

Social Inclusion Division

**Department of Social and
Family Affairs**

Strategic Plan 2009 - 2011



Social Inclusion Division

An Rannán um Chuimsiú Sóisialta

Department of Social and Family Affairs

An Roinn Gnóthaí Sóisialacha agus

Teaghlaigh

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Part 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

A core overall aim of Government is to systematically reduce poverty, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016. Related aims are to reduce social exclusion and promote greater social inclusion and social cohesion. Among its functions the Department of Social and Family Affairs is tasked with formulating appropriate social protection and social inclusion policies and with working with other Departments and agencies in the delivery of Government policies and objectives.

The role of the Division, positioned within the Department, is to support and facilitate the strategic process at national and international levels in working to achieve these aims. The Division was formed from the integration of the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion within the Department with effect from July 2009 and this new strengthened Division will make the best use of the considerable experience and expertise of the staff of both bodies. This is the first strategic plan of the new Division

1.2 Mission

The mission of the Division is to support the Minister and Government in developing and implementing Government strategies for preventing, reducing and ultimately eliminating poverty and social exclusion and in promoting greater social inclusion and social cohesion in collaboration with other stakeholders, including, in particular people experiencing poverty.

1.3 Values and Guiding Principles

In carrying out its work the Division is guided by the following key values and guiding principles:

- **Fairness and Professionalism:** We aim to ensure fairness and mutual respect and to apply the highest professional standards in every aspect of our work.
- **Change oriented:** We embrace change, adopt a pro-active approach and welcome and support open dialogue.
- **Evidence based and Consultative:** We are committed to producing evidenced based outputs analysis and policy advice through research, and consultation with stakeholders.
- **Flexibility and responsiveness:** We aim always to respond to challenges in a flexible, creative and innovative manner.
- **Collaborative approach:** We adopt a collaborative and integrated approach in working with key stakeholders at local, national and international levels recognising the fundamental importance of this approach in meeting our responsibilities.
- **Participation:** We engage proactively with people experiencing poverty to benefit from their experience of the effectiveness of policy and its implementation and in ensuring that the needs of people in poverty are the central focus of social inclusion policy design and service delivery.

1.4 Strategic Approach

Poverty and social exclusion are multi faceted in terms of causes, nature and incidence among vulnerable groups in our society, and in urban and rural areas of disadvantage. The policies required must in turn be multifaceted with a focus on how best the combination of policies can achieve the best outcomes for those experiencing poverty and for the areas in which they live, and in economic terms and for the wider society. Since 1997 a series of strategies for reducing poverty and social exclusion has been adopted, based on a consensus among all stakeholders, which reflect these realities. The development and implementation of this strategic approach, which complements similar approaches at national, EU and wider international levels, provides the mandate for the functions and work of the Division.

1.4.1 Key elements

The main elements of the strategies that direct the work of the Division include the following:

- a lifecycle framework designed to facilitate and promote an integrated approach across the various policy areas at national and local levels to meeting the challenges of preventing and reducing poverty and social exclusion focusing on children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities and communities (including areas of rural and urban disadvantage, immigrants, travellers and the homeless).
- a series of high levels goals underpinning the strategy;
- a series of objectives and targets to make progress in achieving the goals;
- commitments of Government to specific measures over the period of the plan and of resources to realise the objectives and targets;
- regular monitoring of progress, and reporting on progress to Government, other stakeholders, the European Union and, as appropriate, other international organisations;

- use of common EU indicators, supplemented by national indicators, to evaluate outcomes and to inform the assessment of the impact of policies and their implementation at national and local levels on poverty and social exclusion;
- systematic consultation at all stages of the process with Government Departments and agencies, local authorities, Oireachtas Committees, social partners, other stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty.

1.5 Mandate

The strategic approach was initially adopted in 1997 with the introduction of the *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* to apply for 10 years. A revised strategy *Building an Inclusive Society* was introduced 5 years later in 2002 which included provision for the establishment of the Office for Social Inclusion. The successor to these strategies, *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion*, introduced in 2007, will apply to 2016. The *National Development Plan, 2007 to 2013*, contains a full chapter providing for measures during the period of its application for building capacity to achieve social inclusion, and is thus an integral part of the strategies.

All departments have committed to a range of social inclusion objectives to implement the Government's key objective of building an inclusive society. The Division, positioned within the Department, has overall responsibility for co-ordinating and driving implementation of the Plans and has a key role providing leadership and support to deliver on our shared objectives.

