



Report on Consultation for National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion **2003-2005**



Ireland



Foreword



Those experiencing poverty and social exclusion and those working with them have a key role in developing the policies and programmes designed to meet their needs. They can tell us first hand from the realities of their daily

lives how effective our policies are, what can be done to make them more effective, what further provision is necessary and what the priorities should be.

We obtained much of this feedback from the social partners and the community and voluntary sector through their involvement in the consultations and negotiations on the revision of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, *Building an Inclusive Society* and on the social partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*. At the first Social Inclusion Forum in January 2003, the proceedings of which have been published, there were also wide ranging exchanges on these issues.

A wider consultation process took place in April and May (2003) involving a series of national and regional seminars, and an invitation in the National newspapers for submissions. There was a wideranging response across the board to the process.

I am pleased to introduce this volume, which contains excellent summaries of both the submissions and the seminar proceedings prepared by independent consultants.

I am heartened that the broad approach being taken in the plan is in line with that sought by the participants in the process. There are also new challenges identified, many suggestions and proposals for further development of policy and priorities for action. I am pleased that these are all now on record.

I would like to sincerely thank all those who gave of their time, experience and expertise to contribute to the process and to those throughout the country who contributed so much so willingly to administering the events.

I wish to thank the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) who worked closely together in organising the seminars, and to the OSI who organised the submissions. I wish to pay tribute to Mel Cousins and Maria Hegarty who have done a superb job in summarising the voluminous, varied and rich material that emerged from the process.

I know that the work and commitment by so many, which this publication represents, will make a major contribution to our common goal of building a fair and inclusive society for all.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Coughlan".

Mary Coughlan T.D.
Minister for Social and Family Affairs

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**Submissions on
on NAPs/incl 2003-2005**

**Review by
Mel Cousins**

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Executive Summary

As part of the consultation process for the development of the Irish National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005 (NAPs/incl), organisations and individuals were invited to make submissions on the contents of the plan. In total 65 submissions were received and this report summarises the key issues raised in those submissions.

Submissions put forward a range of suggestions to strengthen chapter 1 of the NAPs/incl (trends and challenges) including reference to additional data on disability, housing access, and homelessness.

Submissions also provided an additional perspective on the level of progress made in recent years (chapter 2) although there was, with some exceptions, little structured analysis in this area.

Submissions broadly accepted the existing strategic approach to the NAPs/incl although a number of new or revised objectives and targets were proposed (chapter 3). In terms of new targets, the main issue raised was in relation to a 'risk of poverty' (or relative income poverty) target. A number of suggestions were also put forward for the revision of existing key NAPS targets in relation to income adequacy, education, literacy, etc., and for new targets and indicators, e.g. e-inclusion. A number of submissions also made proposals in relation to the outstanding housing access target.

The submissions provided a wealth of examples of new or revised policy measures (chapter 4). One of the main points made in a significant number of submissions was the need for a more rights based approach to the delivery of public services.

Submissions set out a range of constructive proposals for strengthening the institutional mechanisms (chapter 5). In particular, the importance of linking the NAPs/NAPs/incl to overall government policy and budgetary policy was emphasised (including strengthening poverty proofing). Other key issues included the development of a data strategy, co-ordination at national and local level, participation of disadvantaged people, resourcing the NAPs/incl, supporting the community and voluntary sector, and ongoing consultation on and evaluation of the NAPs/incl.

In general few submissions referred to examples of best practice (chapter 6) and those that did largely referred to individual or pilot projects rather than key policy measures as sought by the EU.

A final point is that the NAPs/incl objectives as currently worded (at EU level) may not facilitate the consultation process at national level. More clearly structured and better-phrased objectives might assist any future consultation process by making it easier for groups (and indeed Member States) to identify the EU's intentions.

1 Introduction

As part of the consultation process for the development of the Irish National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005 (NAPs/incl), organisations and individuals were invited to make submissions on the contents of the plan. Draft material on some aspects of the plan was made available to groups participating in the consultation process.

In total 65 submissions were received and this report summarises the key issues raised in those submissions. It is obviously only possible to summarise here the main points made in submissions which ran to over 500 pages.¹

It was suggested to those making submissions that they might follow the structure of the NAPs/incl report in making their submissions. Some did, some did not. The submissions ranged from brief one or two page submissions to comprehensive 15-40 page submissions from some voluntary and statutory bodies. A number of organisations submitted reports or submissions which had been made in relation to separate processes which they felt were of relevance to the NAPs/incl.

¹ Not including one 160-page report submitted by one body.

2 Who made Submissions?

Submissions were received from a wide range of organisations and from a small number of individuals. Submissions were broken down by the type of organisation making the submission and by the organisation's main policy interest. In the case of individual submissions, most dealt with one specific aspect of policy and these were categorised accordingly.

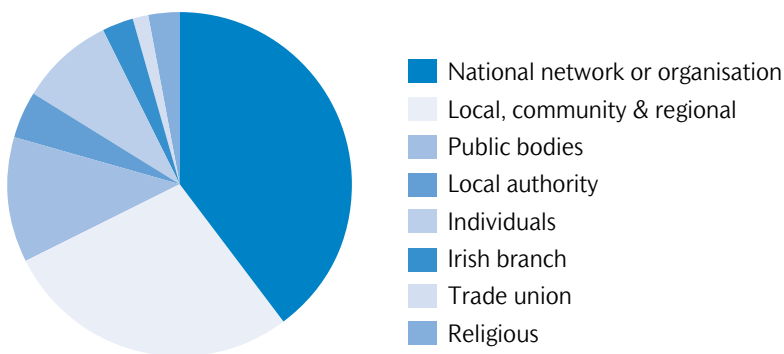
In terms of the type of organisations making submissions,² submissions were made mainly by national networks or national voluntary groups (27) and local, community or regional groups (19). Two submissions came from Irish branches of international voluntary organisations. The second largest area of submission came from public bodies (8) and local authorities (3). Six submissions were from individuals, two from religious bodies and one from a trade union organisation. Thus the submissions came overwhelmingly from the community and voluntary sector and the public sector with other social partners being very underrepresented.

In terms of the policy areas represented, the largest was, unsurprisingly, those involved in anti-poverty/social inclusion work (10). This was followed by organisations involved in community development/local partnership (8) and organisations and individuals in the area of

immigration and racism (7). The next largest areas were gender (4), disability (4), housing/homelessness (4), education (3), children/childcare (3) and Travellers (3). One or two submissions each were received from groups or individuals involved in (or concerned with) the areas of older people, carers, lone parents, debt and money management, health, drugs, prostitution, families, gay people, e-inclusion, unemployment, and young people.³

The comparatively high level of submissions on immigration, ethnic minorities and racism is noteworthy. It is also of interest that, despite the reference in the NAPS, under the heading 'mobilising all the actors,' to the importance of volunteering, corporate social responsibility and family policy, there were very few submissions from organisations working in these areas.

