



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

Shared Island: Projects, Progress & Policy

The Good-Jobs Agenda

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1. Executive Summary

This Secretariat Paper on the concept of ‘Good Jobs’ forms part of a larger Shared Island Project, carried out by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) at the request of the Department of the Taoiseach. Drawing on insights and opinions garnered from a series of engagements with relevant practitioners and experts, it highlights the potential benefits of using the ‘Good Jobs’ framework as a basis for exploring shared problems and challenges in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Although ‘poor’ jobs are not a new phenomenon, there is growing concern that the drivers of economic and social change—climate transition, digitisation, demography and globalisation—could combine in a manner that accelerates fragmentation and inequality in the labour market. This has served to focus attention on the idea of a ‘good jobs’ economy, given the potential economic, social and political benefits associated with good jobs.

Although there is broad consensus as to the benefits of promoting a good-jobs economy, and the potential negative consequences associated with growing levels of ‘lower-quality jobs’, there is no definitive definition of what good jobs means in practice. To an extent, ‘good jobs’ is an imprecise concept and, as such, it needs to be operationalised in a way that is evolving and context-dependent.

The lack of an agreed definition of good work ensures that there is also considerable uncertainty as to the suite of measures and actions that are required to improve job quality in the labour market. Despite this level of uncertainty, it is recognised that improving the nature and design of jobs will require a sustained, coordinated and collaborative approach, involving networks of public and private coalitions. This networked approach should be underpinned by a commitment to intensive interaction, learning and review, based on the emerging experience and knowledge of practitioners and front-line actors.

The devolved administrations in both Scotland and Wales have introduced initiatives designed to substantially increase the incidence of ‘Fair Work’ in their labour markets and, in so doing, seek to harness the potential positive economic and social benefits. Both the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government have also adopted strategies and policies that are supportive of the good-jobs agenda.

This Secretariat Paper provides a foundation for the next stage of the NESC research, premised on a deeper, area-based approach, designed to contribute to how problems and challenges more generally might be resolved, supported and

progressed by a Shared Island perspective. In this context, the adoption of a good-jobs approach is considered an appropriate lens for examining the lived experience of individuals, families and communities in specific localities—for example, border regions and/or urban communities.

There are a number of elements in the good-jobs agenda which suggest its relevance to a deeper, area-based approach. These include: mobilising coalitions of public and private actors; the advantages of an experimental approach premised on engagement, learning, monitoring and review; the potential to generate social and economic benefits for both individuals and society; and the need to devise an integrated set of tailored and customised policy initiatives. In the context of the transition to a low-carbon economy, the need to both create green and sustainable jobs and ensure that no-one is 'left behind' also suggests that the good-jobs agenda will be an integral element of the NESCC's proposed project work on sustainability.

It is worth noting that interviewees, recognising the various competitive pressures and labour-market contexts associated with different sectors of the economy, also saw potential in adopting a sectoral approach to this issue, which has been a feature of the policy approach in both Scotland and Wales. The social care and retail sectors, in particular, were identified as sectors that would benefit from such an approach.

1.1 Introduction

This Secretariat Paper considers some of the issues around the concept of 'Good Jobs' as a potential research project within NESCC's Shared Island work. Facilitating dialogue and engagement is an integral part of the Shared Island Initiative; this paper provides an overview of the insights and opinions garnered from a series of engagements with relevant practitioners and experts on the topic of 'Good Jobs' (see Appendix 1).

The paper is structured as follows:

- Section 2 provides an overview of the good-jobs concept.
- Sections 3 considers the approach adopted to support 'good jobs' in the UK and the devolved Administrations.
- Section 4 outlines how Ireland has sought to promote 'good jobs' in the labour market.
- Section 5 provides feedback from an initial round of stakeholder engagement, indicating support for work in this area and the challenges involved in undertaking cross-border projects.
- Section 6 concludes with some observations about possible next steps, and in particular, the potential to use a good-jobs 'framework' as a part of an area-based research approach.

2. A Good-Jobs Agenda

In recent years, there has been increased demand for governments and policymakers to focus attention not just on the quantity but also the quality of jobs. Although ‘poor’ jobs are not a new phenomenon, there is a growing concern that the drivers of economic and social change—climate transition, digitisation, demography and globalisation—could combine in a manner that accelerates fragmentation and inequality in the labour market.

We’re living in a world now where the problem is that for a number of trends—to do with technological changes and how globalised the world market is—we are in a chronic state of shortage of good jobs (Rodrik, 2021).

This has served to focus attention on the idea of a ‘good jobs’ economy, given the potential economic, social and political externalities associated with good jobs (Cazes *et al.*, 2015; Cohen, 2020; Rodrik & Sabel, 2019; Wilson, 2018).¹

Job quality is not only a key determinant of the well-being of individuals and of the households in which they live (an end in its own right) but also can be an important driver of increased labour force participation, productivity and aggregate economic performance (Cazes *et al.*, 2015: 6).

From an economic perspective, good jobs are associated with higher levels of productivity, performance and innovation, which are viewed as drivers of sustainable economic growth. For individuals and broader society, a good-jobs economy is seen as a way of improving standards of living, reducing inequality and poverty, and improving personal well-being. Alternatively, ‘bad jobs’ are associated with high levels of labour turnover, slower innovation, lower productivity and additional managerial costs. There are significant negative impacts on workers in terms of their health, well-being, quality of life and access to credit. Increased levels of employment and income insecurity in the labour market are also associated with growing societal inequality. This has the potential to generate substantial negative externalities for the state, in terms of both loss of tax revenue and increased welfare expenditure to mitigate the effects of ‘poor jobs’, particularly through higher levels of income transfers and health expenditure. Cazes *et al.* (2015) envisage a focus on job quality as part of the OECD’s broader focus on well-being and inclusive growth.

Interestingly, there has also been a growing recognition of the association between concentrated economic and social deprivation and the rise of political extremism, or what one author referred to as the ‘revenge of places that did not matter’ (Rodríguez-Pose, 2017). Rodrik and Sabel (2019) strongly contend that failure to address the increased proportion of ‘poor jobs’ in the labour market may undermine democratic institutions and political stability. Although it is often

¹ In addition to good jobs other terms that appear in both the literature and policy practice include quality work, fair work, decent jobs etc.,. For the purposes of this paper, we have chosen the term ‘good jobs’ except where organisations and/or authors use another specific term.

articulated in terms of a conflict over identity and values, Rodrik (2021) argues that right-wing populism has very strong economic roots. Several of the individuals who were interviewed for this paper referred to the potential social and political fallout of a failure to tackle growing inequality across Europe.

The concept of good work has attracted increasing interest in academic, statistical and policy circles in recent years. The development of various measurement frameworks is in part reflective of this (see Table 1). At the same time, it has tended to have less prominence in policy practice (Cazes *et al.*, 2015) and there is some concern that the policy dialogue around addressing the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic could be dominated by a focus on job quantity/creation, as was the case in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

However, the swift and purposeful manner in which many states, including Ireland (see section 4), have responded to the economic and social impacts of Covid-19, and in particular the willingness to directly intervene to support employment and productive capacity over a sustained period, suggests that there may now be scope for a greater emphasis in national economic recovery plans on job quality, labour-market inclusiveness and well-being.

