

Finding Your Way around Poverty, Welfare and Family Policy

Hilary Curley



information for all

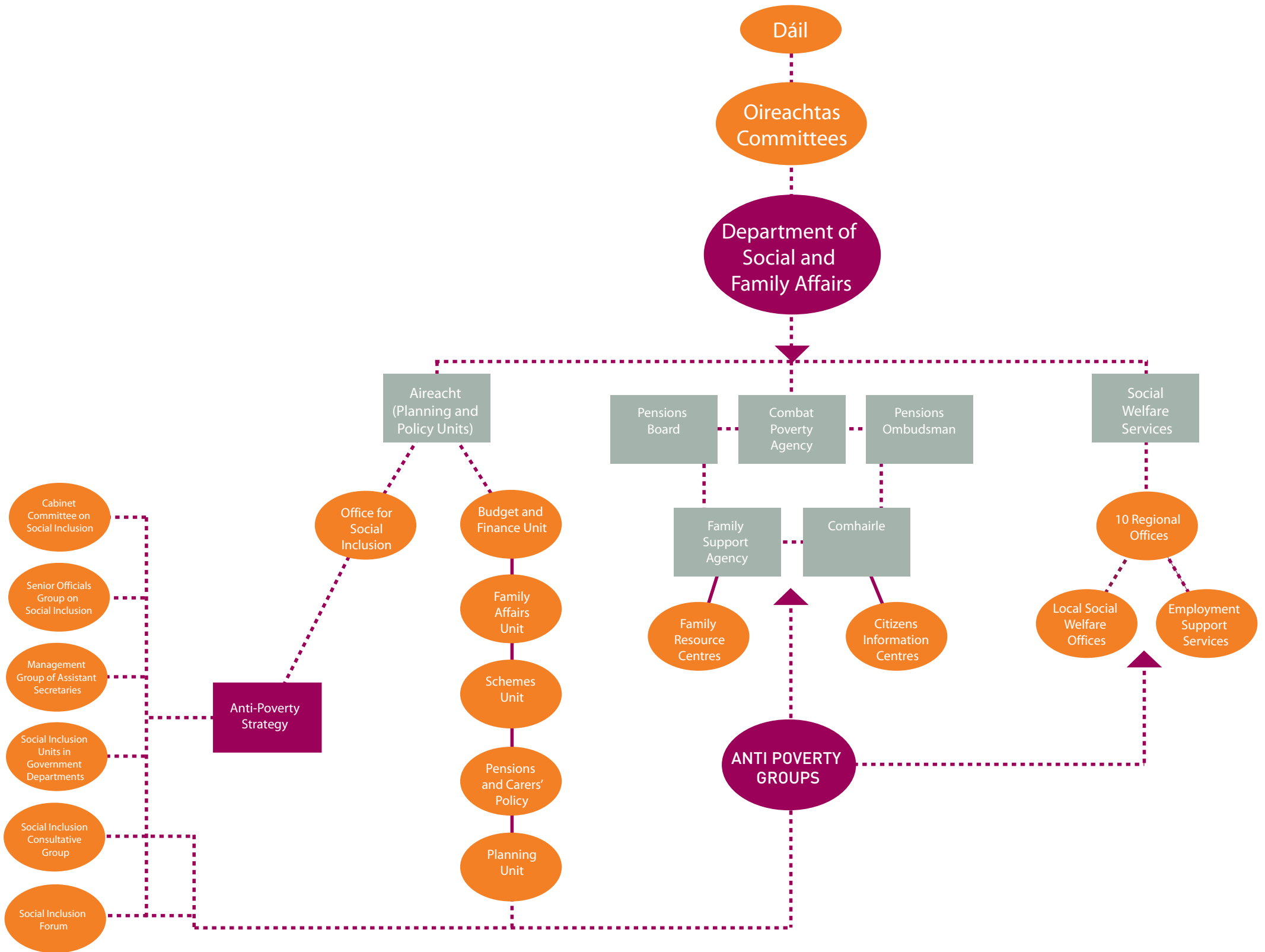
Office for Social Welfare and Family Policy
 Understanding the policy system
 family policy
Social welfare
 Office for Social Welfare and Family Policy
National Development
Organisational
Social Partner Agreement
 National Development
 Consultation
Committee
 Department of Social Welfare
 Guide to Understanding the Policy System: Social Welfare and Family Policy



Combat Poverty Agency working for a poverty-free Ireland

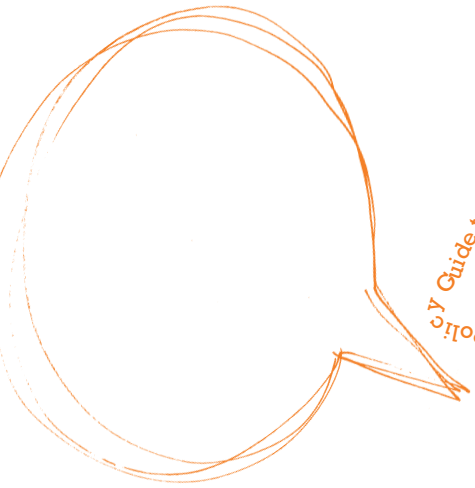
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Finding Your Way around Poverty, Welfare and Family Policy

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Understanding the policy system
family policy
social welfare
Office for Social Inclusion
National Organisations
Social Partnership Agreement
National Development Plan
Consultative Committee
Department of Social



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Foreword

Combat Poverty Agency is a state advisory agency developing and promoting evidence-based proposals and measures to combat poverty in Ireland. The Combat Poverty Agency Act 1986 specifies Combat Poverty as a state agency whose functions include: policy advice, research, project support, innovation and evaluation. This work is undertaken through its current Strategic Plan 2005-2007 *Working for a Poverty-Free Ireland*. One of the key principles guiding the implementation of the plan is partnership. Hence the plan creates opportunities and bridges between different sectors to address poverty.

In November 2005 Combat Poverty launched a three-year programme, *Having Your Say* (see www.combatpoverty.ie/havingyoursay). The aim of the programme is to strengthen the voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty in the development and implementation of anti-poverty policies and programmes. Objective 2 of the *Having Your Say* Programme is designed to support the skills and capacity of the community and voluntary sector to understand the policy system.

The three guides are designed as practical tools to enable the community and voluntary sector, with a focus on poverty, to better understand, analyse and influence the policy environment in four key areas: Local Government, the Budget process in Ireland, and social welfare and family policy. The three guides are published in partnership with Comhairle and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA). A fourth guide on health is produced in collaboration with Combat Poverty's *Building Healthy Communities* Programme.

Combat Poverty acknowledges Hilary Curley's work in producing three of the guides. It is hoped that they will make a valuable contribution to a greater understanding of the policy system in Ireland, leading to better outcomes for people experiencing poverty.