Reflecting the fact that the main source of submissions was national organisations, over two-thirds of submissions came from Dublin-based organisations although in the case of national organisations many would have membership or offices in other parts of the country. A significant number of submissions were received from Leinster (outside Dublin) and Munster but only three from groups based in Connacht/Ulster. No submissions were received from outside the Republic of Ireland.



² A small number of submissions were made jointly by groups so the numbers of groups do not tally exactly with the numbers of submissions.
³ The trade union and religious bodies' submissions are not categorised here and there was one general individual submission.

3 General Comments

Overall, while a range of critical comments was made about particular aspects of policy, the tone of the submissions was constructive and supportive of the NAPs/incl process. A significant number of submissions specifically agreed with the core elements of the proposed Strategy. A small number of submissions argued that the plan as currently drafted did not add substantially to the existing NAPS and to *Sustaining Progress*.

Most submissions raised specific policy agendas which were felt to require further attention or a more specific focus in the NAPs/incl. The specific issues raised will be addressed in more detail in subsequent sections.

Perhaps the main critical point raised was the need to link the NAPS and NAPs/incl more fully into the overall government policy process and, in particular, to the budgetary process.

In general submissions, insofar as they commented on it, welcomed the consultation process. However, a small number of submissions were critical of the scope of the consultation (e.g. local projects should have been more actively involved) or the extent to which issues raised at the consultation meetings had been taken on board (although it was acknowledged that this might be due to the early stage of the process). A number of submissions expressed a hope that the draft NAPs/incl would be circulated for further comments before being finalised.

A small number of submissions called for a greater emphasis on the European dimension in developing the NAPs/incl, e.g. in setting targets based on the experience of other countries or in drawing on good practices. One submission suggested that in addition to the immediate focus on the period 2003-2005, the plan should adopt a long-term vision for the period up to 2010.

One submission argued that the plan should acknowledge the role and value of social partnership. Others, however, questioned what was perceived to be an attempt to re-define partnership by excluding groups which did not sign *Sustaining Progress* while one submission suggested that the NAPs/incl was overly reliant on social partnership given the perceived limitations on progressing a social agenda in that forum.

4 Trends and Challenges

This section corresponds to the draft chapter 1 of the NAPs/incl which deals with trends and challenges. A number of submissions specifically referred to the draft chapter which had been circulated and comments on this area were implicit in other submissions.

Trends

One key point made in a substantial number of submissions was the perceived gap between rapid economic progress in recent years and the level of social progress. An important point which it was felt did not receive sufficient focus was the rise in numbers at 'risk of poverty' (i.e. in relative income poverty), in particular older people, children and women. A small number of submissions also referred to trends towards a widening in income distribution.

A number of submissions made the point that national survey data do not capture particular disadvantaged groups such as homeless people or provide a breakdown on the basis of ethnicity. A number of submissions highlighted the need to present data on specific groups in situations of vulnerability.⁴ Areas where additional data were suggested included

- People with disabilities⁵
- Low income workers
- Travellers
- Lone parents⁶
- Employment data on older people (55+)
- A spatial/geographical breakdown of data

- Racism and ethnic diversity
- The outcome of the housing needs assessment⁷
- Homelessness data

In some cases it was acknowledged that macro-level data did not exist and it was suggested that relevant material needed to be explored to complete the picture set out in chapter 3.

Challenges

Amongst the challenges which were identified were the economic slowdown and restrictions on public finances. However, the point was made that Ireland's economic outlook is still quite positive and that restricting public spending should not be seen as the only response to tighter public finances. The importance of social investment was stressed in a number of submissions.

One submission argued that the main policy challenge for Ireland was to use the wealth generated by economic development to create the services and infrastructure needed to eliminate poverty and social exclusion and to create a more equal society. Broadly similar points were made in a number of submissions.

Probably the largest emerging challenges in relation to groups in situations of vulnerability were seen to relate to groups such as migrants and ethnic minorities (including asylum seekers and refugees). Other emerging issues raised in submissions included a perceived increase in debt (including middle class debt).

4 Two submissions proposed that the title 'vulnerable groups' should be changed to 'groups vulnerable to poverty' or 'people/groups in situations of vulnerability' to shift the focus to the situations which undermine a person's capacity to function within society rather than locating the problem within the individual – a suggestion which is followed here. [NDA and Refugees and Asylum Seekers Service]

5 For example, the recent QNHS survey on disability.

6 One submission requested that the term 'lone parent' rather than 'single parent' be used. [OPEN]

7 Reference was also made to Dublin City Council's report on the *Profile of Households Accommodated by Dublin City Council* (2002).

5 Progress

This section corresponds to chapter 2 of the proposed NAPs/incl which will deal with progress since the first NAPs/incl 2001-2003. No draft was circulated in relation to this material and relatively few submissions specifically commented on it. However, comments on progress in relation to social inclusion in recent years were implicit in a larger number of submissions.

Looking first at submissions which specifically addressed this issue, one submission set out a tabular analysis of progress towards implementation of the (revised) NAPS commitments. In fact, however, because the NAPS itself is only one year old little new data is available which made it difficult to make any formal assessment of progress.

Two submissions did, however, provide a detailed assessment of progress in the housing and homelessness area which highlighted both the positive (e.g. the Homelessness Strategy, increased funding) and negative (e.g. failure to provide three year funding, lack of statutory basis for and data deficits in homeless actions plans, potential shortfall in social housing activity) [Threshold etc/Irish Council for Social Housing]. Submissions also provided an assessment of progress in relation to Traveller's issues. [Pavee Point]

A number of submissions argued that little progress had been made in certain areas (e.g. income adequacy, child income support, educational disadvantage, Travellers). 'Progress' in these submissions sometimes referred to progress towards specific NAPS targets and sometimes towards what the groups identified as their objectives (although not identified as an objective in the NAPS).

One submission pointed out that even if targets were being met at a national level, there was a significant variation in performance spatially so that particular local areas were still highly disadvantaged.

In addition, a considerable number of submissions, while not specifically linking the point to the material for chapter 2, argued that the reduction in the rate of increase in government spending and reductions in specific services had impacted on the possibility of making progress towards specific targets (e.g. in relation to income adequacy) or objectives or represented a negative development. Amongst the areas highlighted was the reduction in the number of CE places.

A point made in a number of submissions was that there has been little if any progress in relation to the development of a rights based approach.

6 Strategic Approach, Objectives and Targets

This section corresponds to chapter 3 of the NAPs/incl which will deal with the strategic approach of the NAPs/incl, the objectives to be pursued and the specific targets set under those objectives. Chapter 4 (addressed in the next section of this report) will deal with policy measures to achieve the objectives. The material circulated in relation to the draft chapter 3 itself and submissions made in response to it, however, did not, in general identify clearly between objectives and targets, and policy measures to achieve those objectives and targets.⁸ This report attempts to maintain the distinction between objectives and targets (dealt with in this section) and policy measures (which are addressed in the following section).