Cazes *et al.* (2015) contend that there is no discernible trade-off between job quality and quantity but rather potential synergies as countries that do relatively poorly with respect to job quality tend to have relatively low employment rates, and vice versa. This same study does note, however, that the relationship between job quantity and quality can be quite complex, especially in the short term, as evidenced by the impact of the global economic and financial crisis.

Although there is broad consensus as to the benefits of promoting a good-jobs economy, and the potential negative consequences associated with growing levels of 'lower-quality jobs', there is no definitive definition of what good jobs means in practice. A number of different frameworks for measuring job quality are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Measuring Job Quality: Key Indicators

| EU Laeken Indicators | ETUI | ILO | OECD | Eurofound |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Intrinsic Job Quality | Wages | Employment Opportunities | Earnings Quality | Physical Environment |
| Lifelong Learning & Career Development | Non-standard forms of employment | Unacceptable Work | Job Security | Work Intensity |
| Gender Equality | Working Time & Work-Life Balance | Adequate Earnings & Productive Work | Quality of Working Environment | Working Time Quality |
| Health & Safety at Work | Working Conditions & Job Security | Decent Hours | | Social Environment |
| Flexibility & Security | Skills & Career Development | Stability & Security at Work | | Skills and Discretion |
| Inclusion & Access to Labour Market | Collective Interest Representation | Combining Work & Family Life | | Prospects |
| Work Organisation & Work-Life Balance | | Fair Treatment in Employment | | Earnings |
| Social Dialogue & Workers Involvement | | Safe Work Environment | | |
| Diversity & Non-discrimination | | Social Protection | | |
| Overall Economic Performance & Productivity | | Social Dialogue & Workplace Relations | | |
| | | Economic & Social Content of Decent Work | | |

Source: Wilson, 2018; Eurofound, 2017.

The OECD framework for measuring and assessing job quality is premised on three objective and measurable dimensions of job quality that it considers important for worker well-being and policy development (see Box A).

Box A: The OECD Job Quality Framework

Earnings Quality: this measure uses an index that accounts for both the level of earnings, which is a key benchmark for assessing contribution to material living standards, and their distribution across the workforce, as this has an impact on well-being.

Labour-Market Security: this dimension focuses on probability of job loss and the economic cost for workers, and thus incorporates the risk of unemployment, the expected duration of unemployment, and the nature of public unemployment insurance (in terms of both coverage and generosity).

Quality of the Working Environment: this focuses on the non-economic aspects of job quality and the incidence of job strain, which constitutes a major health risk factor for workers. Job strain is based on a combination of job demands and limited job resources.

Source: Cazes *et al.*, 2015.

Eurofound contends that the success of EU employment policies to boost employment levels, prolong working life, increase the participation of women, develop productivity and innovation, and adapt to the digital challenge depends not just on changes in the external labour market but also on developing good working conditions and job quality. Eurofound's sixth European Working Conditions Survey (Eurofound, 2017) used seven indices of job quality: physical environment, work intensity, working-time quality, social environment, skills and discretion, prospects, and earnings. These dimensions were chosen due to their perceived importance and impact (positive or negative) on the health and well-being of workers. The survey scores from each of the dimensions were then used to categorise workers into five typical job-quality profiles:

- high-flying;
- smooth-running;
- active manual;
- under pressure; and
- poor-quality.

While there is merit in all of the measurement frameworks outlined in Table 1, the lack of an agreed definition ensures that in practice the concept of 'good' or 'quality' jobs remains problematic and indeed to some degree contested.

Rodrik and Sabel (2019), in articulating the benefits of a good-jobs economy, refer to it as a ‘slippery concept’ that will have highly contextualised features. They stress that ‘good jobs’ is an imprecise concept and thus it needs to be operationalised in a way that is evolving and context-dependent.

Although the concept of a good job can mean different things to different people in different socio-economic contexts, Cohen (2020), adopting what he terms a philosophical approach, contends that there are four core instrumental and intrinsic features of a good job which transcend specific contexts:

- the provision of standard goods;
- voice;
- purpose (worthwhile doing); and
- pleasure (provides enjoyment, engagement and social collaboration).

For example, ‘standard goods’ are those features that make a job good because they enhance the contribution of a job to the quality of life outside of work. While accepting that there will inevitably be variations across people and place, Cohen (2020) argues that it possible to identify specific standard goods, as ‘generally speaking,... a good job is a job that that has features that make it reasonable for most people to want’ (Cohen 2020:5). This author notes that most contemporary conceptions of good jobs identify the following four good-making features:

- **Compensation:** they provide a decent standard of living, sufficient to cover basic needs—for example, a living wage.
- **Stability:** they have some predictability in hours and stability in tenure to enable the person with the job to fit it into the rest of their life.
- **Healthy and Safe:** they provide protection against harsh and dangerous working conditions.
- **Growth:** they offer opportunities for acquiring new skills and responsibilities that are associated with greater compensation over the life-course.

As discussed below, both the Scottish and Welsh devolved administrations have adopted a high-level vision of what constitutes ‘fair work’ (see sections 3.2 & 3.3). A high-level vision, arguably, provides a framework for considering how various measurement indicators of good jobs (see Table 1) are combining so as to achieve progress with regard to the key elements of the said vision. As noted earlier, interest in the concept of good jobs has been driven by its potential to provide a range of positive social, economic and positive externalities. To an extent, a vision seeks to translate these externalities into tangible and practical outcomes for both individuals and broader society.

The lack of an agreed definition of good work ensures that there is also considerable uncertainty as to the suite of measures and actions that are required in order to improve job quality in the labour market. Cohen (2020) highlights that improving the nature and design of work will not happen by chance, as it will necessitate a sustained, coordinated and collaborative approach.

... making it different will require a very deliberative public-private focus on creating '*good jobs*' in part by focusing on how to shape technologies as human amplifiers, in part by thinking about how good jobs fit into the larger world of education, training, consumption, finance, firm organisation, and worker representation (Cohen, 2020:4).

This approach rejects technological determinist assumptions regarding the quantity and quality of work, highlighting the pivotal role of political and organisational decisions and actions. It reaffirms that designing good jobs requires an active state and coordinated set of public policies. For example, there is scope to align labour-market, industrial, and technology policy to the goal of supplying 'good jobs' (Rodrik, 2020).

Rodrik and Sabel (2019) emphasise the need to mobilise networks of public and private coalitions, underpinned by a commitment to intensive interaction, learning and review, based on emerging experience and knowledge. Extensive and sustained engagement with frontline actors and practitioners, they contend, facilitates the development of more customised and tailored interventions, while also providing an opportunity to revise and redesign higher-level goals and strategies based on new learnings and information. The different competitive pressures and labour-market contexts associated with different sectors of the economy suggest there is merit in the view that increasing the proportion of good jobs in the economy will require the co-production of comprehensive and customised sectoral strategies (Osterman, 2019).