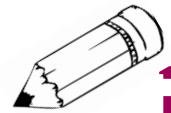
Combat Poverty Agency
December 2006



Glossary of Terms

NAPinclusion	National Action Plan for Social Inclusion
OSI	Office for Social Inclusion
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
EU	European Union
FRC	Family Resource Centre
CIC	Citizens Information Centre
FRCNF	Family Resource Centre National Forum
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
NSSPI	National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Inclusion

Keep Notes:





Introduction

The purpose of this Guide is to help community and voluntary groups understand the work of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and indicate areas in which they can influence the development of social and family policy.

Central to the work of the Department is the implementation of the anti-poverty strategy. While final responsibility for the strategy rests with the Department, it is a government-wide initiative seeking to address poverty through the work of all departments and agencies.

The interface between the anti-poverty strategy and the Department is quite clear: the anti-poverty strategy sets social policy at a strategic level across government, while the local, regional and operational aspects of social policy are handled by the Department and its associated agencies.

It is vital for community and voluntary groups with an anti-poverty agenda to recognise the strategic nature of NAPinclusion and how it sets social policy for all government activity. Knowing how the strategy integrates with the role and work of the Department of Social and Family Affairs is also important.

This Guide outlines the role, function and responsibilities of the Department as well as explaining the NAPinclusion process and how it is managed. The Guide also endeavours to identify the most opportune time to influence the social policy process and the key structures to target.

The diagram set out at the front of the Guide will help groups navigate their way around the somewhat complex picture that is the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the NAPinclusion process.



Overview


The day-to-day work of community and voluntary groups, particularly those involved in anti-poverty work, may often appear to be far removed from the high-level, jargon-laden world of social policy development. The reality, however, is quite different.

The development of policy can be understood as a circular flow: the learning and experience gleaned from groups working at local level informing the policy-making process at national level which in turn makes decisions, designs programmes and allocates resources, thus continuing to fuel the work of groups at the local level (see diagram).

This is the theory. In practice it is not so simple, for many reasons:

- People become so immersed in their own local projects that they neglect the wider picture and do not see what relevant policy processes are coming down the line.
- The significant volume of information coming at people on a daily basis means that key information is lost, critical opportunities to influence policy are missed and decisions are made without the input of people who are most affected by the policy decision in question.
- The breadth and complexity of the policy world is daunting and groups are unclear about whom they should talk to, uncertain about how they can become involved and sceptical as to whether anyone will take what they have to say seriously.

Central to the work of the Department of Social and Family Affairs is the government anti-poverty strategies explained in detail in



Section 2. The anti-poverty strategies are crucial policy documents because they are the backdrop against which all government policies, programmes and funding relating to social inclusion are framed. This activity in turn shapes the programmes and projects run by anti-poverty groups and the level of resources achieved.

The anti-poverty strategies stretch across and underpin other key government policy and planning documents such as the National Health Strategy, the National Policy for Educational Disadvantage (DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) and key government policy documents including:

- The National Development Plan: A multi-annual plan setting out national priorities and proposed investments for the economic and social development of the country;
- The Social Partnership Agreement: Involves government, unions, employers, the community and voluntary sector and farming organisations. It is among the key policy-making fora in the country. The social and economic commitments made between the social partners inform the work of government. The most recent 10-year agreement, Towards 2016, contains many of the commitments made in the anti-poverty strategies;
- The Programme for Government: Sets out what a newly elected government is planning to achieve during its period in office and reflects many social inclusion commitments.

Policy is made on the back of learning gleaned from work on the ground. Groups can influence the implementation of policy at all levels – local, regional and national – but they need to be able to document their experience clearly, know where to communicate this information, when to communicate it and who to target.




If the anti-poverty strategies and other anti-poverty related policies are to be focused and targeted on the real needs of people and communities who live in and experience poverty, they need to be informed and influenced by the work of groups around the country.

Anti-poverty groups have a heavy workload, carried out with limited resources and by volunteers with already busy lives. Engaging in policy work might seem just another extra duty requiring too much time and delivering very little.

There are a number of tips a group should remember that will help conserve energy, resources and make their policy efforts more effective:

- Be very clear about what the problem is, how it is manifesting itself, what could be done to address it. Try to speak in specifics rather than generalities and have real life examples or situations to back up your argument.
- Try to keep any policy submissions short and to the point.
- Document the problems or obstacles faced in your work as you go along. It makes it easier to compile an argument when necessary.
- Identify which policy fora or spaces you are going to concentrate your energies on. Trying to engage with every individual, every strategy, every policy will dilute your efforts and sap your energy. What do you need to say, where do you need to say it and who do you need to target?
- Identify the key people you need to keep in touch with – people from political parties; civil servants most related to your policy area; journalists who have a particular interest in social





policy issues. Put work into building up informal networks and relationships with these people.

Groups may feel that nobody is listening or that nobody is interested in hearing the real story. This should not deter them. There are policy spaces detailed in the Guide where groups can contribute to the process. Even though it can be frustrating, it is important that efforts are made to feed learning into the system so that policies can be more targeted, meaningful and effective.



Section 1: Department of Social and Family Affairs

What is it?

The Department of Social and Family Affairs is responsible for developing social policy, administering social protection payments and delivering family schemes and services.

Social protection payments refer to any payments necessary to support people who are most vulnerable. They include pensions, unemployment payments, disability payments, carers allowance, farm assist, etc.

The Department is also ultimately responsible for the implementation of the NAPinclusion process, ensuring it permeates through all other government departments and agencies with a social policy remit.

While its role is primarily that of social policy, welfare and support, the Department is also proactive in the area of education and employment by encouraging people back to the labour market through various incentives such as the Back-to-Work programme and the Back-to-Education programme.



Why is it important?

Through the planning and development of social protection policy and administering welfare payments, the work of the Department has a direct impact on the lives of people who live in poverty or are at risk of living in poverty. The payment rates are determined by government each year through the annual budget process.

How does it operate?

The work of the Department is divided into two separate areas: The first main area, called the Aireacht (or ‘Ministry’) is responsible for the overall management of the Department and for formulating policy, developing legislation and acting in an advisory capacity to the Minister. One of the key sections in the Aireacht is the Planning Unit which is central to reviewing and developing social welfare policy (see text box on the next page).





The Planning Unit within the Department is responsible for the formulation of social protection policy and provides support and advice to the Minister. Apart from the Office for Social Inclusion, the following sections of the Planning Unit may be of particular interest to community groups:


Family Affairs Unit: Involved in co-ordinating family policy and the One Parent Family Payment Policy. The Unit also supports the implementation of the National Longitudinal Study of Children with other relevant departments and works with the Family Support Agency (see Section 8).

Budget and Finance Section: Responsible for the preparation of the Budget package and the development of policy in relation to means testing.

