the great global changes that currently face us all.

Action is needed to address the great challenges of our times, and a key action as identified in this report is to support and encourage people to play a much more engaged role in determining what our public policy priorities should be. The participants in the People's Conversation were clear that if people are engaged more in deliberative approaches to policymaking, and enabled to live to a basic standard acceptable to us all, then we stand a much better chance of responding positively to these challenges.



A note on methodology

More than 150 people took part in small conversation groups convened by 15 civil society organisations and campaign groups. Participants were drawn from these organisations' wider networks, including members, staff, volunteers, service users and interested members of the general public. Citizens shared their incredible insights and experiences; they generated ideas and they inspired each other to action.

A full note on each of the conversation group meetings was produced. An initial analysis of the notes identified a number of common themes which were then presented to conversation groups for further feedback and discussion.

Over 300 additional participants took part in public conversation events, including a special dedicated session at The Wheel's 2018 annual summit, at which three special reports were launched and discussed.

Following the discussion groups and the publication of the first report, *Citizens Rising*, further expert input and analysis was commissioned. This resulted in the three further reports (published in 2018) that examined different aspects of the participation challenge:

1. *Powering Civil Society* looked at the role of the community and voluntary sector as a vehicle for active citizenship.
2. *Money Matters* looked at economic barriers to active citizenship and how to overcome them.
3. *A Two-Way Street* looked at the missing piece in the participation narrative: the role of the public servant.

Citizens Rising reflected the rich diversity of these citizens' conversations, but it also identified key challenges that need to be met in order to make this new vision of citizenship a reality. The report identified three key avenues to progress:

1. Promoting active citizenship and an independent community and voluntary sector.
2. Putting citizen participation at the heart of the design and delivery of public services.
3. Developing the link between economic and social wellbeing, and citizen participation.

This final report of the People's Conversation draws together all of the conversation themes and the findings of the three expert reports into one summary document that aims to stimulate action towards enabling a fully participative society for all people.







People are keen to participate in dialogue around the great challenges of our time, and have plenty to say about how these challenges can be more adequately addressed. It is incumbent on policymakers now to ensure that the many recommendations in this report are considered and that the issues to which they relate are addressed in the years ahead.

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