The EU has set a range of specific objectives according to which the NAPs/incl is to be structured and, accordingly, this report follows that outline.

General comments

It is probably fair to say that most submissions broadly accepted the existing strategic approach set out in the NAPS of sustaining economic growth and employment, providing levels of income support sufficient to sustain dignity and avoid poverty while facilitating participation in employment, addressing the needs of groups at high risk of poverty, providing high quality public services to all, tackling the causes of inter-generational poverty, and supporting disadvantaged communities.

Submissions emphasised that economic and social development should not be seen as in competition, but that there are significant complementarities between the two. For example,

it was argued that investment in housing can contribute to the development of human capital, in the form of a healthier and more productive workforce. It was also argued that more socially cohesive societies have lower crime rates and this offsets the necessity of other expenditure. While Ireland has converged on, or overtaken, many of the European Union states in terms of national income, submissions argued that substantial social deficits remain and these, if not addressed, would have substantial economic costs.

It is important to note that a number of submissions specifically agreed with the existing core objectives of the NAPs/incl. The bulk of submissions did not propose the setting of any new objectives or targets focussing instead on development of existing policy measures.

A number of submissions, explicitly or implicitly, did seek new objectives or a greater focus on existing objectives. One submission argued that the current income adequacy objective should be revised to incorporate the notion that income policies support the full participation of people in society. One submission set out a range of proposed new objectives in relation to income, work, public services, housing and accommodation, health care, education, migration and interculturalism, participation, taxation, rural development, and sustainability [CORI]. A further submission sought the inclusion of reference to a participative society in the objectives and to integrated quality public services.

A number of submissions also proposed additional targets. The most common additional target was that a 'risk of poverty' or relative income poverty target should be set to complement the existing

⁸ The draft chapter 3 material specifically states that some sections contain planned actions, which are proper to chapter 4 of NAPs/incl but were included here for ease of reference.

consistent poverty target.⁹ One submission proposed that relative income poverty be halved by 2007.¹⁰ [CPA] Another suggested that the target be to reduce the risk of poverty to the EU average or below. [EAPN] One submission proposed that Irish targets should be benchmarked against best European standards. A small number of submissions proposed a target for reducing income inequality. [CPA/CORI]

In addition, a number of specific proposals for objectives and targets were put forward which are discussed under the relevant NAPs/incl objectives. (Income adequacy targets which are policy measures are discussed in chapter 4). A number of submissions highlighted the need for better data in order to measure progress in relation to existing targets and to set new targets.

Objective 1 – to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services

1.1 Facilitating Participation in Employment

A number of submissions proposed that more emphasis should be placed on the objective of ensuring that employment is 'stable and quality employment' and sought a greater emphasis on the needs of low paid employees. One submission argued that low-income workers should be included as a specific risk group [ICTU].

1.2 Facilitating Access to Resources, Rights, Goods and Services for All

Education

It was suggested that there was a need for a greater focus on early intervention and on adult

education. A number of groups suggested new or revised targets in this area including

- Reducing early school leaving
- Improving adult literacy

One submission argued that the existing education targets were too ambitious.

Housing & Accommodation

In relation to housing, the NAPS provides that targets for access to housing would be set when the 2002 assessment of housing needs had been analysed. A number of submissions proposed that this target should be that originally proposed by the NESF and published in the NAPS Framework document, i.e. that (initially) 70% of people on the local authority housing list should be provided with suitable and adequate accommodation within 2 years. An alternative submission was that government should engage with relevant groups to establish an appropriate target. Submissions suggested that the homelessness target should be better defined or that a target be set to halve the number of homeless people over the next two years and eliminate homelessness by 2007. It was also proposed that a range of housing adequacy indicators be developed.

Health

There was criticism of the existing health care system in a number of submissions including the two-tier system of health care [IPH]. One submission proposed a new target for increased life expectancy [CPA]. One submission proposed specific health targets for women in relation to circulatory diseases and cancer [NWC].

⁹ One submission proposed that **only** the 'risk of poverty' data be used.

¹⁰ This would imply a fall of 11% in the numbers below 60% of median income (based on 2000 data) compared with an increase in the period 1994-2000 of 6.5%.

2. To Prevent the Risks of Social Exclusion

Objective 2 is a catch-all heading for a number of specific policy issues some of which might have been considered under objectives 1.2 or 3. The sub-objectives under this heading relate to (a) exploiting the potential of the knowledge based society and of key information and communication technology; (b) putting in place policies to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of exclusion such as indebtedness, exclusion from school and becoming homeless; and (c) implementing actions to preserve family solidarity in all its forms.

Issues in relation to education and homelessness have been dealt with under objective 1.2 and will not be duplicated here. Relatively few submissions addressed issues under this heading in relation to objectives and targets.

(a) exploiting the potential of the knowledge based society and of key information and communication technology

A small number of submissions argued that greater attention should be given to e-inclusion as part of the NAPs/incl objectives and that targets should be set for Internet usage and for training in schools. [CPA/eInclusion report] Indicators to measure the new risks of exclusion associated with the emergence of the knowledge society were also proposed for inclusion in the NAPs/incl.

(b) putting in place policies to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of exclusion such as indebtedness

One submission proposed that targets be set to reduce indebtedness amongst low-income families substantially by 2005 and to ensure universal

access to basic banking and credit facilities by 2005. [CPA]

(c) implementing actions to preserve family solidarity in all its forms.

Proposals in this area are generally addressed elsewhere, e.g. objective 1.1 (childcare) or 3 (groups in situations of vulnerability). One submission proposed the use of non-monetary indicators in relation to the well being of families. [Home Start]

3. To Help the Most Vulnerable/(Groups in Vulnerable Situations)

(a) to promote the social integration of women and men at risk of persistent poverty (referring as examples to people with disabilities and immigrants)

It was suggested in a small number of submissions that a greater focus on gender was required in the NAPs/incl. A number of submissions also highlighted the need for a greater focus on migration and related issues (such as racism and ethnic minorities). It was proposed that the NAPs/incl should refer to the National Action Plan on Racism as a guiding document.

A range of subsidiary targets for consistent poverty was proposed for groups in situations of vulnerability (such as people with disabilities, migrants and ethnic minority groups including Travellers) where data does not currently exist.¹¹ One submission argued that the underlying approach to disability issues in the NAPs/incl should be the social model rather than a medical model. It also proposed a very extensive range of indicators in relation to people with disabilities. [NDA]

¹¹ While data has been recorded in the ESRI Living in Ireland surveys on households headed by a person who is sick or disabled this data does not correspond with the total number of people with disabilities nor with households headed by a person with a disability.