Pensions and Carers Policy: Responsible for advising the Minister on policy developments with regard to pensions and liaising with the Pensions Board (the statutory regulator of occupational pensions). This section also advises the Minister on policy developments in relation to support for carers and develops policy for this area.

Short-Term Schemes, Child Income Support, Social Insurance and Statistics Section: Responsible for developing policy in the areas of: illness/disability; maternity and related schemes (including parental leave); child income support; farm assist scheme; incentive-based unemployment payments. The section also produces statistical information relating to social protection schemes.





The second main area, called the Social Welfare Services, is the executive arm of the Department and is responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of social welfare schemes and services, delivered through a network of local and regional offices. The regional structure is based on 10 regions with offices in Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Longford, Sligo, Dundalk and three in the Dublin area.

While the primary job of Social Welfare Services is the management and administration of social welfare payments, it operates a number of services that are relevant to the work of anti-poverty groups:

- The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) helps families who have been identified as having problems with debt, to manage their finances, budgets and debt.
- Employment Support Services employ locally based facilitators who advise and assist unemployed people and lone parents to avail of the full range of options for employment, education, training and self-employment.





The Department also oversees a number of agencies including the following:

- **Combat Poverty Agency** is a state advisory agency developing and promoting evidence-based proposals and measures to combat poverty in Ireland. Combat Poverty's general functions cover policy advice, project support and innovation, research and public education. Its functions are outlined in the Combat Poverty Agency Act, 1986.
- **The Family Support Agency** is responsible for the provision of family supports such as a mediation service and manages the Family and Community Services Resource programme (see Section 8).
- **Comhairle** supports the network of the Citizen Information Centres around the country with the aim of ensuring that all citizens have easy access to the highest quality of information, advice and advocacy on social services.
- **The Pensions Board** looks after occupational pensions, their development and the general issue of pension coverage.
- **The Office of the Pensions Ombudsman** investigates complaints relating to occupational pension schemes.
- **The Social Welfare Tribunal** adjudicates in cases where there are disputes about unemployment payment claims.





Points of influence

The annual budget process is an important event each year as it determines the payment rates for the various social protection schemes. The Department of Social and Family Affairs is responsible for proposing new schemes and advising on rate changes. These are all negotiated with the Department of Finance as part of the budget process every year.

Anti-poverty groups have an opportunity to contribute to the budget process by way of submissions to the Department outlining their proposals, the impact these will have and the cost of implementation.

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs holds a pre-budget forum for community and voluntary groups, usually in October each year. Groups have an opportunity to air their concerns and present their proposals directly to the Minister and his/her officials.

Attendance at the pre-budget forum is by invitation only. The groups that are invited (in excess of 30) tend to be the larger, national community and voluntary organisations such as Age Action Ireland, St Vincent de Paul, Threshold. Groups should link in to an existing invitee with their budget submissions. If there is not a relevant invitee to link with, contact the Department of Social and Family Affairs to see if you can be included on the invitation list.

For a budget submission to have any impact, it should be worked on during the early part of the year and submitted before the end of September. Even though the budget is not published until the first week of December, most of the planning and negotiation on costs and proposals happens in the July–October period. (See *Finding Your Way Around the Budget* in this series for more information on the Budget process).



The Department has ultimate responsibility for the NAPinclusion process, and through its Office of Social Inclusion, prepares the Plan and monitors its implementation (see Section 3).

Reviews of social policy initiatives take place from time to time and are usually carried out by the relevant section within the Planning Unit. For example, a review of family services policy would be carried out by the Family Affairs Unit, a review of child income support would be carried out by the Short-Term Schemes, Child Income Support and Social Insurance section. Where the terms of reference of the review require the involvement of relevant community and voluntary groups, invitations are issued to those groups by the Department.

There is no time-specific point for these reviews to be completed so it is recommended that you contact civil servants within the section to see if you can be kept informed about any reviews taking place and how you can engage with the process.

The social welfare regional offices are generally active at the local level, and are represented on local partnership boards and other relevant community groups. From time to time, any one of the regional or local offices may call together 'consumer panels'. These panels bring customers of welfare services together with regional and local social welfare staff and customer services to discuss a particular scheme or service and how it can be managed and delivered more effectively. The consumer panels are informal consultative spaces that are called together when the need arises.

Additionally, the Department provides customers with an opportunity to make suggestions, comments or complaints themselves. This process could lead, in turn, to a consumer panel being initiated.



Who to target

If a group is making a budget submission, it is recommended that it be sent to the office of the Minister in the Department of Finance and the office of the Minister who has ultimate responsibility for the areas covered in the budget submission.

It should also be sent to the civil servants in the Department who are responsible for dealing with your particular issue. For example, if your submission relates to family services, it should be submitted to the Family Affairs Unit of the Department of Social and Family Affairs; if your submission is concerned with carers, it should be sent to the Pensions and Carers Policy section. It would also be a good idea to send a copy to the Budget and Finance section of the Department.

You should find out the name of the people responsible for dealing with your particular issue and contact them early in the year to let them know about your forthcoming budget submission, to collect some information about relevant dates and to establish a relationship.

It is also a good idea to maintain ongoing, informal contact with civil servants in the different sections within the Department. This will help to keep you informed about any policy reviews taking place that could affect your target group. It may be possible to engage with the policy review process.

Relationships should also be built with members of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs (see Section 7). This is an important influencing space because of the Committee's role in scrutinising the work of the Department, discussing draft legislation and exploring items of concerns that have been brought to its attention.



A group should always keep in contact with local TDs to ensure that they are kept informed about issues relating to anti-poverty work. Again, this building of knowledge and relationships is always important around budget time because TDs can have a role in influencing the process.

Finally, keep in touch with opposition spokespersons with responsibility for the social and family affairs brief. This means that if you want information on a particular issue, a parliamentary question can be posed by the spokespersons which the Minister is required to answer, either in the Dáil or by written response. This can happen at any time of the year when the Dáil is sitting.

Main targets

- Civil servants working in the relevant sections within the Department of Social and Family Affairs
- Members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs
- Opposition Spokespersons
- Your local TD





Helpful hints

Do not wait until budget time to contact the necessary people in the Department. Begin building a relationship with them early in the year so that they are familiar with your group, your work and your concerns.

Further information.

Further information is available from the department's website www.welfare.ie





Section 2: National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

What is it?

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (referred to as the NAPinclusion) contains the government's plans to tackle poverty in Ireland. It sets out the social policy strategy of the government and is relevant to all levels of government and across all departments and agencies.

A new action plan is being developed for Ireland. This is part of a wider drive by the EU to make a serious effort to reduce poverty across all EU countries by 2010. Ireland's current plan against poverty and social exclusion will build on the social inclusion commitments contained in the social partnership agreement *Toward 2016* and the National Development Plan.