The Eurofound European Working Conditions Survey (2017) indicates that overall job quality can be supported by a wide-ranging set of policies and actions aimed at addressing the issues raised in their survey analysis; for example, low pay, employment insecurity, long hours, management quality, and workplace risks. This would involve EU and national-level policy action in conjunction with social partner initiatives (see also Cohen, 2020). Eurofound's work also draws attention to the key role that company-level workplace policies and practices can play in enhancing job quality.

3. UK and Devolved Administrations' Perspective on Good Jobs

3.1 The UK Government

In 2017, the Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices was published in the UK (Taylor *et al.*, 2017). This influential report included a recommendation that the government should place equal importance on the quality as well as the quantity of work, and should identify a set of metrics to measure success in improving work. In response, the UK government published its Good Work plan, which stated that it aimed to put good work at the centre of industrial strategy (Department of Business, 2018).

In 2018, Carnegie UK Trust–RSA established the Measuring Job Quality Working Group in response to the Taylor Review proposals. This group comprised senior representatives from industry, employee and employer groups, academia, charities and policy organisations. The main focus of its deliberations was on trying to identify the metrics that would be used to measure and evaluate job quality. This Working Group concluded that job quality is a complex, multi-faceted concept and that different aspects of job quality need to be understood and measured in their own right (Carnegie UK Trust–RSA, 2018). The final report cautioned against creating a single metric or measure, and proposed a job-quality framework based on 18 measures of job quality that related to seven overarching themes (Table 2).

3.2 The Scottish Government

The Scottish government has been very much in the vanguard of the debates around good work in the UK. Already in 2015, it established the Fair Work Convention (FWC), an independent public advisory board, whose role is to set out what fair work means and identify how a new social dialogue can increase the incidence of fair work.² The FWC aims to put fair work at the heart of Scotland's workplaces and economy. It has adopted an ambitious vision: that by 2025 people in Scotland will have a world-leading working life where fair work drives success, well-being and prosperity for individuals, businesses, organisations and society. The FWC has developed a comprehensive Fair Work Framework (Fair Work Convention, 2016) which sets out its definition of 'fair work'. This led to quality jobs and fair work being enshrined as a national outcome in the National Performance Framework which the Scottish government uses to measure and track its success (Carnegie Trust UK–RSA, 2018).

We believe that fair work is work that offers effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect; that balances the rights

² See <https://www.fairworkconvention.scot/>, accessed 19.02.21.

and responsibilities of employers and workers and that can generate benefits for individuals, organisations and society (Fair Work Convention, 2016: 7).

Table 2: Carnegie UK Trust–RSA Quality of Work Framework

| Theme | Indicators |
|---|---|
| Terms of Employment | Job Security Minimum Guaranteed Hours Underemployment |
| Pay and Benefits | Pay Satisfaction with Pay |
| Health, Safety and Psychosocial Wellbeing | Physical Injury Mental Health |
| Job Design and Nature of Work | Use of Skills Control Opportunities for Progression Sense of Purpose |
| Social Support and Cohesion | Peer Support Line Manager Relationship |
| Voice and Representation | Trade Union Membership Employee Information Employee Involvement |
| Work-Life Balance | Over-Employment Overtime (paid and unpaid) |

In 2020, the FWC published its ‘Fair Work in Scotland’ report, which analysed and considered progress against the agreed five dimensions of Fair Work—opportunity, respect, security, fulfilment and effective voice—using the FWC’s Fair Work Measurement Framework (The Fair Work Convention, 2020). This Measurement Framework consists of 39 indicators reflecting the multidimensional nature of fair work. Highlighting both areas of improvement and aspects of work that had deteriorated over the previous five years (see Table 3), the report articulates the need for faster progress on fair work, and outlines a series of policy recommendations designed to achieve the FWC’s collective vision of a Fair Work Nation by 2025. These recommendations include a demand for joint action by the Scottish government, employers and unions. The 2020 report reveals that disabled workers, ethnic minorities and young workers often experience poorer working conditions and are more heavily concentrated in precarious and low-paid work. It

also recognises that the challenges across all of the dimensions of fair work posed by the Covid-19 crisis have reinforced the need for swift and decisive action.

Table 3: Fair Work in Scotland Report 2020—Key Highlights

| Progress | Decline |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall in the proportion of people earning less than the real living wage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No improvement in access to flexible working |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall measures of employment security have improved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No improvement in the number of illnesses caused by work |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of participation in involuntary non-permanent and involuntary part-time work have improved | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of zero-hour contracts |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in collective bargaining coverage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease in effective use of skills in the workplace |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A narrowing of the gender and ethnicity pay gaps | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased participation in workplace learning |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease in trade-union membership |

In addition to monitoring overall progress on fair work in the labour market, the FWC undertakes sectorally focused initiatives, producing a report on Fair Work in the Social Care sector in 2019 and initiating an Inquiry into Fair Work in the Construction Sector in 2020 . This latter initiative is being progressed through a Construction Industry Inquiry Group that is looking at the practical challenges to delivering fair work in the sector through public-sector commissioning and procurement.

3.3 The Welsh Government

The Welsh government convened a Fair Work Commission in 2018 to develop a strategy to promote and encourage fair work in Wales, including developing indicators and measures of fair work, and identifying sources to assist in measuring progress and advising on policies and actions that would promote fair work. The focus on fair work reflects the Welsh government’s view that fair work can assist in addressing inequality, reducing poverty, promoting well-being and supporting national growth and prosperity. In its report, published in 2019, the commission recommended that its proposed definition and characteristics of fair work be taken together and adopted and used across the Welsh government in its promotion of fair work (see Box B).

Box B: Fair Work Wales (2019), Report of the Fair Work Commission

- **Definition:** Fair work is where workers are fairly rewarded, heard and represented, secure and able to progress in a healthy, inclusive environment where rights are respected.
- **Characteristics:** Fair reward; employee voice and collective representation; security and flexibility; opportunity for access, growth and progression; safe, healthy and inclusive working environment; legal rights respected and given substantive effect.
- **The promotion of equality and inclusion is integral to all six characteristics.**

Source: Fair Work Commission, 2019: 2.

The Fair Work Commission's final report contained a broad range of policy recommendations and initiatives, under the following headings:

- legislating for fair work;
- promoting fair work through economic incentives;
- promoting fair work through trade unions and collective bargaining;
- promoting fair work through other measures;
- taking fair work forward building capacity, institutions and mechanisms; and
- measuring and reporting progress on Fair Work.

In light of the developments in Scotland outlined in section 3.2, the commission called for the establishment of an Office for Fair Work within the Welsh government and the convening of a Fair Work Wales Forum in Social Care, as the first of a series of social partnership-style sectoral fora.