Finally, a small number of submissions proposed additional groups be added to those already listed in the revised NAPS, in particular low income workers and gays, lesbians and bisexuals, while another submission recommended that the NAPS/incl make reference to the nine grounds of discrimination set out in the Equal Status Act, 2000.

(b) to move towards the elimination of social exclusion among children [and young people]¹²

One submission suggested a range of new objectives in relation to children including the provision of appropriate accommodation and health care and a minimum income [CRA]. It was also proposed that the NAPS/incl should include existing commitments and objectives in this area such as those set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(c) to develop comprehensive actions in favour of areas marked by exclusion

No specific new objectives or targets were proposed. Many submissions emphasised the importance of a community-based approach to tackling poverty at a local level.

¹² The EU NAPS/incl refers only to children but one submission argued that reference should also be made to young people [NYCI].

7 Policy Measures

The bulk of the submissions dealt with policy measures which are addressed in this section (which corresponds to chapter 4 of the NAPs/incl). Given the quantity of submissions in this area, it is only possible to highlight the main areas raised and examples of the policy measures proposed.

Submissions identified the need for clear links in the NAPs/incl between objectives and targets and the specific, costed and timetabled policy measures by which those objectives will be achieved. It was also suggested that there was a need to identify the implementing bodies and to establish monitoring mechanisms, progress indicators and enforcement mechanisms.

Objective 1 – to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services

1.1 Facilitating Participation in Employment

(a) promoting access to stable and quality employment for all persons capable of work

Policy measures included proposals to focus education and training on disadvantaged groups and encourage progression into better jobs; measures to support Community Employment, the Job Initiative and the social economy; and to ensure that the welfare system acted as a support to people seeking to enter employment. There were also a range of policy measures for specific groups including women, people with disabilities and migrants.

Amongst the policy measures proposed in this area were

- Target investment in education and training on people in low paid employment, people with low levels of educational qualifications and people who are unemployed, particularly families headed by an unemployed lone parent
- Remove barriers to education, employment and employment progression particularly the lack of affordable childcare provision, and financial disincentives to enter employment/education for those on benefits
- Develop “bridge-building” programmes to ensure that transitions from unemployment are into high-quality sustainable jobs.
- Ensure that options under the Employment Action Plan are appropriate to people’s needs
- Develop a ‘profiling system’ that would identify those most likely to experience difficulties in escaping unemployment and long-term unemployment
- A continued focus of Community Employment and the Job Initiative for particularly disadvantaged groups with CE training budget increased to 15%¹³
- Involvement of community groups in delivering measures to the long-term unemployed
- Develop the social economy
- Carry out a comprehensive welfare-to-work audit to eliminate employment and poverty traps

¹³ Some submissions argued that there should be no further reduction in CE numbers or that this should happen only where social economy numbers were increased.

- Develop a clear and comprehensive 'secondary benefits' policy/increase income thresholds for retention of secondary benefits
- Reverse changes in the Back-to-Work Allowance with a view to returning eligibility to one year, as after five years unemployment potential participants will be too distant from the labour market
- Review the eligibility guidelines for retention of the Medical Card for former Job Initiative and Back-to-Work Allowance participants and long-term unemployed people and their spouses
- Policies to support women returning to work, particularly older women
- Implement outstanding recommendations of P2000 working group on access for women returners/establish a national support programme for women returners
- Increase the One Parent Family Payment disregard
- Support measures to allow people with disabilities to participate in employment and training, such as personal assistants where necessary and an affordable, accessible transport system
- Provision of non-welfare supports for people with disabilities
- Expansion of programmes piloted by D/SFA to equip people with disabilities to take up employment
- Measures to reduce perceived exploitation of migrant workers such as allowing migrant workers to have control of the work permit (i.e. change jobs), improved implementation of minimum wage and employment protection

legislation, provision of information in appropriate languages, language classes, etc.

- Allow asylum seekers to work after, say, 6 months

Some submissions argued that reintegration measures should not be focussed solely on paid employment and should also cover voluntary work.

(b) preventing the exclusion of people from the world of work through human resource management, organisation of work and life-long learning.

This sub-objective appears to refer to people **at** work. Some of the policy measures, are also relevant to objective 1.1 (a) and have been dealt with above. Amongst the policies of specific relevance to people at work were

- Measures to provide better conditions of work and protection to migrant workers
- Flexible retirement to allow older people to go on working should they wish to do so
- Family friendly arrangements, childcare and eldercare policies to allow people to reconcile work and family life
- Extended maternity leave and benefit and paid paternity and parental leave
- Progression strategies for people in employment
- Increase minimum wage and remove from income tax net
- People in sheltered employment should receive at least the minimum wage
- Disability quotas in employment

1.2 Facilitating Access to Resources, Rights, Goods and Services for All

Rights

One of the main points made in a significant number of submissions was the need for a more rights based approach to the delivery of public services. It was generally felt that there had been little progress in the development of a rights based approach.

Income Adequacy

A considerable number of submissions referred to the income adequacy target. While there were frequent references to the existing NAPS target of 150 Euro for the lowest social welfare payments (in 2002 terms by 2007), some submissions sought implementation of the existing commitment, some interpreted it as meaning 30% of gross average industrial earnings (GAIE) and sought increases which would reach that target by 2007, and some sought attainment of the 150 Euro target (in current prices) at a date earlier than 2007. An additional submission was that the timetable for achieving the target should be clearly set out and the measures to be taken in each Budget clearly stated. Some submissions also referred to the target of 200 Euro for the lowest old age pensions to be reached by 2007.

There were also a series of proposals in relation to the precise level of child income support (e.g. to set the child income support package at €55 per week (approximately 35% of the average industrial wage)). Most submissions adopted the existing NAPS commitment that child income supports payments should be 33-35% of the minimum adult payment with submissions seeking a timetable for implementation of this commitment and/or

a future review of the appropriate level on the basis of new research. A number of submissions argued for the need for a 'second tier' of child income support on top of a universal child benefit while some argued for an increase in child dependant allowances.

Social Welfare

Amongst the policy issues in relation to social welfare were improvements in the system for women (including a greater degree of individualisation), improvements in carers and disability payments and a range of other measures.