The first step in this process has already taken place with the publication of the report *Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008*, submitted by government in September 2006. This report is quite general in nature, with high-level strategic objectives.

The next step is to make the report far more detailed and relevant by introducing specific objectives, strategies and targets. This work is underway and will form the basis for a three-year action plan, the new NAPinclusion.

The new NAPinclusion will continue the work begun in the 10-year National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) initiated by government in 1997 and revised in 2002.



Progress on the plan is monitored at EU level. This has the effect of increasing political pressure on the Irish government to prioritise the objective of social inclusion, particularly when its actions are subject to EU scrutiny.

Why is it important?

Addressing the causes and effects of poverty requires the intervention of many different government departments and agencies – health, education, employment, justice, family, welfare, etc. These interventions need to be co-ordinated so that problems can be addressed in an integrated and effective way. The NAPinclusion provides this vital tool for co-ordinating social policy across all departments and agencies.

The NAPinclusion is defined by high-level, national targets. In fact local organisations might perceive the Plan to be quite removed from work on the ground. But it is a crucial policy instrument because it contains information on all government policies and programmes relating to social inclusion and poverty.

The objectives and targets contained in the NAPinclusion incorporate the social inclusion elements of the National Development Plan, the Social Partnership Agreement and other government strategies such as those dealing with education or health.

Groups involved in anti-poverty work should be linked into the development and review of the NAPinclusion to ensure that it reflects the real needs of people who live in poverty or are marginalised.



Some of the high-level strategic targets set by the revised NAPS 2002–2007

Education: to halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006

Health: to reduce the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by at least 10 per cent for circulatory diseases, for carers and for injuries and poisoning by 2007

Housing: to deliver 41,500 local authority housing unit starts (including acquisitions) between 2000 and 2006

Vulnerable Groups, Children and Young People: to reduce the numbers of children who are 'consistently poor' to below 2 per cent and, if possible, eliminate consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.


For up to date information on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion see: www.socialinclusion.ie

How does it operate?

The NAPinclusion can be difficult to come to terms with because of its high-level, strategic national focus. It does not deliver direct tangibles in terms of project resources or budgets to local groups. The Plan sets out how government budgets, policies and programmes are designed so they will have maximum impact on poverty.

The NAPinclusion is supported by a complex set of implementation structures which are cross-departmental in nature to reflect the cross-cutting nature of poverty and the total government approach to tackling it.





NAPS Structures	Role
Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion (chaired by the Taoiseach)	Monitors the social inclusion strategies that operate across government and the overall direction of the Plan
Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion drawn from all relevant government departments (see Section 6).	Co-ordinates social inclusion policy development, assesses the implementation of the Plan and reports to the Cabinet Committee
Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs (see Section 2)	As a cross-party committee, keeps an eye on the work of the Department as well as the implementation of the Plan
Office for Social Inclusion (see Section 3)	Co-ordinates the production of the Plan and reports on progress against objectives and targets
Social Inclusion Units/Liaison Officers	These are established in key government departments and co-ordinate their department's contribution to the process in liaison with the OSI and under the general direction of members of the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion
Social Inclusion Consultative Committee (see Section 4)	Provides advice on the implementation and development of the Plan




NAPS Structures	Role
Social Inclusion Forum convened by the NESF (see Section 5)	Includes representatives of different sectors and people experiencing poverty who meet on an annual basis to advise on all aspects of the Plan
Combat Poverty Agency	Supports, in an advisory capacity, individual government departments and local or regional structures in the development of anti-poverty strategies, poverty impact assessment tools and public consultations on poverty and social inclusion

Points of influence

The most important influencing opportunities present themselves during the preparation of the social inclusion plans and the reporting stages.

The public consultation elements of the NAPinclusion process mean that anti-poverty groups have regular opportunities to contribute to the consultation process through written submissions and through organised meetings. These opportunities are usually organised by the Office for Social Inclusion and NESF but consultation sessions are also undertaken by other national community and voluntary organisations.





Consultation for the social inclusion plans informs the development of policy at many different levels so there are other policy spaces where influence can be brought to bear. Perhaps the most central is the social partnership arena where social inclusion commitments are reflected in the multi-annual social partnership agreements (see text box).

Social Partnership Agreements

The social partnership process is a term used to describe the coming together of all key groups in Irish society, along with the government, to identify and address the social and economic problems facing the country. This happens every few years and priorities and policies to address the country's ills are agreed and published in what is called a Social Partnership Agreement.

The first social partnership agreement was in 1987 when the country's economy was particularly bleak and unemployment levels were very high. The government called together the Trade Unions, the Employers and the Farmers to work with them and agree tax and wage policies that would help get the country back on its feet.

Since that time, the social partnership process has expanded to include the community and voluntary sector. The range of issues addressed in the agreements has also expanded over the years and now includes education, health, justice, poverty, etc. While wage agreements still form a central part of social partnership agreements, proposals to address wider issues are also included.

(continued on p.28)



Social Partnership Agreements (*continued*)

In previous years, social partnership agreements ran for a period of 2–3 years but the current agreement will span a period of ten years, as reflected in its title, *Towards 2016*. As with all other agreements, a Steering Group has been set up to assess its progress. This involves representatives from the community and voluntary pillar as well as other social partners. The community and voluntary pillar is a loose organisational structure that brings together a range of national community and voluntary organisations.


Social partnership agreements now form a central plank of government policy making and the commitments contained within social partnership link in with other government strategies such as the National Development Plan and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) as well as other more subject-focused government strategies such as the National Health Strategy and the National Policy for Educational Disadvantage (DEIS).

Who to target

Given the range of institutional structures supporting the implementation of the NAPinclusion, it is important to be focused as regards where your key message needs to be delivered and where it will be taken on board.

The Social Inclusion Forum and the Social Inclusion Consultative Committee are the main consultative mechanisms where issues around the NAPinclusion are discussed and groups have an opportunity to feed into the process. The role and composition of the





social inclusion institutional structures are currently being considered by the social partners and further opportunities for community groups to participate in the process may arise.

Get to know the elected representatives on the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs (see Section 7). They are generally very open to meeting groups and hearing feedback from people on the ground.

Finally, find out what members of the different social partners are on the Social Partnership Steering Group and make contact with the community/voluntary representatives. Make sure there is an information channel between your organisation and the national representatives so that you are kept informed about what is happening at the meetings and you can feed in any problems or proposals relating to anti-poverty work arising from your practical experience.

It is important to take opportunities to network and build relationships with staff from the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) and the Social Inclusion Units in government departments.

Main targets

- Members of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs
- Community and Voluntary Pillar representatives on the Social Partnership Steering Group



Helpful hints

You should try and connect with other groups who are working in similar areas with common issues so that there is strength in your position and a greater opportunity for your message and your voice to be heard.