Social Partnership

The development of these plans was based on widespread consultation with stakeholders. The social partners had a major input in the context of the negotiations on the various social partnership agreements, notably the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2002) and *Towards 2016* (2006) and through the institutional arrangements for monitoring and evaluating their implementation.

European Union – Open Method of Coordination

Ireland fully supported the commitments made by the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 to work to make the European Union “*the most competitive, dynamic, knowledge based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*” The EU Council also pledged that Member States would work “*to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty*” by 2010 (reiterated by European Council in March 2006). On the basis of proposals made by Ireland amendments were made to the Treaties which gave the EU competence to assist and support Member States in meeting these commitments in relation to social inclusion, the modernisation of social protection and through the Social Protection Committee. This support and assistance is provided through an open method coordination. This currently involves Member States producing *National Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, pensions, health and long term care which focuses on the priorities to be pursued.

The latest report on these strategies covers the period 2008 to 2010. These plans are assessed and peer reviewed at EU level in the context of comparing progress with other Member States, allowing for relative levels of social and economic development. This process also facilitates and promotes the exchange of best practice between all Member States in meeting the common challenges relating to poverty and social exclusion and in modernising social protection to address current realities.

Council of Europe – Strategy for Social Cohesion

Ireland has also given its full support to the Strategy for Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe developed at the direction of European Summits in 1997 and in Warsaw in 2003. The strategies have a focus on Council of Europe support for social cohesion through an emphasis on social rights and through research, policy recommendations and guidelines, and exchanges of best practice. Ireland has ratified the *Revised Social Charter of the Council of Europe* that corresponds for social rights to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Article 30 provides for *the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion*. Ireland has also ratified the standard setting *European Code for Social Security*.

United Nations

Ireland supported the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development held by the UN in Copenhagen in 1995 and its declaration and programme for action. The Government announced, at this event, its decision to introduce the first *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* subsequently published in 1997. Ireland has continued to support the further development of the Copenhagen commitments in the period since which inform policy development at national levels. Ireland has also ratified key UN Conventions in the social field, notably the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

1.6 Structures

Structures have been progressively developed in the period since the strategic process was introduced to, in effect, make the strategic process happen. The Division works within and in collaboration with these structures in assisting and supporting the effective development and implementation of the strategies. The structures include the following:

- Minister for Social and Family Affairs, with specific responsibility for social inclusion and social cohesion, coordinates the strategies and reports on developments to the Cabinet Committee on social inclusion, the Government and the Oireachtas;
- Senior Officials Group, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, guides the ongoing development of the strategic process, its implementation and advises the Government on the development of the strategies across Departments and on the outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation, particularly in the context of the social partnership process through for example the Annual Social Inclusion Report;
- Social Partnership Review Group monitors and evaluates progress and advises on future development in light of views of organisations and interests they represent;
- Government Departments develop policies to meet goals and implement measures committed to in strategies, in collaboration, as appropriate, with other Departments, Agencies, Local Authorities and in consultation with and, as appropriate, in collaboration with, other stakeholders;
- Local authorities have a key role in achieving the objectives of the social inclusion strategies at local level through effective implementation and coordination of the relevant local authority services, and in monitoring progress more generally at local level;
- Social Inclusion Units, which operate in close liaison with the Division, have been established in certain Government Departments and local authorities to assist in coordinating the development and implementation of the strategies.

1.6.1 International Structures

- Social Protection Committee (SPC) of the European Union: responsible for the open method of coordination as it applies to social inclusion and social protection (pensions and long term care) in EU Member States and specifically for the strategies; reports directly to the Council of Ministers on these strategies and other relevant developments, and which in turn reports to the Heads of State and Government; the Director of the Division is one of the Irish representatives on the Committee;
- European Committee for Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe coordinates the development and implementation of the Councils strategy for Social Cohesion and reports on developments through its Secretariat to the Committee of Ministers; the Director of the Division represents Ireland on the Committee;

Representatives of the Division also attend meetings, as appropriate, of committees of the OECD, International Social Security Association (ISSA), and the UN.