- Individualisation of the social welfare system including abolition of the 'limitation' rule and in the long-term the concept of qualified adult allowance and reform of the credits system [NWCI]
- Increase pensions for older women (including increases in QAAs to 100% of the old age (non-contributory) pension) and backdate homemaker's disregards
- Increases in widow(er)'s (non-contributory) pension
- Reformed social insurance cover for atypical workers
- Improvements in carer's allowance including abolition or relaxation of the means test
- Introduce a cost of care allowance
- Payment of carer's allowance with another social welfare payment
- Increase domiciliary care allowance to realistic levels

- A “costs of disability” payment should be introduced to take account of the extra costs associated with disability
- People with disabilities in institutions should receive a personal allowance adequate to meet their needs
- Integrate family income supplement into the tax system
- Increase the back to school clothing and footwear allowance to reflect actual costs
- Part-time unemployment benefit for parents with children under 12
- Monitor implementation of the cohabitation rule
- Increased fuel allowance
- Provide special needs assistants in secondary schools
- Set service provision targets for educational psychology services
- Eliminate the costs of participating in education for disadvantaged families;
- Reduce the student/teacher ratio in disadvantaged schools
- Adequately resource projects such as the School Completion Project, School Substance Use Policy Development Groups, After Schools Projects, etc.
- Implement Education Welfare legislation
- Support parent-teacher-community groups
- Develop alternatives to suspension which maintain the link with the education system
- Expand supports such as homework clubs and book rental schemes
- Invest in a reformed school meals scheme
- Develop enhanced remedial services at all education levels
- Provide enhanced inspection of Young Persons (Employment) Act 1996
- Mainstream the development of local area based networks to tackle disadvantage
- Role for local authorities in adult literacy
- More flexibility in allowing people on social welfare benefits to engage in adult education
- Recognise and address the particular needs of disadvantaged women in adult education including women over 65

Education

A number of submissions set out a range of detailed analysis and proposals in relation to aspects of education policy including early childhood education, primary and second level, adult education and access to third level. Issues raised included

- Consider the needs of parents and children together when addressing educational disadvantage and adopt policies that address the needs of both
- Support community-based approaches to tackling educational disadvantage
- Develop a more flexible approach in schools which is culturally relevant to children from disadvantaged backgrounds
- Provision of hot meals for children in schools

- Childcare to be an integral part of adult education programmes
- Implement White Paper on Adult Education
- Funding for women's and community education organisations
- Reforms to Back to Education Initiative (BTEI), reinstatement of Back to Education Allowance (BTEA) and abolition of fees for part-time third level courses
- Provide for recognition of prior experience in accreditation
- Implement recommendations of Access Group on Access to Third Level Education and the Taskforce on Lifelong Education
- Double the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering third level education by 2005
- Lone parents to be assessed for third level grants in their own right
- Increase to 10,000 the number of pre-school places for disadvantaged children
- Expand Early Start programme
- Develop quality early childhood education in breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage
- Further research into early identification of and intervention with children in need
- Targeted pre-school interventions for children with special needs
- Increased representation for women on education bodies

- Introduce rights based legislation on education and children with a disability
- Provide special needs assistants in secondary schools
- Improve and support the participation of students with a disability at primary and secondary level education, as well as at third level
- Full integration of people with disabilities in the education system

Health

A range of policy measures were proposed both for general reform of aspects of the health service, in relation to medical cards, and in relation to specific services or groups. Actions included

- Shift the focus to public health, early intervention and health promotion
- Additional staffing for health promotion units in disadvantaged areas
- Greater priority to a preventative approach, e.g. support for locally based family support services rather than crisis intervention by social work services.
- Involve users in the planning, implementation and evaluation of health services and their own care plans
- Improved information and a National Health Information Strategy
- Increased resources and support mechanisms for integrated approaches to tackling health inequalities at national, county/city and local levels

- Investment and research into the development of a universal health system.
 - Address operational issues in acute services that create problems for those on low incomes and women in particular e.g. ‘user-friendly’ appointments, crèche facilities, and better co-ordination of services.
 - Need for community-based health services incorporating a community development approach
 - Establish and resource a community development health network
 - Set out entitlement to community care services in legislation
 - Health impact assessments should undergo health and equality proofing
 - Improve medical card eligibility by increasing the thresholds/extending to families/extending to all children under 18 on a phased basis
 - Medical cards for people with disabilities to be based on needs assessment rather than means-testing
 - Increase the medical card thresholds by 15% for adults and reform the scheme
 - Policies to improve oral health
 - Increased support for home help services
 - Increase nursing home subventions
 - Recognise the correlation between poverty and drug misuse with continued resourcing of the National Drugs Strategy and the ‘alcohol and drug use’ special initiative in *Sustaining Progress*.
 - Revise the National Drugs Strategy to include alcohol, emerging drug issues and to involve a partnership approach.
 - Recognition of particular health needs of homeless people
- Submissions raised a range of specific issues in relation to particular conditions, e.g. waiting list for cardiovascular surgery, screening for prostate cancer, etc.
- ### *Housing & Accommodation*
- Submissions raised a range of general housing policy measures and issues specific to social, local authority and rented housing and to specific groups. Issues raised included
- Establish a right to adequate housing/accommodation in the Constitution in line with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
 - Monitor the impact of Part V on the housing mix and make specific provision for people with disabilities
 - Increased or reaffirmed housing targets, e.g. a new goal to deliver 20,000 new local authority housing completions between 2003 and 2005 and set a specific target for social housing
 - Set a target of 20% of new housing for low-income and disadvantaged groups
 - Development of PPPs to encourage affordable housing should include accessibility targets
 - Increase the production of lifetime adaptable housing

- Carry out an investigation of the impact of policy on owner occupation, particularly tax treatment, and of the implementation of promised reforms in the private rented sector on the ability of people in poverty and on low incomes to access the housing market
- Strengthen tenant participation in estate management
- Establish a fully integrated housing support system for both public and private tenants administered by one authority
- Greater financial and human resources to ensure enforcement of legislation on tenancy agreements, rent books, minimum standards and landlord registration with each relevant authority to publish an annual report on the outcomes of enforcement by 2005.
- The removal of the cap on rent supplement payable under the SWA scheme
- Upgrading and repair of existing local authority housing stock
- Development of social, non-market alternatives to increase the supply of quality housing for people dependent on social welfare
- Increase use of derelict sites for social housing
- Build publicly funded social housing to meet lifetime homes standards
- Facilitate access to housing for people leaving care/mental hospitals
- Disabled person's housing grant to be applied consistently by local authorities
- Review of social and affordable housing should examine housing for people with disabilities
- Local authorities to draw up accommodation plans for people with disabilities
- Carry out a comprehensive housing needs assessment for people with disabilities
- Reform the disabled person's grant
- Sufficient resources must be made available to ensure delivery of the homelessness strategy and/or a revision of the strategy
- Local authorities to be resourced to carry out accurate homelessness assessments
- Increased detail and targets in homelessness strategies
- Homeless action plans to be put on a statutory basis
- The provision of more 'move-on' accommodation for homeless people
- Specific targets for emergency accommodation
- Implement Youth Homelessness Strategy
- Provide grant to replace unfit rural housing targeted at low-income families
- Extend essential repairs grant and establish a minor works assistance grant and group repair grant
- Develop of transient halting sites by all local authorities

Transport

A number of submissions argued that transport policy issues (relating both to urban and rural areas) should be included in the NAPs/incl as being able to move around is crucial both for access to work and for social inclusion. In particular access to public transport was identified as an issue. Issues raised included