Further information

Further information is available on the Office for Social Inclusion website at www.socialinclusion.ie The European Anti-Poverty Network, Ireland website at www.eapn.ie also contains excellent briefing materials on the NAPinclusion process.





Section 3: Office for Social Inclusion

What is it?

The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) operates within the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Its main responsibility is the co-ordination and production of the NAPinclusion and reporting on progress in relation to the Plan (see Section 2).

Why is it important?

The OSI is the central co-ordinator of the NAPinclusion process and has responsibility for compiling the plans and reporting on their implementation.

The OSI has also been given responsibility for preparing an annual Social Inclusion Report which will provide information on the progress of social inclusion actions contained in the social partnership agreement: *Towards 2016*.

How does it operate?

The OSI has its own staff complement and links in with a complex set of institutional structures at national level (see Section 2). It works with social inclusion units and other sections in relevant government departments in connection with the development of policies and targets around social inclusion and the reporting on progress in relation to these.





The office is responsible for reporting progress on social inclusion strategies to the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (see Section 6).

It is also making efforts to ensure that the NAPinclusion process becomes more relevant at the local level, linking in with Social Inclusion Units established in local authorities. The idea is to try and influence their service planning and delivery (see text box).

Social Inclusion Units


Eight pilot social inclusion units have been established in local authorities around the country. One of the commitments of the new social partnership agreement is an expansion in the number of Social Inclusion Units to half of the city and county councils by the end of 2008.

This would ensure that an anti-poverty focus underpins the work of the local authority, particularly in areas such as housing and infrastructural development.

Combat Poverty has supported local authorities to develop an anti-poverty focus in their work through a number of training and information supports and the development of a Learning Network. The Network brings together local authority officials and elected members to facilitate information exchange and networking and to provide training.

This work has now been mainstreamed and is being led by a Local Authorities Steering Group consisting of the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), the Department of the Environment, Heritage





and Local Government, the Local Government Management Services Board, the County and City Managers Association, the Office for Social Inclusion and Combat Poverty Agency. The Learning Network is now supported by the IPA.

Points of influence

The main opportunities to influence the government's over-arching social inclusion policies present themselves through the following:

- The social partnership process
- Pre-budget submissions
- Consultations undertaken during the preparation of, reporting on and review of social inclusion strategies
- Parliamentary debate in the Oireachtas.

The OSI has specific responsibility for preparing an annual Social Inclusion Report which will provide information on the progress of the social inclusion elements of the social partnership agreement.

It is not clear yet how this report will be prepared but there may be an opportunity for groups to feed their views into this process through the community and voluntary pillar of the social partnership process, reporting on how the social inclusion policies are impacting, or otherwise, on the ground.

A group can contact the office at any stage if there are concerns or issues arising under the overall NAPinclusion process.



Who to target

It is a good idea to keep up to date on social inclusion strategy developments by regularly checking the www.socialinclusion.ie website. But the primary focus should be on the people who sit on the various institutional structures that support the anti-poverty strategy process.

Main targets

- Social Inclusion Consultative Committee (see Section 4)
- Social Inclusion Units within government departments
- Social Inclusion Forum (see Section 5)
- Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs (see Section 7)
- Opposition spokespersons

Helpful hints

If you have a particular concern about any aspect of the overall anti-poverty strategic process, document it, support it with evidence, and communicate this to the Office for Social Inclusion. If the concern relates to an area that is the primary responsibility of a particular government department, the communication should be sent directly to that department.

Further information

Further information is available from the Office for Social Inclusion at www.socialinclusion.ie





Section 4: Social Inclusion Consultative Committee

What is it?

The Social Inclusion Consultative Committee was set up to include in the anti-poverty strategy process those social partners who are involved in social partnership agreements.

It is co-chaired by the Department of An Taoiseach and the Office for Social Inclusion. Its membership is drawn from relevant government departments, trade unions, employers, community and voluntary sector, farmers and specialist agencies such as Combat Poverty and the Equality Authority.

Why is it important?

The Social Inclusion Consultative Committee does just what its name suggests – it is a consultation space where social partners, government departments and specialist agencies can come together to discuss the progress of anti-poverty strategies. The Office for Social Inclusion reports to the Committee on the progress of the NAPinclusion.

How does it operate?

The Group meets at least twice a year and is called together by the Office for Social Inclusion who is also responsible for drawing up the agenda.





Points of influence

There are no specific times in the year during which groups are advised to focus on the Consultative Committee – informal contact over the year with members of the Committee should suffice.

Bear in mind that the Committee is linked in with the social partnership process of which the Community and Voluntary Pillar is one of the four partners. So use your time and resources efficiently.


By establishing information links with members of the Pillar on an ongoing basis, you will not only be informing the members of the consultative committee about the realities of poverty and social exclusion on the ground but you will be informing the social partnership process itself.

Who to target

The first step for any group is to find out who are the members of the Social Inclusion Consultative Committee, particularly the representatives of the Community and Voluntary Pillar. Contact details for the latter are available from the Community and Voluntary Pillar secretariat.¹⁾ It should be noted that the role and composition of the social inclusion institutional structures are currently being considered by the social partners. It is possible that this may lead to some developments in this area.

Contact the representatives and see what feedback mechanisms are in place, i.e. mechanisms where you can feed in your concerns,

¹ The Community and Voluntary Pillar is a loose organisation of organisations that come together for the purposes of participating in the social partnership process. The secretariat for the Pillar rotates on a regular basis and it currently rests with Age Action Ireland.



issues, problems, proposals and in turn receive information from your representative.

Try not to limit your input or focus to the Community and Voluntary Pillar. There may be other organisations on this committee who may be interested in hearing from groups on the ground, e.g. Combat Poverty or the Trade Unions. The more organisations you link in with, the greater the possibility that your message will be heard.

Main targets

- Community and Voluntary Pillar representatives on the Committee
- Other members of the Committee such as Combat Poverty, the Equality Authority or the Trade Unions

Helpful hints

The social partnership process is among the key policy-making fora in the country and underpins many government strategies. Establishing communication channels with members of the Community and Voluntary Pillar will effectively link you in with the nerve centre of the policy-making process and maximise the impact of your contribution.

Further information

Further information is available from the Office for Social Inclusion at www.socialinclusion.ie Details on Community and Voluntary Pillar membership is available from Age Action Ireland at www.ageaction.ie or The Wheel at www.wheel.ie



Section 5: Social Inclusion Forum

What is it?

The Social Inclusion Forum is an event organised each year to provide groups and individuals who are not directly involved with the social partnership process with an opportunity to input their views and experiences on the implementation of the anti-poverty strategies. It is convened by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) who also produce a report on the Social Inclusion Forum proceedings after each annual event.