1.7 Functions of the Division

The main overall function of the Division is to assist with the operation and further development of the structures in place to support implementation of the strategies. The more specific functions of the Division are as follows:

- advise and make recommendations to the Minister and the Government on policies and programmes to eradicate poverty and social exclusion based, in particular, on evidence obtained from monitoring and evaluating progress in implementing the strategies, from research, consultation with stakeholders, exchange of best practice and, in particular, from the perspective of the benefits of a more integrated approach to policy development and implementation;
- promote understanding of poverty and social exclusion among Government, the social partners and the wider community;
- monitor, in consultation with stakeholders, the implementation of the Government strategies as they relate to social inclusion, against expected outcomes;
- develop the application of common EU indicators and coordinate development of additional national indicators to measure progress in achieving expected outcomes of specific national policies;
- coordinate and initiate as required quantitative and qualitative research to assist with meeting the challenges that emerge from the monitoring and evaluation processes and, in particular, on new and emerging risks;
- develop and promote good practice and innovation in policy implementation in relation to tackling poverty at local, national and international levels in partnership with stakeholders;
- develop an academic research programme to complement and support the Division's ongoing research programme;
- promote the ongoing development of data strategies that make possible effective analysis and research into poverty trends, circumstances of vulnerability, monitoring and evaluation of progress;

- ensure that the tools of poverty impact assessment become an integral part of relevant policy development and implementation at national and local levels, and are continually reviewed and adapted to improve their effectiveness;
- further the development and operation of the structures required to facilitate networking, coordination and collaboration across Government Departments and agencies, across regional and local authorities and between national, regional and local levels in a whole of Government approach to achieving greater social cohesion;
- further the development of structures and promote their effective operation to ensure that the voice of the social partners and, of people experiencing poverty and those who support and work with them, including those in the community and voluntary sectors, are clearly heard and their views fully taken into account in all aspects of policy development and implementation, and that effective collaboration between Governmental and non-Governmental services is fostered in a whole of Society approach to achieving social cohesion;
- ensure active participation in the social cohesion processes of the EU, Council of Europe, UN and, as appropriate, other international bodies, to ensure that Ireland contributes to and draws on best international experience in working to achieve greater social cohesion.

1.8 Overview of Socio-economic Context

The functions of the Division are exercised within a particular social and economic environment that has a major impact on the extent to which progress can be made in achieving the goals and objectives of the strategies. The period since the strategic process commenced in 1997 demonstrates the impact of the environment on progress.

Over the period of the first NAPS, 1997 to 2007, a major impact was made on poverty in Ireland through a combination of the strategic approach being operated and the unprecedented high levels of economic growth and development. The progress made was illustrated in the findings of the annual EU Survey on Income and Living Standards (EU-SILC) and the annual reports on NAPinclusion.

The National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2007-2016, using the lifecycle approach contains a range of goals objectives and targets for reducing poverty and social exclusion. In the report to the EU in October 2008 on the strategy for social inclusion, the following priorities were chosen for the period up to end 2010:

- *Child Poverty*
Children in or 'at risk of poverty' is a key priority and challenge to ensure that they can reach their true potential and parents are supported in providing care for them.
- *Access to quality work and learning opportunities*
Supporting working age people and people with disabilities, through activation measures and the provision of services to increase employment and participation
- *Integration of immigrants*
Immigrants comprise a significant proportion of Ireland's workforce and population and their integration is an important challenge being faced by Irish society over the coming years.
- *Access to Quality Services*
Improving access and the quality of essential services is crucial for the achievement of adequate standards of living, individual well being and social cohesion.

The severe economic downturn which has arisen over the past year means that some key assumptions on which these plans are based may have to be adapted. The surplus in the public finances of recent years

has now turned to a major deficit, which is projected to continue for a number of years. The challenges of preventing and reducing poverty and social exclusion are likely to be much greater than has been the case over the period since 1997. The strategic approach has a key role to meet these challenges in the coming years

The strategic plan of the Division follows.

Part 2

**Strategic
Plan
2009 –2011**

The Division's Strategic Plan, in accordance with its mandate, placed within the overall Statement of Strategy of the Department of Social & Family Affairs is designed to enhance, support and complement the delivery of the thematic and high level goals in relation to Children and Families, People of Working Age, Retired and Older people and People with Disabilities and in seeking better outcomes to tackle Poverty and Social Inclusion.

The key strategic objectives and actions which follow set out what is required to achieve these goals and provide a greater understanding on the nature, extent and means of tackling poverty.

2.1 Provision of Policy Advice

The Division will advise and make recommendations where appropriate on all aspects of the implementation of the measures and targets in government strategies for social inclusion with particular reference to those commitments which are due to be implemented within the timeframe of this plan. The Division will focus in this plan specifically on the priorities for Ireland in the report to the EU on strategies for social protection and social inclusion for the period up to the end of 2010 namely:

- *Child Poverty*
- *Access to quality work and learning opportunities*
- *Integration of immigrants and*
- *Access to Quality Services*

2.2 Monitoring Progress

A key task of the Division is to work within Government and, in consultation with stakeholders, on monitoring progress in implementing and adapting the strategies, having regard to the changing economic environment. These functions are carried out mainly in the context of preparing the comprehensive annual social inclusion progress report of the Division and the triennial report on social inclusion for the EU.