- Allowing free travel passes to be used on all community and private transport
- Developing a comprehensive strategy for disability transport
- Accessible transport for people with disabilities/ensure public transport (including rural transport initiatives) are accessible for people with disabilities
- Development of an integrated transport plan for all urban areas similar to the Dublin Transportation Office plan

Care Infrastructure

A number of submissions raised issues in relation to caring both for children, people with disabilities and older people. Some of these proposals are outlined elsewhere (objectives 1.1, 3). Other issues raised included

- The need for a 10-year programme for childcare and eldercare with specific annual targets
- A care strategy to expand the supports for carers (e.g. respite care, therapy services, etc.)
- Support for childcare costs of low income parents

2. To Prevent the Risks of Social Exclusion

(a) exploiting the potential of the knowledge based society and of key information and communication technology

A small number of submissions raised the issue of e-inclusion. One public body submitted a very comprehensive report on e-inclusion which addresses the issue in some detail.¹⁴ This study developed a measure of 'digital equality' and found that groups with low Internet usage or access included some disadvantaged groups such as unemployed people. The report recommended the development of a National eInclusion Plan and integration of e-inclusion measures into the NAPs/incl (including e-inclusion indicators). The report sets out a comprehensive range of policy recommendations.

(c) putting in place policies to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of exclusion such as indebtedness

A small number of submissions raised issues in relation to indebtedness including a proposal for a special savings incentive scheme for low-income households

(c) implementing actions to preserve family solidarity in all its forms.

One submission urged the development of more innovative family support programmes while another outlined the benefits of early intervention programmes with young children. However, surprisingly few submissions raised issues specifically in relation to family policy. It may be that family policy issues have been picked up primarily in the family fora which have been run by the Department of Social and Family Affairs at roughly the same time as the NAPs/incl consultation process.

14 S. O'Donnell et al., *eInclusion: expanding the Information Society in Ireland*, forthcoming.

3. To Help the Most Vulnerable/(Groups in Vulnerable Situations)

It should be noted that many issues relating to specific groups have already been set out under earlier objectives (e.g. 1.1, 1.2 or 3).

(a) to promote the social integration of women and men at risk of persistent poverty (referring as examples to people with disabilities and immigrants)

Women

Submissions argued for the need to recognise the diversity of women experiencing poverty and to address multi-dimensional issues. Particular policy measures of relevance to women (not already mentioned under an earlier heading) included

- Parents should be paid for caring work in the home [NWCI, WITH]
- Additional funding for the civil legal aid scheme and reintroduction of private practitioners scheme to shorten the waiting lists
- Local authorities to make special provision for women made homeless through violence
- Develop policies to address the needs of migrant women
- National Women's Strategy to be poverty proofed and NAPs/incl gender proofed, with specific indicators on women and poverty identified and monitored
- Adequately resource the National Domestic Violence Intervention Project and other measures in relation to violence against women

- Improved accommodation for women with violent partners
- Develop targeted labour market measures for women who have experienced violence
- Ensure all services are culturally appropriate and accessible to women from ethnic minorities

Men

One submission also raised the issue of disadvantaged men and sought resourcing for men's networks and the establishment of a 'men's lobby/network' to support men's development work and related issues.

Older people

- Implement the Equality Authority report on equality for older people
- Extend the meals on wheels scheme
- Proof all policies in relation to the needs of older people

People with disabilities

A range of issues were identified in relation to people with disabilities including:

- Rights based disability legislation
- Improved respite services
- Local authorities to ringfence funding to meet commitments under the Barcelona Declaration
- Extend the personal assistants programme
- Ensure public transport, including rural transport initiatives are accessible;

- Better supports for people with mental health disabilities
- Disability quotas in public representation
- Disability proofing of existing public buildings/implementation of part M of the building regulations
- Access audits for towns of over 1,000 people and disability proof pedestrian routes
- Establish an independent living fund

Submissions also raised a range of issues relating to specific disabilities and/or services, e.g. psychological assessment.

Asylum Seekers & Refugees

- Abolish direct provision or alternatively avoid long-term residence in institutional settings, i.e. 6 months maximum
- Examine the needs of children in direct provision
- Increase allowance paid to people in direct provision to up to Euro 40 p.w.
- Allow asylum seekers to work after a certain period, e.g. 6 months
- Avoid dispersal of asylum seekers to locations distant from family and friends
- Improve services to meet specific needs of asylum seekers
- Establish the Refugee Advisory Board
- Review qualifying conditions for access to labour market programmes to take account of the special circumstances of this group

- Develop integration programmes for persons granted refugee status including improved recognition of overseas qualifications
- Improve access to English language training and interpretation services
- Address access to education (including third level education) issues for children of asylum seekers and refugees

Travellers

A number of submissions were highly critical of the recent legislation in relation to trespass which has particular implications for Travellers (Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2001, s. 24) and sought its repeal. Other issues raised included

- Establish an implementation plan for the Task Force on the Travelling Community
- Review of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 and full implementation of the National Traveller Accommodation Strategy, e.g. inadequacy of some Traveller Accommodation Plans and lack of sanctions against local authorities which do not implement them
- Basic services (water, electricity, sewerage) to be provided to all Traveller families
- Equality proof legislation affecting Travellers re access to self-employment, e.g. Casual Trading Act, 1995 and Control of Horses Act, 1996
- Moratorium placed on the use of s. 10 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 until appropriate accommodation is provided
- Ringfence places for Travellers in CE, Social Economy, JI, etc.

- Retention of medical cards by Travellers taking up employment
- Full implementation of National Traveller Health Strategy
- Development and implementation of a Traveller education strategy
- Specific actions to address early school leaving

*Migrants & Ethnic Minorities*¹⁵

Two submissions highlighted the practical impact on individual immigrants (in particular women and children) of racism, discrimination and inadequate resources. Other issues raised included

- Need for programmes and publicity to foster interculturalism and anti-racism
- Anti-racism and intercultural programmes to be developed at all levels of training and education
- Develop a coherent immigration policy (reference was made to the NESC policy framework)
- Measures to integrate migrants and their families into Irish society
- Training and education programmes for service providers
- Need for community development supports for minority ethnic groups
- Consideration of a statutory duty on public bodies to promote equality of opportunity, accommodation of diversity and tackling poverty based on similar UK legislation

- Implementation of recommendations of Task Force on Policy regarding Emigrants and cross-referencing in NAPs/incl

One individual submission took a contrary view to the general trend proposing that migrants should only be allowed to enter or remain in Ireland if they are able to support themselves.

Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals

- Implement recommendations of Equality Authority report
- Capacity building of gay, lesbian and bisexual groups to participate in anti poverty programmes and policy development
- Measures to provide appropriate and accessible services for gay, lesbian and bisexual people particularly in the areas of employment, education, housing, health and training.