Groups who attended the forum in the past are automatically issued with an invitation but it is open to any anti-poverty group who is interested in attending. The event is advertised through different community and voluntary newsletters and websites.

Why is it important?

The importance of the Social Inclusion Forum lies in the fact that it is the only policy space in the whole NAPinclusion process where individuals living in poverty have a chance to personally air their views and concerns and feed into the policy process.

In all of the other policy spaces, even in the social partnership process, groups and individuals work through representatives. In the forum, there is no such intermediary and individuals can input directly to the proceedings and have their voices heard.





After each forum, a report is prepared by the NESF and disseminated to a wide audience including the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion (chaired by the Taoiseach), government ministers, all members of the Oireachtas and everyone who attended the event.

How does it operate?

The forum is convened every year by the NESF. It consists of a report on progress to the participants, question and answer sessions with various government departments and workshops on key issues pertinent to anti-poverty work and the plan.

The forum is held specifically to allow groups to:

- Put forward their views and experiences on key issues relating to the anti-poverty strategies
- Identify barriers and constraints to progress and recommendations on how these can best be tackled
- Provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

Combat Poverty has supported the participation of groups experiencing poverty in the Social Inclusion Forum.

The feedback from these workshops forms the basis for the report prepared.





National Economic and Social Forum

The role of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) is to research, analyse and monitor the implementation of specific programmes contained in the social partnership agreements.

The NESF was set up in 1993 by the government and is run by a management board comprised of representatives from social partners, local government and national government. It is particularly interested in initiatives or programmes concerned with equality and social inclusion. The results of its research informs the direction of future social policy.


The NESF has the additional role of facilitating public consultation on particular policy matters when asked by the government and provides another forum for the community and voluntary sector to contribute to the social partnership process.

Further information on the NESF is available at www.nesf.ie or telephone 01-8146300.

Points of influence

The main point of influence is the annual meeting of the forum meeting itself because groups and individuals can represent themselves directly.





It is recommended that some preparatory work be done by the group on:

- What the key issues are
- What it wants to say
- What it wants to see changed.

These views should be informed through consultation with people who are experiencing poverty in your own community, be it geographic or sectoral.

Who to target

There is no one individual to target, because a group or individuals can represent themselves directly at the forum. Make sure you are on the mailing list for the forum so that you know when it is happening.

Helpful hints

Think about linking in with other groups who have similar views or concerns prior to the forum. There is strength in numbers and if a number of people are saying the same thing at the forum, it is more likely that your message will be heard and taken on board.

Further information

Further information is available at www.nesf.ie; click on the 'Work Programme' link and then the 'NAPS' link.



Section 6 Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion

What is it?

The Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion is a group of senior civil servants from different government departments involved with social inclusion actions. Its task is to co-ordinate all policy developments concerning social inclusion issues and to bring emerging topics to the attention of the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion.

This Group operates very much at a policy level, looking at obstacles or challenges that are hindering the achievement of the social inclusion objectives of the government. This includes those set out in the NAPinclusion as well as other social inclusion related initiatives including the National Drugs Strategy, the Homelessness Strategies and the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.

Why is it important?

The Senior Officials Group is the central co-ordination point where all the social inclusion related programmes or strategies operating across different departments and agencies converge. This co-ordination role is absolutely vital given the cross-cutting nature of poverty and social exclusion.

Policy problems that may be arising through the implementation of the various social inclusion initiatives, e.g. lack of co-ordination between departments, are all brought to this table for discussion and proposed resolution.





How does it operate?

The Senior Officials Group is chaired by a senior civil servant from the Department of An Taoiseach and meets every four weeks. The Office for Social Inclusion reports into this Group on the progress of the NAPinclusion.

Other departments with responsibility for social inclusion strategies (e.g. the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs looking after the National Drugs Strategy), also report to this committee.

This committee in turn reports directly to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion where all decisions concerning social inclusion policy are discussed and proposed to government.

Points of influence

There is very little opportunity or very little space to directly influence the work of the Senior Officials Group, given that it is a high-level policy group comprised of civil servants.

The best one can hope for is to influence the institutional structures and civil servants at the levels below through the Community and Voluntary Pillar representatives in the social partnership process, Social Inclusion Consultative Committee (see Section 4) and the Social Inclusion Forum (see Section 5). Reports from these processes are fed into the Senior Officials Group.



Who to target

Community and Voluntary Pillar representatives in the social partnership process, the Social Inclusion Consultative Committee, the Social Inclusion Forum and Combat Poverty Agency.

Helpful hints

If there is a particular concern you have about any aspect of the overall anti-poverty strategic process, you should document it, support it with evidence and communicate this to the Office for Social Inclusion. If the concern relates to an area that is the primary responsibility of a particular government department, the communication should be sent directly to that Department.

Further information

Further information is available at www.socialinclusion.ie





Section 7: Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs

What is it?


A committee system operates in the Dáil that assists it in carrying out its legislative and policy-making functions. The most important from the community and voluntary sector viewpoint are the Select Committees and the Joint Committees.

- Select Committee: involves members of the Dáil only and has a key role in debating draft legislation and considering departmental budget estimates.
- Joint Committee: involves all the members from the Select Committee and elected representatives from the Seanad. It has a somewhat wider function than that of the Select Committee and its meetings are open to the public and the media.

The committees are set up in line with the departmental divisions in government. Thus the remit of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs corresponds with the functions of the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Why is it important?

The joint committee has an important policy function both in scrutinising the work of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and hearing inputs on draft legislation from members of the public.



Draft legislation or ‘Bills’ go through a series of stages for discussion or comment, including what is called ‘committee stages’. This is when a Bill is brought to the Select Committee for consideration.

The Joint Committee can also play a role in these debates by inviting interested outside parties, such as community and voluntary groups, to make presentations to the Committee about their views on the legislation.

The Joint Committee carries out a number of other functions:


- Providing a forum for discussion, comment and criticism on the work of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and particularly where problems have been brought to its attention either by constituents, organisations or the media
- A general role in monitoring the NAPinclusion.

The discussions that take place at committee meetings ensure that TDs and senators are more informed about the issues in question, which in turn informs debates in the Dáil and Seanad. An additional feature of the committees is that their discussions are frequently attended and reported on by the media.

How do they operate?

The Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs meets at least once a month. The agendas are available to the public a week in advance, on the Oireachtas website (see below), and proceedings from the meetings are also posted on the website approximately 1–2 weeks after committee session.





The committee has a clerk who provides secretarial and administrative support and a chairperson elected by the committee.

Joint Committee meetings are open to the public. If you are interested in attending to observe any of the debates, you are advised to contact your local TDs or one of the members of the Committee to request an official invitation. This is essentially a formality but is required for security purposes.

The Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs frequently invites outside groups or organisations to attend its meetings, for the following reasons:

- Draft legislation is being discussed and interested organisations have requested an opportunity to air their views on legislation and policy.
- The committee has decided to address or investigate progress on a particular issue of concern in the Department, e.g. lone parents, and wishes to hear the views of organisations dealing with these issues on a daily basis.
- A member of the committee proposes that part of a meeting is devoted to a problem or issue that has come to his/her attention (usually by local groups).

Points of influence

The best chance of influencing government committees is for a group to be informed and keep regular contact with committee members.



The committees have a work programme which is set out in their annual report. This programme is not set in stone and the Committee can respond to issues as they arise during the year.


There are specific times when opportunities to influence present themselves:

- Firstly, when draft legislation is being introduced. If the forthcoming legislation is something that concerns a group and its anti-poverty work, it is crucial that groups set in place a lobbying campaign that targets members of the Select and Joint Committees and seek to have in input at the Joint Committee during the discussion phase. A list of proposed Bills at the beginning of each Dáil session is available from the Chief Whip's Office at the Department of An Taoiseach.
- Secondly, the budget estimates for different departments are discussed at Select Committee meetings generally during the month of June and sometimes July. This discussion takes the form of a question and answer session with the Ministers of the Departments so if a group wants any issues raised on budget lines, targeting committee members before this date is vital.
- Finally, regular contact with TDs and Senators on the committees should be maintained. This contact is really important if a group needs to bring its issues of concern beyond the local to the national level.

Who to target

Find out who holds a seat on the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Social and Family Affairs. This information is available through the website (details below) or through contacting the clerk of the committee.





Make contact with the Chairperson of the Committee to let him or her know about the work of your group and how it links in with the work of the committee. This contact is important if you are seeking an invitation to address the committee in the future. Groups will find, over time, that there are particular committee members who have an interest in their work and a relationship will be established which is mutually beneficial.

There are a number of other committees who deal with social inclusion issues in their brief:

- Committee on Environment and Local Government
- Committee on Justice, Equality and Law Reform
- Committee on Arts, Sports, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
- Committee on Health and Children
- Committee on Education and Science

In general, a group should always keep in contact with local TDs to ensure that they are kept informed about issues in relation to anti-poverty work. Again, this building of knowledge and relationships is always important around budget time as TDs can have a role in influencing the process.

Finally, keep in touch with opposition spokespersons with responsibility for the social and family affairs brief. This means that if you want information on a particular issue, a parliamentary question can be posed by the spokespersons which the Minister is required to answer either in the Dáil or by written response. This can happen at any time of the year when the Dáil is sitting.



Main targets

- Chairperson of the Joint Committee
- Members of the Joint Committee
- Clerk of the Joint Committee
- Opposition Spokespersons
- Your local TD

Helpful hints

Contact the Chair of the Committee relevant to your area of interest to establish contact with him/her. Find out some information on the Committee and how you can link in with its work in practice.

Further information

The Oireachtas Website is a great source of information on Government Committees: www.oireachtas.ie Select committees on the left-hand side of the page. Members of Joint Committees are listed on the website.

Dáilbrief is an information service provided by Combat Poverty for the community and voluntary sector, and is available free of charge. To subscribe, email brharvey@iol.ie





Section 8: National Organisations

Combat Poverty Agency

What is it?

Combat Poverty is a state advisory agency developing and promoting evidence-based proposals and measures to combat poverty in Ireland. Its general functions cover policy advice, project support and innovation, research and public education. These functions are outlined in the Combat Poverty Agency Act, 1986.

Why is it important?

The role of Combat Poverty as the state advisory body to the government is important but so too is its role as researcher and educator on poverty issues. The information it disseminates, the research it conducts, the conferences it runs, the programmes it initiates – all of these impact on the work of anti-poverty groups, from both a capacity building and policy formation perspective.

How does it operate?

Combat Poverty prepares a strategic plan every three years, setting out its priorities, objectives and tasks to be undertaken. This translates into annual work programmes for the staff, broken down across projects, policy and research and information. It also believes in a partnership approach to working and creates policy spaces where both the community/voluntary sector and the state sector can develop a better understanding of each other.





While Combat Poverty has its own work programme, it also works closely with the Office for Social Inclusion in developing and driving the NAPinclusion process.

Points of influence

There are no specific times to link in with the work of Combat Poverty. The work of anti-poverty groups informs the work of Combat Poverty on an ongoing basis. Opportunities include pre-budget submissions and a range of programmes. These programmes are usually nationwide and have the dual objective of (a) educating and building the capacity of anti-poverty groups and (b) informing Combat Poverty about the real issues on the ground that need to be addressed through policy interventions.

These action-research type projects are central to informing the work of Combat Poverty and the policy advice it offers to government.

Who to target

Different staff members within Combat Poverty Agency are responsible for particular policy areas, e.g. local government or health policy. Contact the office and you will be directed to the person most relevant to your issue of concern.

Further information

Further information is available at www.combatpoverty.ie or telephone 01-6706746.





Family Support Agency

What is it?

The Family Support Agency is responsible for the provision of a number of family supports.

Why is it important?

It is important because it provides financial support to a number of organisations working with families during difficult times in their lives and with organisations helping families to combat disadvantage. The agency undertakes research and provides information about parenting and family issues. It also acts in an advisory capacity to the Minister on family matters.

How does it operate?

The Family Support Agency is funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and is under the remit of the Department. The agency has its main office at St Stephen's Green House, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2.





It runs a number of programmes:

Family Mediation: The agency directly provides mediation through its 16 centres around the country and offers this service free to couples who have decided to separate or divorce and who together want to negotiate the terms of their separation or divorce. It also provides mediation to non-married couples whose relationships are ending.

Counselling and Bereavement Grants: The agency provides grant-aid to voluntary groups providing marriage, child and bereavement counselling in local communities. In 2006 the agency grant-aided approximately 540 groups.

Families Research Programme: The agency carries out research on families in response to issues identified in its strategic plan but also in response to requests by the Minister.

The Family and Community Services Resource Centres Programme (FRCs): At the end of 2006 the agency funded 100 Family Resource Centres around the country. FRCs are designed to meet the needs of the local community and include the provision of information, education courses and childcare facilities.

The Family Resource Centres around the country have set up a national forum called the Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF), which is a support network working with Family Resource Centres throughout Ireland. The forum is made up of representatives from different FRCs operating around the country. It provides practical support to its members and helps resolve local issues. It also is proactive in influencing family policy at a national level (see also below).





Points of influence

There are no policy-specific times during which groups should be linking in with the Family Support Agency. It essentially runs programmes, offers information and carries out research on an ongoing basis. The Minister or the Oireachtas seek the views or request submissions on policy issues from the agency on a regular basis.