3.4 The Northern Ireland Executive

The Northern Ireland Executive has also recognised the need to address both the quantity and quality of jobs in the labour market. In 2015, the New Economics Foundation (NEF) published 'Good Jobs in N. Ireland—Tackling Inequality and Poverty at Root' as part of a programme of independent research commissioned by

the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM).³ The NEF study argued that there was now an opportunity to reconfigure Northern Ireland’s labour market and economic policy around an increased focus on the creation of good jobs that provide decent wages, as well as decent work. This reconfiguration around good jobs, it was suggested, would serve to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in Northern Ireland.

Following on from this, the Northern Ireland Executive Office’s Outcome Delivery Plan 2018–19 (Executive Office, 2018) contained as one of its strategic outcomes a commitment to ‘having more people working in better jobs’. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) was given the task of developing a ‘Better Jobs Index’ to measure progress against this outcome. Consequently, NISRA has developed six indicators of quality work, and a number of additional questions were incorporated into the quarterly Labour Force Survey to facilitate measurement of quality work. The six indicators of quality work are:

- i. job security;
- ii. work quantity (time-related);
- iii. job satisfaction (question added to LFS in January 2018);
- iv. meaningful work (question added to LFS July 2019);
- v. opportunities for career progression (question added to LFS July 2019);
and
- vi. involvement in decision-making (question added July 2019).

On 8 December 2020, NISRA published ‘Work Quality in Northern Ireland’, which provides the first overview of the above six work-quality indicators, sourced from the Northern Ireland Labour Force Survey (NISRA, 2020).

This focus on ‘work quality’ was reinforced by the commitment in the ‘New Decade New Approach’ agreement to incorporate, within the future Programme for Government, an enhanced focus on creating good jobs and protecting workers rights (UK Government & Irish Government, 2020). Although delayed by the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis, the Northern Ireland Executive is actively progressing a new Programme for Government. As part of this activity, a public consultation on the Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework has been initiated (Northern Ireland Executive, 2021). The concept of ‘better jobs’ has been included as a key policy priority area that would contribute to achieving two of the proposed Strategic Outcomes (see Table 4).

³ This research forms part of a programme of independent research commissioned by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to inform the policy development process. The views expressed and conclusions drawn are those of the author and not necessarily those of OFMDFM.

Table 4: NI Executive—Programme for Government draft Outcomes Framework (2021)

| Outcome | Key Policy Area |
|---|--|
| Everyone can reach their potential. | Better Jobs: Creating and developing more opportunities and better jobs, by tackling issues such as job security, wages and flexibility, and giving employees a voice. Improving employability and helping those who are unemployed into work and ensuring we develop a workforce that is equipped and ready for employment. Protecting workers' rights, addressing 'zero hours' contracts and barriers to employment. |
| People want to work, live and visit here. | Better Jobs: Creating varied, fulfilling and quality employment opportunities for our workforce to support retention of our workforce, and attracting skilled workers to Northern Ireland's industries. |

4. Ireland: Supporting Good Jobs in the Labour Market

4.1 Introduction

Although the Irish Government has not adopted a specific ‘good jobs’ framework, in terms of an agreed definition and associated set of metrics designed to measure progress, there has been within enterprise and labour-market policy over the several decades an ‘implicit’ recognition of the economic and social benefits of supporting the creation of better jobs. There is little evidence of seeking to gain ‘competitive advantage’ through labour-market deregulation, or support for a ‘low road’ employment strategy. Indeed, as discussed below, the Government has, through various policy initiatives and measures, actively sought to mitigate many of the issues associated with the emergence of lower-quality or precarious work. Significantly, in the Programme for Government there is a clear articulation of the need for a concerted policy focus on increasing the number of quality and sustainable jobs in the labour market (Government of Ireland, 2020).

“Covid-19 has highlighted the need to make a deliberate policy shift to increase both quality jobs which will allow for better living standards and sustainable jobs, which will be less vulnerable to loss (Government of Ireland 2020:21).”

Pembroke (2018) argues that the labour market is characterised by increased incidence of precarious work, and that this trend will continue both in general and within certain sectors. The McGuinness *et al.* (2018) research on contingent employment—defined in terms of temporary contracts and freelancing—indicates that this form of employment accounted for between 8 and 9 per cent of total employment between 1998 and 2005, before increasing to over 10 per cent in the period following the onset of the economic and fiscal crisis. It has since fallen back to pre-recession levels. The authors conclude that there is no evidence that contingent employment has been steadily increasing in Ireland. At one level, the evidence on the prevalence and growth in at-risk categories of precariousness in Ireland is mixed (Nugent *et al.*, 2019). At the same time, these authors contend that there is evidence of a growth in the share of several at-risk categories of precarious work, including in part-time work, underemployment, marginal part-time work, part-time temporary contracts and involuntary temporary contracts. Certainly, it appears evident that there are certain sectors in which less favourable pay, conditions and employment relations are more prevalent. As discussed in section 4.5, the Covid-19 crisis, for example, has shone a light on the pay and conditions of many frontline and essential workers. This issue is not necessarily confined to traditional sectors. A recent study suggested that low pay, limited benefits and work intensity are key issues for many workers in the growing gaming industry in Ireland (Moody & Kerr, 2020). There is also concern that younger workers are also experiencing higher levels of precarity (Nugent, 2020). This indicates clear scope for a concerted and collaborative focus on addressing fragmentation and inequality in the labour market as part of an overall focus on increasing the number of ‘good jobs’.

4.2 Regulating Precarious Work

Following growing concerns about the use of zero-hour contracts, particularly in the retail and hospitality sectors, the Workplace Relations Commission commissioned the University of Limerick to undertake a study on ‘The Prevalence of Zero Hours Contracts’. This study found that zero-hours contracts, within the meaning of the Organisation of Working Time Act 1997 (OWTA), are not extensive in Ireland (University of Limerick, 2015). There was, however, evidence of the use of ‘if and when contracts’, which like ‘zero-hour’ contracts are associated with non-guaranteed hours of work.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) data on working hours indicate that 5.3 per cent of employees in Ireland have constantly variable working hours (their hours of work vary greatly from week to week). The sectors with the highest proportions of constantly variable working hours are wholesale and retail; accommodation and food services; and health and social care. CSO data also show that 2 per cent of employees regularly work 1–8 hours per week, 6 per cent work 9–18 hours per week and 24 per cent work 19–35 hours per week. Very low hours (1–8 hours) are particularly prevalent in the wholesale and retail, and accommodation and food sectors.

In seeking to deliver on a Programme for Government 2016 commitment to address the challenges of increased casualisation of work, and to strengthen the regulation of precarious work, the Government introduced the Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2018. This legislation is designed to improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts and/or working variable hours. The key provisions of the Act are:

- Employers shall give employees core terms of employment within five days of starting work.
- Zero hours contracts will be restricted.
- There will be minimum payments for people called into work but sent home without work.
- A ‘band of hours’ system will be introduced where an employee’s contract does not reflect actual hours worked.
- There will be strong anti-penalisation provisions for employees who invoke their rights under this legislation.
- The National Minimum Wage rates for younger people and trainees will be simplified.

Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection Regina Doherty said:

... this new law will profoundly improve the security and predictability of working hours for employees on insecure contracts. This law is rooted in a foundation of extensive consultation and, as a result, this is

a balanced and fair measure for both employees and employers which is designed to work effectively in practice. In a changing world, this reform ensures that the available legal protections will match the conditions experienced by a modern workforce and make a real difference in the lives of thousands of workers. (Regina Doherty, Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection, DSP, 2019).

The ICTU welcomed this legislation, which to an extent was the culmination of a five-year trade union campaign:

Workers' rights have been significantly improved thanks to the trade union movement successfully pushing for legal protection around the working hours of the lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers... Low and fluctuating working hours made it 'stressful and humiliating' for workers... The day-to-day reality of such working conditions for workers has no place in a modern, wealthy economy (Patricia King, Secretary General, ICTU, Prendergast, 2019).

Mandate, which represents workers in the retail and distribution sector, described it as 'one of the most significant pieces of legislation on workers' rights in decades' (Prendergast, 2019).

4.3 Sectoral Standard-setting Instruments

In the UK, the Taylor Review on Good Work (2018) recommended that the remit of the UK's Low Pay Commission be extended to include working with employer and worker representatives to develop specific codes of practice and guidance that support the provision of quality work. In the Irish employment relations regime, there is a long tradition of using standard-setting instruments to regulate pay and conditions in specific sectors (see Box C).

Although JLCs have demonstrated their capacity to establish a floor of minimum standards in sectors characterised by low pay, they are not widely used in the labour market.

The continued usage of SEOs to set minimum employment standards has been brought into question by a High Court ruling which struck out, on the grounds of constitutionality, both the electrical contracting SEO and that part of the 2015 Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act that provided the legal basis for all other SEOs (Higgins, 2021).⁴ The State is appealing this ruling of unconstitutionality to the Supreme Court. This will be a pivotal case for both SEOs and EROs as, if the High Court ruling stands, it could conceivably be used to challenge the process for establishing the latter as well.

⁴ This particular SEO was the subject of a case brought to the High Court by the National Electrical Contractors of Ireland (NECI).

Box C: Sectoral Standard-setting Instruments

A Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) is made following a recommendation from the Labour Court on matters of pay, pension or sick pay schemes for workers in an economic sector. SEOs for the construction, mechanical engineering and electrical sectors have been signed into legislation, setting a legally binding floor on rates and obligations in these sectors.

Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) are bodies established under the Industrial Relations Acts to provide a process for fixing statutory minimum rates of pay and conditions of employment for particular employees in particular sectors. They may be set up by the Labour Court on the application of: (i) the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment; or (ii) a trade union; or (iii) any organisation claiming to be representative of the workers or the employers involved. A JLC is made up of equal numbers of employer and worker representatives appointed by the Labour Court. An Employment Regulation Order (ERO) is an instrument drawn up by a JLC, adopted by the Labour Court, and given statutory effect by the Minister. The ERO fixes minimum rates of pay and conditions for workers in specified business sectors. Employers in those sectors are then obliged to pay wage rates and provide employment conditions not less favourable than those prescribed.

A Registered Employment Agreement (REA) is a collective agreement made between a trade union or unions and an individual employer, group of employers or employers' organisation, relating to the remuneration or conditions of employment of workers of any class, type or group. It is binding only on the parties to the agreement in respect of the workers of that class, type or group.

Source: Workplace Relations Commission.⁵

Although there is scope to improve the effectiveness of JLCs, they remain a viable option for improving pay and conditions in sectors where collective bargaining is not well established and wages tend to be low. Following on from a commitment in the Programme for Government 2020, employers and trade unions are currently negotiating the establishment of a new JLC that would set minimum pay and conditions for 20,000 childcare workers (Higgins, 2020b).

New pay increases, along with changes to overtime calculation, pay slips and welfare facilities, have recently been awarded to approximately 20,000 cleaners, through an agreement reached under the existing Contract Cleaning JLC (Higgins, 2020a). In announcing his intention to sign the new ERO, the Minister for Business, Employment and Retail, Damien English, recognised that these employees were undertaking vital work in the context of Covid-19. He also highlighted the capacity of JLCs to deliver mutual benefits to employers and employees:

⁵ See <https://www.workplacerelements.ie/en/>, accessed 19.02.21.

... they are a robust way of ensuring fair terms and conditions such as wage rates, sick pay, etc. For employers, they offer flexibility to agree on work practices, pay and conditions which are custom made to their industry (Minister Damian English TD).⁶

4.4 Employment Vulnerability and Transitions

In 2020, NESC produced a report on the impact on employment of the transitions associated with climate change and increased digitalisation (NESC, 2020). In this report, the Council concluded that actions to ensure continuous workforce development, build resilient enterprises, and deliver targeted funding should be the three drivers of an economy's response to these transitions. A key finding of this study was the importance of quality work and jobs with good conditions in minimising vulnerability for sectors, firms and workers.

4.5 Responding to Covid-19: Swift and Purposeful Intervention

The Covid-19 pandemic and the comprehensive emergency measures introduced to suppress its transmission, both nationally and internationally, have given rise to a severe economic shock that is unprecedented in both the size and speed of its propagation (Central Bank of Ireland, 2020). The Irish Government has responded to this crisis in a swift and purposeful manner by developing a comprehensive, integrated and evolving package of financial supports for firms, employees and households affected by the pandemic (Thomas, 2020).

With the introduction of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), the Employee Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) and the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme, the State has become—on a temporary basis at least—the 'quasi-employer of last resort' for a substantial proportion of the private-sector workforce. Since the EWSS was launched in September, replacing the TWSS, 45,900 employers have registered for the scheme and the Government has provided €1bn in wage subsidies to 506,600 employees (Miley, 2021). These various initiatives represent an unprecedented level of intervention in the labour market designed to protect employment, minimise the potential scarring effects of unemployment and sustain productive capacity in the private sector (Department of Finance, 2020; McCarthy, 2020; Thomas, 2020).

This willingness to intervene to support labour-market stability and productive capacity demonstrates that the lessons from Ireland's policy approach to the global

⁶ See Higgins, 2020a.

financial crisis, including embracing the good practice adopted from other states, have been taken on board.⁷

In situations where an individual is unable to remain in employment (due to the loss of a job, loss of trading income, or absence due to illness/isolation), the State has responded in a similarly purposeful manner to cushion the negative impact on incomes through the introduction of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) and the enhanced Covid-19 Illness Benefit.

The outbreak of Covid-19 also witnessed the (re)emergence of a more meaningful form of social dialogue as both the ICTU and IBEC worked closely with the policy system in designing the innovative labour-market policy interventions noted above (Sheehan, 2020; Thomas, 2020). It is envisaged that this form of engagement will continue to be a feature of policy initiatives to promote economic and social recovery in the aftermath of the crisis (ibid.).

Finally, the concerted policy focus on cushioning the impact of the pandemic-induced recession on individuals, by either subsidising their continued employment or providing an enhanced form of income support, has also facilitated a closer alignment of labour-market and welfare policy.