Carers

It was suggested that a specific term for voluntary carers should be adopted such as 'full-time voluntary carers'. Other issues included

- Support for carers groups and development of drop-in/information centres
- Education, information and training support for carers
- Carer input into health services provided for the person needing care

Prisoners

- Establish a task force to make recommendations on prison standards and post release mechanisms

15 This section covers issues not already specifically addressed in the sections on asylum seekers and refugees and Travellers.

(b) to move towards the elimination of social exclusion among children [and young people]

Issues raised included

- Adopt a children's rights approach in addressing child poverty as set out by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- Appoint Ombudsman for Children
- Further develop initiatives like Springboard and Family Services Projects;
- Implement the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland.
- Greater provision of play facilities and the resourcing of the National Play Policy being developed by the National Children's Office
- End the practice of housing families with young children in B&Bs for extended periods
- Develop support measures for unaccompanied minors
- Put in place measures to ensure retention in school of young mothers
- Importance of teen counselling services
- Fund implementation of Children's Act, 2001 in particular provisions concerning family welfare conferences, special care provision and private foster care.
- Establish a child law unit in the Legal Aid Board

One submission argued that the family is the foundation on which efforts to end child poverty have to be based and called for a consultation process on the needs of families today and for their inclusion in the NAPs/incl. [ATD]

(c) to develop comprehensive actions in favour of areas marked by exclusion

It is assumed that this sub-objective is intended to deal with spatial disadvantage. Issues raised included

- Safety management and upkeep of public areas
- Continued funding for programmes such as drugs projects, family support services, etc.
- Need for early childhood education particularly in areas of urban and rural disadvantage
- Need to raise awareness amongst franchise staff of social inclusion issues where local authority services are contracted out
- Evaluate RAPID and CLÁR to address recognised problems.
- Establish a community investment programme specific to rural areas
- Evaluate the smallholder initiative run by ADM and Teagasc
- Establish community technology centres to prepare people for future employment/self-employment

A number of submissions were critical of ongoing changes in the community development support programme and of insecurity in relation to staffing and future directions.

8 Institutional Arrangements

This section corresponds with chapter 5 of the NAPs/incl which, in turn, relates to objective 4 of the EU objectives: 'mobilising all relevant bodies'. A significant number of submissions addressed issues under this heading. There was a general acceptance of the structures established under the revised NAPS and the main focus was on strengthening existing structures.

Data Strategy

A number of submissions focussed on the need for an improved data strategy. Amongst the key issues identified were

- A gender based approach to data collection
- The need for data to be available at a local spatial level
- The ongoing collection and analysis of data to enable up-to-date assessment of progress
- The need to put in place data collection systems for areas and groups where data is currently unavailable, e.g. for people with disabilities, Travellers, gay, lesbians and bisexuals, migrants and ethnic minorities
- The need to complement quantitative data with qualitative information and to take into account the views of people living in poverty

Participation of Disadvantaged People

A number of submissions also made the point that there is a need, as set out in objective 4(a) of the NAPs/incl, to involve people directly affected by social exclusion to a greater extent. Some argued for greater participatory democracy. It was clear that very few of the submissions were from people directly affected by poverty or spoke of people's personal reactions to poverty and exclusion (although it may be that people were more

directly involved in other aspects of the consultation process). Submissions called for greater participation for disadvantaged people and for specific measures to promote such participation.

Participation of Children and Young People

One submission proposed that structures should be put in place to allow children and young people to express their views on policies which affect them.

Co-ordination of NAPs/incl with Overall Government Policies

A number of submissions argued that there was a need for greater integration of the NAPS and NAPs/incl into the overall government policy process (such as the NDP) and, in particular, into the budgetary process. The basic point being made was that the implementation of many key commitments in the NAPS is dependent on budgetary decisions and that a commitment to a particular target needs to be matched by a commitment to provide the resources to achieve that commitment. It was also suggested that all public social expenditure should be explicitly linked to specific targets under the NAPS.

Poverty Proofing

A significant number of submissions raised the issue of poverty proofing. In particular it was suggested that the recommendations of the NESC in relation to strengthening the poverty proofing process should be fully implemented. Some suggestions argued that there was a need for additional proofing processes including age proofing, rural proofing, family proofing and equality proofing.

Equality

A number of submissions highlighted the need for continued support and increased funding for the existing equality and human rights institutions and for community and voluntary representation on these bodies.¹⁶

Co-ordination at National Level

It was suggested that there is a need for greater co-operation between government departments and agencies in relation to cross-cutting issues. For example, it was suggested that the Departments of Education and Science, Justice, Equality and Law Reform and Health and Children need to improve co-operation in relation to early childhood development and education with Sure Start in the UK being given as an example of a crosscutting approach. The importance of linkages between D/SFA and D/CRGA in relation to community development and anti-poverty work were also highlighted.

Submissions proposed a range of new bodies in relation to the housing and accommodation area including a central housing body, a national independent housing advice service, a national traveller accommodation agency and a national homelessness committee.

Co-ordination at Local Level

Submissions argued for the need to further develop and roll-out a focus on social inclusion at a local government level (i.e. local authorities and health boards/authorities). In particular, some submissions called for greater support (at both local authority and national level) to be given to the pilot social inclusion units established in a number of local authorities and a mainstreaming of social inclusion priorities at all levels of local authority policy making. It was also suggested that

a local social inclusion strategy be established in each city and county area. One submission highlighted the role of the City and County Development Boards in co-ordinating this approach. Submissions also argued for the involvement of local community organisations in such strategies. A small number of submissions set out a range of proposals to strengthen participative democracy at local authority level (e.g. establishment of consultation units, capacity building for local authority staff and communities, disability and literacy proofing of information).

Cross-border Co-operation

A small number of submissions also raised the need for greater cross-border linkages in border areas. One argued that there are particular issues of poverty and exclusion in the border region and that attention needs to be paid to addressing these issues, along with peace building and reconciliation measures.

Resources

A number of submissions argued that the NAPs/incl needed to include substantial new resources to fund policy measures and that the Plan should set out when the resources would be delivered. It was also suggested that consideration should be given to the idea of “top slicing” whereby a percentage of each Department’s budget is allocated specifically for poverty reduction/social inclusion measures. Other submissions argued that there is a need for additional revenue raising to fund increased social investment and a greater emphasis on value-for-money. It was accepted that higher social expenditure requires higher rates of taxation, broadening the tax base and/or the reduction of tax reliefs.

¹⁶ A number of submissions criticised the proposed removal of issues relating to licensed premises from the Equality Tribunal.

Support for Community and Voluntary Groups/Community Development

A wide range of submissions argued for increased or continued support for community and voluntary organisations involved in social inclusion work and called for the NAPs/incl to promote and support community work and community development as a key anti-poverty strategy. It was suggested that the Combat Poverty Agency and the National Anti-Poverty Networks should play a continued and enhanced role in this regard.

Communications Strategy

A number of submissions called for an expanded communications strategy in relation to the NAPs/NAPs/incl.