Poverty Measurement

- The Annual EU SILC survey presents detailed findings on the progress being achieved on poverty reduction, including breakdowns according to age, occupational status, household composition, regions. The Division will arrange for provision of analysis on the implications of the findings for policy development and outcomes. It will also assess the need and the possibilities for making further data available to examine progress on poverty reduction for smaller marginalised groups and areas of disadvantage not covered by EU SILC.

Data Strategies

- Availability of relevant data is essential for monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes. The data strategies will be further developed over the period of this strategic plan with a view to ensuring necessary data availability across the various policy areas, to supplement the data from EU SILC, and specifically in relation to the vulnerable groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion and to areas of disadvantage. The advice of the Technical Group will be of key importance in this exercise.

Indicators

- Indicators assist in clarifying policy inputs, outputs and outcomes. As such they greatly assist in monitoring progress in relation to policies and programmes and compared, for example, to previous years, in implementation in various areas at local and regional levels within the country, and compared to other EU countries. The Division will review the application of the EU indicators over the period of this strategic plan and the possibilities for supplementing these with more detailed national indicators for each relevant policy area.

2.3 Evaluating Outcomes

The resources invested in social inclusion measures in terms of personnel and expenditure across all policy areas, the numbers dependent on these policies, which include the most vulnerable people in society and the implications for economic development and social cohesion require rigorous evaluation of the outcomes being achieved. This is even more compelling during the current economic down turn. Outcomes need to be evaluated for individual policy areas and within these for individual schemes and programmes. There may be a number of outcomes to be achieved for any policy area in this context, but the Division in this strategic plan will be focusing mainly on the impact policies have on poverty and social exclusion on the basis of the Lifecycle approach.

Poverty Impact Assessment

- This tool will be developed further with a view to its use in clarifying the intended outcomes to be achieved for poverty and social exclusion based on the Lifecycle approach e.g. what are the intended purposes of income support in this regard and what are the priorities. The impact of individual policies and programmes on poverty and social exclusion and their implementation will in the future be assessed against the background of this analysis
- Over the period of the plan, projects will be undertaken in the main policy areas including local authority services in collaboration with relevant Departments and local authorities. The project findings will inform priorities for a poverty impact assessment programme.

Promoting Integrated Approach to Policy and its Implementation

- One objective of the Lifecycle Approach is to promote an integrated approach to policy development and implementation across the various policy areas, with a view to achieving the best overall outcomes. The findings of the poverty impact assessment process on overall policy assessment should greatly facilitate identifying how more effective integration could be achieved.

One of the outcomes of the project on poverty impact assessment will be to report on the extent to which greater integration can be achieved and how this process can be further advanced.

- Regular feedback from the social partners, people experiencing poverty and those working with them will form an essential part of the poverty impact assessment. Arrangements to receive this feedback will be a key part of the structures to be put in place for enhanced consultation with stakeholders referred to below.

Promote & Develop Good Practice and Innovation in Policy Implementation

- There is much scope for the developing and promoting good practice and innovation in relation to policy and its implementation between Government departments and agencies, between local authorities and other Government institutions that operate at regional and local levels, between service providers in particular groups which focus on poverty and social inclusion in the community and voluntary sectors, and at international level particularly from the EU Open Method of coordination. The good practice identified can also be an important tool in evaluation.
- A further element of the project on poverty impact assessment and integration assessment will be to examine how good practice and innovation in policy implementation can be identified and exchanged between Governmental institutions at national and local levels. The extent to which exchanges of good practice through the Consultation process with stakeholders could be facilitated will be examined in consultation with participants in that process.
- The Division will establish procedures and structures for reporting on and providing an analysis of good practices in other countries that emerge from the EU Open Coordination and other international sources.

2.4 Research and Policy Analysis

The research function will support the monitoring and evaluation processes in relation to analysis of EU SILC results, development of data strategies, development and application of indicators, poverty impact assessment and integration assessment and facilitating the exchange and analysis of good practice.

The evaluation process may identify issues that require specific research. The Division will arrange for this research to be undertaken as resources permit and projects managed in collaboration, as appropriate, with relevant Government institutions and/or other stakeholders.

Research projects will be undertaken and/or completed during the course of the period of application of the strategic plan, having regard to existing research projects and the programme of the EU Year 2010, and to include:

Developing an academic research programme to complement the Division's research programme which may include establishing research fellowships to increase the analytical capacity of the Division to support its research remit as appropriate.