4.6 Valuing (all) Work

NESC Secretariat research (FitzGerald, 2020) has also showed how Covid-19 has brought attention again to the conditions of certain jobs: low incomes; inadequate incomes, hours, benefits, pensions, representation; and contractual insecurity. The pandemic has also added new criteria with which to assess job quality: the contact-intensity of the job/risk of infection; the essential nature (or otherwise) of the role; and the ability to work remotely. Of these new criteria, it is likely that the ability to do a job remotely will persist as an important consideration after the crisis has ended.

In addition, Covid-19 has revealed the true value to societies of lower-income, higher-risk jobs in retail, hospitality, healthcare, social care, public transport and other services. Individuals undertaking these jobs have been in the vanguard of the State's response to an unprecedented public health emergency. The crisis, moreover, has reaffirmed the key enabling, or foundational, role that these jobs play with regard to a properly functioning economy and society. The crisis has created a recognition of the need to reappraise what constitutes good jobs and how we value different types of work and roles. In particular, it has focused attention on whether or not the terms, conditions and work experience of particular jobs now need to be changed to reflect the real societal and economic value of such roles. As noted above the Government has already signalled their intention to adopt a concerted policy focus on quality and sustainable jobs.

⁷ Germany's extensive use of its short-time working scheme (Kurzarbeit) in the aftermath of the global financial crisis is viewed as being key to both the resilience of the German labour market and maintaining productive capacity in this period (Chazan & Milne, 2020).

4.7 Conclusion

The overall approach to enterprise and employment policy, allied to the willingness to use legislative and statutory instruments to promote minimum employment standards, demonstrates a clear commitment by the Government to promoting good employment. Furthermore, the concept of creating 'good jobs' is relevant to the Government's forthcoming National Economic Plan as it seeks to grapple with issues around creating sustainable employment on a regionally balanced basis in the post-pandemic, post-Brexit era. In the context of Covid-19, the State has shown leadership, decisiveness and willingness to intervene in the labour market. There is evidence of deepening synergy between labour-market and welfare policy, while the crisis, in general, is prompting a much deeper discussion on how we value work, the nature of work, and the role of public policy and social dialogue. While accepting that 'good jobs' remains a 'slippery concept', it potentially represents an overarching framework for exploring and deepening these interconnections.

5. Scope for Shared Island Project on Good Jobs

5.1 Exploratory Stakeholder Engagement

The Irish and Northern Irish economies are shaped by the same factors—climate change, digitisation, globalisation and demographic change—which suggests that a good job agenda has an important all-island dimension. To progress our thinking on this topic, we conducted 13 interviews with experts drawn from public, private and civil society organisations (see Appendix 1). These interviews were designed to:

- garner expert opinion on the concept of ‘good jobs’ and the extent to which it is considered relevant to the Shared Island initiative;
- gather interviewees’ insights on related labour-market issues, including labour-market mobility, skills development, social dialogue and sectoral initiatives; and
- identify some of the challenges and opportunities associated with seeking to develop and progress this area on a cross-border basis.

Working together, North and South, to meet the challenges we both face, and fostering a constructive and inclusive dialogue, are core elements of the Government’s approach to the Shared Island Initiative. In this context, these initial conversations represent a tentative start to progressing these objectives with key informants.

5.2 Support for an All-Island Project

These exploratory interviews indicated strong support, among the interviewees, for the Shared Island initiative, which was considered to have the potential to deliver a range of benefits for both jurisdictions. Interviewees were also acutely aware of the challenges associated with seeking to progress initiatives on a cross-border basis.

Several interviewees indicated that a shared-island economy is already in place, with many companies already operating on an all-island basis in terms of logistics, supply chains and organisational structure. It was noted that an all-island labour market also operates for certain sectors, professions and counties (particularly in the border area). The Ibec–CBI (NI) Joint Business Council has since the early 1990s been active in promoting the all-island economy, with a particular focus on infrastructure projects. It is currently finalising a report which will set out business priorities for the Shared Island, namely: a shared labour market; education, innovation and skills; climate change; infrastructure; supply chains; and the work of institutions. In relation to the last of these issues, it was suggested that institutional arrangements and policy need to ‘catch up’ with economic and labour-market developments.

There was consensus that the ‘good jobs’ strategy is an appropriate and important theme for both jurisdictions and that there is potential to progress it within a shared island framework. A good-jobs agenda could also help to address in-work poverty and labour-market inequality (New Economics Foundation, 2015; Rodrik & Sabel, 2019; Rodríguez-Pose, 2017). Several interviewees referred to the link between economic and social deprivation and the rise of political extremism across Europe.

It was noted too that Covid-19 had focused attention on both the key role played by essential workers and the fact that many such workers experienced less favourable pay and conditions. While this was creating more debate about labour-market inequality, it was recognised that making any substantial progress on this issue would require sustained and focused action by relevant stakeholders.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions’ Retail Sector Group, which comprises unions representing workers in retail and distribution across the island of Ireland (Mandate, SIPTU, Unite, USDAW and the GMB), has initiated a new campaign designed to address low pay and insecure work, and rebuild the sector post-Covid-19. The unions have called for a renewed focus on decent work premised on improved pay and conditions, trade-union representation, collective bargaining and access to training and upskilling (ICTU, 2020). The establishment of a tripartite Retail Stakeholder Group, comprising trade unions, retail employers and key government departments, is viewed as an appropriate forum for developing this new blueprint for the retail and distribution sector.

5.3 Progressing the Good-Jobs Agenda: Addressing the Challenges

The interviewees also identified a number of challenges to the development of a shared-island good-jobs agenda:

- the practical meaning of good jobs;
- labour-market mobility and cross-border working;
- skills and apprenticeships; and
- social dialogue.

First, the concept of ‘good jobs’ was seen by the interviewees as a contested and somewhat subjective concept, as there can be very different interpretations of what it means in practice. It could be linked with creating more higher-paying jobs. Equally, it could incorporate an increased emphasis on improving the quality of ‘poor’ jobs, as well as attracting or creating additional ‘better’ jobs.

What is defined as a ‘good job’ can be viewed as subjective as it can be open to influence by a particular socio-economic construct, which undervalues certain types of jobs. In particular, an emphasis on defining a good job in terms of market rewards and associated qualifications fails to take into account an individual

jobholder's perspective of how they value their job and their experience of working in that role. As highlighted in section 2, Cohen (2020) has argued that two of the core elements of a good job are that it has worthwhile purpose and that the individual derives enjoyment from carrying it out.

Interviewees from Northern Ireland were aware of the Department for the Economy's policy objective of 'more people working in better jobs' and NISRA's work on developing a 'better jobs' index to measure job quality. There were divergent views as to whether or not the approach was the most appropriate or effective strategy for progressing a 'good jobs' agenda in Northern Ireland. There was also a degree of uncertainty as to the types of actions and instruments that should be prioritised to progress a good-jobs strategy. In this context, some interviewees suggested that deeper engagement and consultation with key stakeholders could help to build a more robust shared understanding of the good-jobs agenda, including its definition, the metrics required to measure it and, critically, the types of actions needed to progress it.