Who to target

If a group working in the area of family support has a policy issue it wants addressed, it is recommended that it links in with its local Family Resource Centre. Through their links with the Family Support Agency and national forum representatives, it may be possible to address the group's concerns.

Main target

- Your local Family Resource Centre

Further information

Further information on the Family Support Agency is available at www.fsa.ie For information on the Family Resource Centres National Programme, go to www.frcnf.com

Helpful hints

Find out from the FSA what kind of research on families it is undertaking and see if there is any way you can link in with its activities.



Family Resource Centre National Forum

The Family Resource Centre National Forum (FRCNF) is a support network working with Family Resource Centres throughout Ireland. The aim of the forum is to represent the views of all Family Resource Centres nationally and provide practical support to Family Resource Centres involved in family support and social inclusion initiatives. For further information contact: www.frcnf.com or telephone 01-7071929.

Comhairle

Comhairle is the national agency responsible for the provision of information, advice and advocacy to the public on the broad range of social and civil services. Comhairle provides the www.citizensinformation.ie website and is the support agency for the network of Citizens Information Centres and the Citizens Information Phone Service. The agency also supports the development of advocacy services for individuals, particularly those with a disability.

Comhairle promotes access to information in the voluntary and statutory sectors and contributes to the development of social policy through providing feedback from the users of social services to the relevant government departments and agencies. Further information is available at www.comhairle.ie Under new legislation, Comhairle is to be re-named the Citizens Information Board.






Community and Voluntary Pillar

The Community and Voluntary Pillar is the term used to describe the network of groups who have come together to participate in the social partnership process. Further information on its membership and activities is available from Age Action Ireland, e-mail cvpillar@ageaction.ie or contact The Wheel, www.thewheel.ie, telephone 01-4548727.

National Anti-Poverty Networks

A number of national organisations around the country are funded by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs through the Anti-Poverty Network Programme. They are quite issue-specific but are a useful source of information and are linked into the Community and Voluntary Pillar of social partnership:

- Irish Traveller Movement: www.itmtrav.com
or telephone 01-6796577
- OPEN (One-Parent Exchange and Network): www.oneparent.ie
or telephone 01-8148860
- Irish Refugee Council: www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie
or telephone 01-8730042
- European Anti-Poverty Network, Ireland: www.eapn.ie
or telephone 01-8745737
- Older Women's Network: www.olderinireland.ie/own
or telephone 01-8057709

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- Irish Rural Link: www.irishrurallink.ie or telephone 090-6482744
 - Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed: www.inou.ie or telephone 01-8560088
 - Children's Rights Alliance: www.childrensrights.ie or telephone 01-6629400.

Children's Rights Alliance

The Children's Rights Alliance is a network of non-governmental organisations, set up in 1995 to promote and protect the rights of children as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Specifically, it monitors the implementation of the National Children's Strategy, promotes the ending of child poverty and works for legislative, policy and service delivery changes.

The Alliance works with all Government departments in carrying out this role, given the cross-cutting nature of children's issues². Its engagement with the Department of Social and Family Affairs centres primarily around the rates of child welfare payments such as Child Benefit and Child Dependant Allowance and also the NAPinclusion process.

² The Office of the Minister for Children was established in December 2005 to ensure greater coherence across government in policy-making for children.



Appendix

Case Study: Influencing Children's Policy

Building relationships, being very clear about what needs to happen and thinking medium to long term, are key factors in influencing the policy process, according to Jillian van Turnhout, Chief Executive of the Children's Rights Alliance.

The Children's Rights Alliance is a network of eighty non-governmental organisations, set up in 1995 to promote and protect the rights of children as articulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Specifically, it monitors the implementation of the National Children's Strategy, promotes the ending of child poverty and works for legislative, policy and service delivery changes.

The Alliance works with all Government departments in carrying out this role given the cross-cutting nature of children's issues .

Its engagement with the Department of Social and Family Affairs centres primarily around the rates of child welfare payments such as Child Benefit and Child Dependant Allowance and also the NAP Inclusion process.

"Every year we look to influence social welfare payments through the budgetary process and this is an ongoing event", Jillian says. "We talk with our members throughout the year but come September we sit down to work out the nitty gritty, identifying how much the welfare payments need to go up by and why".



This information is communicated to the Minister at the pre-budget forum for community and voluntary groups held in October every year and a submission is also sent into the relevant Government Departments.

Recognising the issue of child poverty and children's rights is also central to their engagement with the NAP Inclusion process as well as other policy making fora such as the National Children's Advisory Council and to their work as a Social Partner.

The Alliance usually makes a submission to the NAP Inclusion process when it is prepared every two-three years as well as attending consultation sessions held.


"The Government policy making fora are intrinsically linked – the Social Partnership Agreements, linked with the NAP Inclusion, the National Development Plan and the National Children's Strategy . So the commitments made in one should be reflected in other policy documents and we need to work to ensure that this happens", said Jillian.

To this end, the Alliance works closely with other member organisations in the Community and Voluntary sector. But it also makes sure that the message of child poverty and children's rights is communicated to other social partners in the policymaking process and government departments".

Much of the work of the Alliance goes into trying to get the Government to do what they have already committed to, be it in previous anti-poverty strategies or social partnership commitments.

"Things can slide off the radar if effort is not put into keeping it on the agenda, re-confirming existing commitments and monitoring the





implementation of existing commitments”, said Jillian. “Even though this might seem inconsequential, it is a major victory if previous child poverty and children’s rights commitments are continuously re-affirmed in Government policy. It means it is still on the policy agenda and there is still a possibility that commitments made will be implemented and the problem tackled”.

The Alliance works in a proactive manner to achieve certain defined goals while retaining the flexibility to respond, within available resources, to relevant events as they occur. One of the distinctive contributions made by the Alliance is that it provides the opportunity for agencies nationwide which are concerned about children’s rights and welfare from a variety of perspectives to combine forces to lobby for improvements. Such joint action makes possible a level of impact that would be difficult for a single agency to achieve. This opportunity is most evident in relation to the process for monitoring the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Alliance is committed to working for the implementation of Government commitments regarding child poverty and carries out this work through its designation as a National Anti-Poverty Network, as a member of the End Child Poverty Coalition and as a Social Partner.







The Finding Your Way is a series of four guides which are being published as part of the *Having your Say* Programme.

A central tenet of the Programme is the view that policies intended to tackle poverty are more likely to be successful if the people and communities they are designed for are involved in their planning and implementation.

The guides are designed as practical tools to support the community and voluntary sector to understand, analyse and influence the policy environment in a number of key areas.

These include: Local Government, the Budget process in Ireland (North and South), Social Welfare and Family Policy and Health.

These guides are being published in partnership with Comhairle, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and the Building Healthy Communities Programme in Combat Poverty.

€10



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20th Anniversary
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