2.5 Consultation and Participation

Consultation and collaboration with stakeholders, including in particular people experiencing poverty, is an integral part of the strategic process. The aim is to ensure that consultation involving real engagement is developed. This will include:

- clear and regular engagement as part of the consultation process with all service users with a view to obtaining feedback on the effectiveness of policies and their implementation;
- proposals for policy development and improvements being received, analysed and directed to the relevant policy makers, with considered responses provided;
- the potential for collaboration on services provision between stakeholders and with Government agencies being explored and facilitated as appropriate.

The existing structures for consultation will be reviewed. The operation of the structures being put in place for the European Year 2010 will also be reviewed. These include the EU Year 2010 Advisory Committee and the procedures for consultation with the organisations in the various lifecycle groups and the events organised in this context. New and revised structures, based on these reviews and consultation with stakeholders, will then be phased in from 2011.

2.6 Communications with Stakeholders

Effective communications is an essential part of the strategic process including promoting greater understanding about poverty. The main means to achieve this is through communication of information on all aspects of poverty and social exclusion, the policy framework, the measures being taken and the progress being made in the reduction of poverty and social exclusion, the reports on consultations with stakeholders and on international developments.

A communications strategy will be further developed during the course of the period of application of this strategic plan. Communication will be a key dimension of the programme for European Year 2010.

2.7 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

The Social Inclusion Division has been designated the National Implementing Body (NIB) for the EU Year for combating poverty and social exclusion. The NIB has responsibility for coordinating the preparation, implementation and assessment of the outcome of the Year's activities. This Year will provide a major opportunity in the context of the EU 27 for reviewing the realities of poverty and social exclusion, the effectiveness of policies and their implementation, the principles on which these policies should be based, the priorities over the next 10 years, the structures in relation to governance, monitoring and evaluation, consultation with stakeholders, research and communications. The further development of the role, structures, functions and strategic approach of the new Division will be fully informed by the activities and outcomes of the Year.

2.8 Operational Capabilities and Organisational Supports

In order to ensure that the Division operates to the highest quality standard possible we are committed to continuously developing our operational capabilities and organisational support structures.

The skilled and committed staff of the new Division are working in a challenging environment. We are committed to ensuring that the staff of the Division are an effective, adaptable and capable team focused on a culture of excellence.

As part of the Department of Social and Family Affairs there are a range of initiatives in place to assist us in realising a performance culture and a positive working environment. These include:

- Integration of the PMDS with human resources practices and procedures
- Civil Service policies on Equality of Opportunity and Gender Equality
- Human Resources Strategy
- Training and Development Strategy
- Disability Sectoral Plan

- Attendance Management Strategy
- Health promotion Strategy

We will seek to ensure a working environment which is based on cooperation, participation and mutual support through the implementation of cross-functional support and training within the Division and the development of project teams as a method of working to produce timely and high quality outputs.

Staff in the new Division have a range of general and technical competencies, including research, communications, policy analysis, library and information management and project management and innovation. These competencies will be supported and developed in the new Division.

We will support and enhance effective policy development through building linkages with the Department's policy areas and learn from closer working with social inclusion areas in other Departments.

We will explore the establishment of a partnership committee within the Division

We will maintain robust financial management and reporting systems through compliance with Government accounting procedures.

Appendix

Definitions

The basis of the strategic process and its objectives is encapsulated in the following definitions framed at national level, and at European level to which Ireland subscribes.

Poverty

According to the definition of poverty in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS),

“People are considered to be living in poverty, if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.”

Ireland fully supports and participates in the processes coordinated by the EU to combat poverty and social exclusion. The EU definition of poverty is on the same lines as the Irish definition, but with more detail as follows:

“People are said to be living in poverty, if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living acceptable to the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to life long learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion, as specifically defined by the EU, *is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus feel powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives.*

Social Inclusion

Working to achieve social inclusion, as defined by the EU, involves building *a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights.*"

Note: in this Strategy references to social inclusion is taken to include poverty elimination and social exclusion

Social Cohesion

One of the overall outcomes of working to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion is greater social cohesion, which involves promoting a more socially cohesive society. Social cohesion is defined by the Council of Europe as *the capacity of a society to ensure the well being of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding marginalisation.*

For the EU this also includes" *raising awareness of the benefits for all of a society where poverty is eradicated, fair distribution is enabled and no one is marginalised*". It also includes *"increasing public ownership in social inclusion policies and actions emphasising both collective and individual responsibility in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as the importance of promoting and supporting voluntary activities"*.(Decision on 2010, European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion)



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