The collaborative approaches adopted by the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales and the Carnegie UK Trust–RSA were mentioned as good practice. In this context, a number of interviewees believed that consultation on the development of the Better Jobs Index could enhance both its relevance and capacity to progress the quality work agenda.

In terms of exploring these issues further, work underway in the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) can help to progress this agenda. NERI (NI) has been in dialogue with the Carnegie UK Trust about its multi-dimensional Good Jobs framework, and is considering undertaking a project that would seek to apply this to the Northern Ireland labour market. NERI considers this framework both tangible and robust, in part because it was the product of extensive dialogue and deliberation that produced broad consensus on the issue. NERI has been actively exploring, with other stakeholders, the possibility of establishing some form of Roundtable on Job Quality. In essence, this would replicate the Carnegie UK Trust–RSA approach, which was based on establishing a Working Group on Measuring Good Work. While this project will focus on the NI labour market, it would have clear comparative relevance, and also potential connections, for the issue of good jobs in Ireland.

Second, despite the work of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, several interviewees commented that labour mobility and cross-border working is an area that is under-investigated, particularly in the context of Brexit. It was suggested that there is a need, and indeed an opportunity to undertake in-depth analysis on this issue. At the same time, there would be challenges in gathering data (NESC, 2021 forthcoming).

As a result of both Covid-19 and Brexit, the issue of frontier workers has come to the fore as it poses practical challenges in relation to issues such as taxation, social welfare entitlements, data protection, etc. How the social welfare and tax systems on both parts of the island align is key for frontier workers. It was suggested that post-Covid-19, an increase in the incidence of remote/home working may create a larger and more robust all-island labour market for certain professions or sectors; that is, those with tasks and roles that can be undertaken remotely—for example,

individuals working in technology, the digital economy, financial/business services, and some public-sector workers. For others, whose work is not suited to remote working, the change to an all-island labour market will be less pronounced.

An example of how an existing tax regulation can potentially constrain cross-border working is discussed in Box D. The Cross-Border Workers Coalition was established to lobby for change to a particular tax regulation which, they say, imposes a double taxation burden on individuals living in Ireland and working for companies based in Northern Ireland, who work at 'home' any days. The substantial increase in remote/home working as a result of Covid-19 has brought this issue very much to the fore for a particular cohort of employers and their workers. It is argued that a failure to resolve this issue may be a constraint on enterprises' capacity to hire talent from Ireland. This is particularly the case for enterprises in border counties in the North that would have traditionally recruited from a labour-market pool that incorporates counties in the South (e.g. Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim, Louth and Sligo). Equally, this is a potential constraint on an individual's mobility within an all-island labour market. It may also limit an employee's ability to take advantage of flexible working practices designed to reduce commuting and promote better work-life balance.

Box D: The Cross-Border Workers Coalition

The Cross-Border Workers Coalition (CBWC) was established in July 2020 to try to resolve the issue of a double tax burden for certain employees living in Ireland but working in Northern Ireland. Such workers pay their tax and social insurance in the North, but, if they work any days at home (in the South) they are liable for an additional tax to the Irish Revenue Commissioners. Before the Covid-19 crisis, Allstate, an insurance company based in Co. Derry which operates on a 24/7 basis, addressed this issue via a two-tiered HR strategy under which employees living in NI could work from home while those whose primary residence was in Ireland attended the office full-time. Following the introduction of Covid-19 restrictions under which all employees were to work from home where possible, workers resident in the South were afforded temporary exemption by the Revenue Commissioners for the aforementioned liability.

To try to resolve this perceived anomaly, Allstate established the CBCW, made of up representatives from companies based in border counties. The CBWC's sole objective is to have the temporary tax exemption made permanent. In Northern Ireland, HMRC currently allows 90 days working from home in the North, if your place of employment is in the South, before you are subject to any additional tax liability. The CBWC has sought to raise awareness and support for its campaign among politicians in both jurisdictions. It has also explored how this issue is addressed in other EU cross-border regions. The CBWC contends that, if unresolved, this issue will limit the capacity of firms in Northern Ireland to attract employees from Ireland. Equally, this is a potential constraint on an individual's mobility within an all-island labour market. Furthermore, it can limit employees from availing of more flexible work practices, which could assist them in reducing commuting, alleviating stress levels and achieving a better work-life balance. The CBWC argues that it is possible to achieve this change in the tax code without creating any unintended negative consequences.

Third, interviewees focused on the need to improve skills development and address a perceived 'skills deficit' that has been a long-standing policy concern, North and South, with somewhat different features in each jurisdiction. Some respondents were critical of the fact that in both jurisdictions the approach to skills development remains dominated by conventional supply-and-demand-side initiatives. One noted caveat to this is the work undertaken in the area of 'new' apprenticeships. One interviewee stressed that addressing low levels of labour-market participation and economic inactivity would require a more innovative approach to skills development and labour-market activation.

Addressing the skills deficit is a complex problem and will require a concerted tripartite approach involving companies, the state and representative bodies. For example, the private sector could be more proactive in devising workplace-based initiatives designed to equip individuals with business-ready skills and competencies. Similarly, the public sector should be a standard-bearer for policies that promote a more inclusive labour market.

Finally, there was a recognition that deepening and enhancing social dialogue could play a key role in addressing major policy challenges such as social insurance, health, housing and inequality. This could include fostering social dialogue on a Shared Island basis. This would provide an opportunity to share knowledge and experience as well as fostering greater shared understanding of the joint policy challenges and potential ways of addressing them.

6. Conclusion: The Next Steps

This paper has noted a number of potential areas of work that would help to advance the development of a Shared Island good-jobs agenda.

It is suggested that any work that might be progressed should have four key characteristics:

- i. **Problem:** there needs to be joint recognition of a common problem.
- ii. **People:** the project needs people in place who are committed to the project.
- iii. **Pathway:** participants need to agree a pathway for implementing and progressing the project.
- iv. **Prize:** there needs to be some form of incentive associated with project delivery, otherwise it will lack momentum and drive.⁸

A core element of NESC’s overall approach to its work on the Shared Island initiative is to support a shared problem approach, underpinned by ‘digging deeper’ into specific areas (NESC, 2021). This type of deep-dive will help to identify how progress might be made on specific challenges and in doing so will help to contribute to how problems and challenges more generally might be resolved, supported and progressed in a Shared Island perspective. Recognising the importance of engaging with cross-cutting and complex challenges that have social, economic and environmental elements, NESC has identified two integrated areas—Connectivity and Sustainability—that will frame the deep-dive projects (*ibid.*).

While connectivity incorporates many issues, the focus of this integrated project will be on families and livelihoods—in other words, the ‘lived experience’ of how people and places in the broadest sense are actually connected at local level. This will necessitate the adoption of a place-based approach. In this context, it is suggested that the good-jobs agenda represents a useful lens for examining the issue of connectivity in specific places, such as border regions and deprived urban communities. There are a number of elements in the good-jobs agenda which suggest its relevance to families, individuals and communities in selected localities. These include: mobilising coalitions of public–private actors; the advantages of an experimental approach premised on engagement, learning, monitoring and review; the potential to generate social and economic benefits for both individuals and society; and the value in considering tailored and customised policy initiatives for particular regions. In particular, the good-jobs agenda could serve as an effective mechanism for engaging with local coalitions and stakeholders and harnessing their collective knowledge and insights around this context-specific issue.

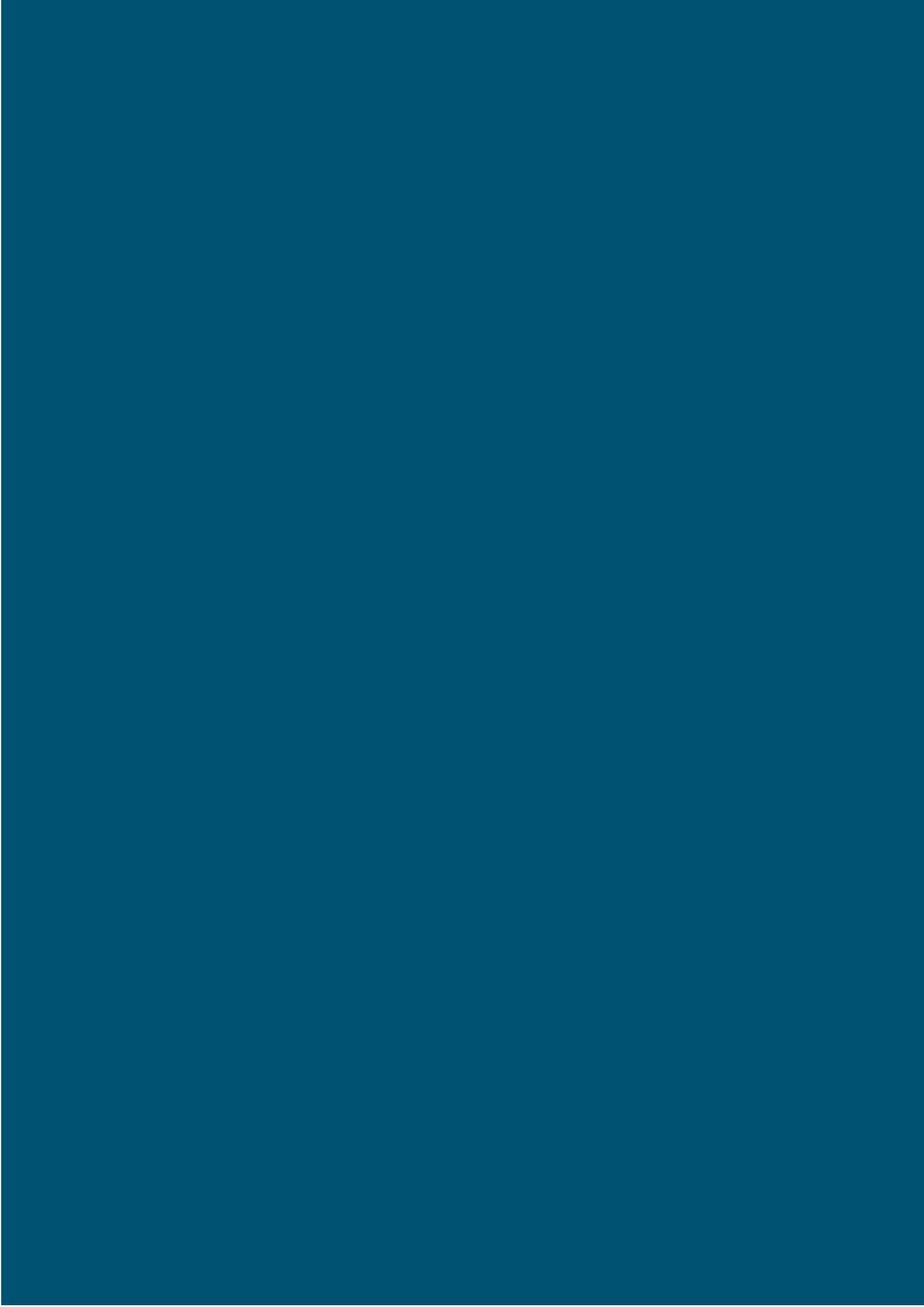
⁸ Based on an approach used by InterTradeIreland.

The need, in the context of the transition to a low-carbon economy, to both create green and sustainable jobs and ensure that no-one is 'left behind', suggests that the good-jobs agenda could also be an integral element of proposed work on sustainability within the broader NESC project.

The interviewees, recognising the various competitive pressures and labour-market contexts associated with different sectors of the economy, saw potential in adopting a sectoral approach to this issue, which has been a feature of the policy approach in both Scotland and Wales. The social care and retail sectors in particular were identified as sectors that would benefit from such an approach.

Interviewees noted that they could see the advantages of undertaking work that had a cross-border or shared-island dimension; however, this would be far more effective if the relevant departments or agencies North and South were jointly mandated to do so. This would create the space to develop, design and deliver agreed projects. There is still merit in seeking to develop this work indirectly or on an *ad hoc* basis, though this may be less effective. Finally, there was strong consensus that cross-border or shared-island projects will need to be progressed in a slow, careful but purposeful manner.

Like other work that NESC will undertake, the process here will focus on identifying shared knowledge and experiences with a view to making tangible progress on shared problems. This inevitably brings into view mechanisms for identifying, engaging with and seeking to resolve problems as they emerge, and in finding more effective pathways through which organisations and citizens can resolve issues. It may bring attention to, for example, 'deliberative' fora within which issues could be discussed with the aim of assisting policymakers in the respective jurisdictions to move to a more constructive space, while recognising that decision-making authority ultimately resides with the respective administrations. In addition, particular projects may help to create a space in which shared issues could be addressed within the boundaries of the project.



Appendix 1: Stakeholder Consultation

| Individuals | Organisation |
|--|--|
| Lisa Wilson | Senior Economist, Nevin Economic Research Institute: NI office |
| Paul Mac Flynn | Co-Director, Nevin Economic Research Institute, NI office |
| Ciaran Nugent | Economist, Nevin Economic Research Institute, Rol office |
| Fergal O'Brien | Director of Public Policy, Ibec |
| Eilish Kelly | Senior Research Officer, ESRI |
| Neil Gibson | Chief Economist, EY |
| Paul Teague | Management School, QUB |
| Eoin Magennis | Economic Policy Centre, Ulster University |
| Edgar Morgenroth | Business School, DCU |
| Jordan Mullan, Aidan O'Kane, Conor Dowds, Paul Quinn | Cross-Border Workers Coalition |
| Aidan Gough | Director of Strategy & Policy, InterTradeIreland |
| Kevin Daly, Alan Power | Labour Market and Skills Unit, Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation |
| Philip McDonagh | Retired Economic Consultant (ex PWC) |
| Owen Reidy | Assistant General Secretary, ICTU (NI office) |
| Maureen O'Reilly | Independent Economic Consultant, NI Chamber of Commerce and Research Associate, CCBS |

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