Corporate social Responsibility

One or two submission raised the issue of corporate social responsibility. In general, however, reference to CSR and the role of business and employers was striking by its absence.

Voter Participation

A small number of submissions referred to the recent survey by the CSO showing that the lowest levels of voter participation in elections tended to correspond with disadvantaged urban areas. It was proposed that the commitment in *Sustaining Progress* in this area needs to be progressed as quickly as possible and that measures be taken to increase the numbers of people with disabilities registered to vote.

Ongoing Consultation and Evaluation

Finally a number of submissions argued for ongoing consultation with the community and voluntary sector and disadvantaged people in relation to the implementation of the NAPs/incl

and for ongoing evaluation of the implementation of the plan. One example was the setting up of working groups or forums of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion with appropriate supports, training and resources to monitor and evaluate the plan.

9 Best Practice

This section corresponds to chapter 6 of the NAPs/incl. Member States were asked to give a detailed presentation of not more than four examples of good practice drawn from policy measures or institutional arrangements implemented as part of the first NAPs/incl. In selecting examples Member States were asked to select those for which monitoring or evaluation results are available. Examples selected were requested to be of key policies rather than of individual or pilot projects or should cover a key institutional arrangement.

Comparatively few submissions gave specific examples of best practice and a number which did (both public and voluntary) proposed their own organisation or a particular service provided by their organisation as an example of best practice. Of those few submissions which suggested examples of good practice unrelated to their own organisation, examples mentioned included

- a The recognition by the Cork City Development Board of the needs of the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities [Gay HIV]
- b The Cara Foyer (Dublin) – a project designed to assist marginalized young people with training and education as well as personal development in a secure accommodation setting [ICSH proposed this and the following 2]
- c Finisklin Housing Association (Sligo) – a housing project for homeless people with emergency accommodation provided in a central building and transitional apartments

- d Safe Home Programme – a programme to assist older Irish emigrants to return to their native country
- e Local homelessness fora established under the Homelessness Strategy including representatives of the local authority, regional health authority and voluntary service providers in each region [Threshold]
- f The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network which supports local authorities to address poverty and social exclusion as part of their work. The Network aims to promote and support the development of a strong anti-poverty focus within local government and to facilitate sharing of best practice. [CPA]

It should be noted that many of these examples relate to individual or pilot projects rather than key policies.

10 Summary and Conclusions

This section summarises a number of key points in relation to the submissions made to the NAPS/incl.

Submissions put forward a range of suggestions to strengthen chapter 1 (trends and challenges) including reference to additional research on disability, housing access, and homelessness.

Submissions also provided an additional perspective on the level of progress made in recent years (chapter 2) although there was, with some exceptions, little structured analysis in this area.

Submission broadly accepted the existing strategic approach although a number of new or revised objectives and targets were proposed (chapter 3). In terms of new targets, the main issue raised was probably in relation to a 'risk of poverty' (or relative income poverty) target. In general submissions did not put forward specific proposals in this area and in relation to the proposals which were advanced no attempt was made to show that the targets were attainable in the relevant timeframe.

A number of suggestions were put forward for the revision of existing key NAPS targets in relation to income adequacy, education, literacy, etc. but given the short period since targets were adopted and the lack of data on progress in most cases, no compelling rationale was advanced for revision at this stage. A number of other submissions advocated new targets or indicators some of which might warrant consideration, e.g. indicators on e-inclusion.

In relation to the outstanding housing access target, a number of submissions have suggested using the original NESF/NAPS working group access target.¹⁷ However, apart from the issue as

to whether or not this is an attainable target, it fails the general tests for acceptable targets (set out by Brian Nolan) on a number of grounds.¹⁸ It is not an 'outcome' target but rather reflects the level of provision of services. Being based on administrative data, it is also a somewhat ambiguous target which is subject to change simply because of changes in the manner in which data is recorded or updated. It would be analogous to setting a hospital waiting list target in the health care area rather than the outcome targets on health which were actually set in the NAPS.

Submissions provided a wealth of examples of new or revised policy measures (chapter 4). One of the main points made in a significant number of submissions was the need for a more rights based approach to the delivery of public services.

Submissions provided a range of constructive proposals for strengthening the institutional mechanisms (chapter 5). In particular, the importance of linking the NAPS/NAPS/incl to overall government policy and, in particular, budgetary policy was emphasised (including strengthening poverty proofing). Other key issues included the development of a data strategy, co-ordination at national and local level, participation of disadvantaged people, resourcing the NAPS/incl, supporting the community and voluntary sector, and ongoing consultation on and evaluation of the NAPS/incl.

In general few submissions referred to examples of best practice (chapter 6) and those that did largely referred to individual or pilot projects rather than key policy measures as sought by the EU.

17 i.e. that (initially) 70% of people on the local authority housing list should be provided with suitable and adequate accommodation within 2 years.

18 B. Nolan 'Targeting Poverty in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy', 2002.

A final point is that the NAPs/incl objectives as currently worded (at EU level) may not facilitate the consultation process at national level. The overall structure required for NAPs/incl reports is logical with the division into trends and challenges, progress, strategies and objectives, policy measures, institutional arrangements and examples of best practice.¹⁹ However, the rationale behind some of the objectives (and the sub-division of the objectives) is not always apparent. This is not assisted by the fact that the current text is written in English which is neither standard nor grammatical. For example the particular purpose of 'access to goods' in objective 1.1 is not immediately apparent. The added value of objective 2 'preventing the risks of exclusion' is also not obvious and few submissions specifically addressed this objective. To give a final example, the request for examples of 'best practice' immediately suggests, to an Irish audience, examples of individual or pilot projects whereas the EU in fact specifically does not want such examples under this heading.²⁰ More clearly structured and better-phrased objectives might assist any future consultation process by making it easier for groups (and indeed Member States) to identify the EU's intentions.

19 The fact that the vast bulk of submissions relate to policy measures is typical of this type of consultation process rather than being a feature of the EU plan.

20 There are a number of other examples where the meaning of the objectives is somewhat unclear such as Objective 3(c) which relates to developing 'comprehensive actions in favour of areas marked by exclusion'

Appendix: Submissions Received

Age Action Ireland
Aontas
ATD Fourth World
Ballybeg Community Development
Cáirde
Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
Centrecare
Cháirde ESAN
Children's Rights Alliance
Combat Poverty Agency
Community Connections
Community Platform
Community Workers Co-operative
CORI Justice Commission
Cork Centre for Independent Living
Cork City Council Social Inclusion Committee
Dental Health Foundation
Department of the Taoiseach
DergFinn Partnership
Donnelly, L.
Drogheda Immigrant Group
Drug Awareness Programme, Crosscare
Dublin City Development Board
Emigrant Advice
End Child Poverty Coalition
European Anti-Poverty Network
Fingal Co. Childcare Committee
Focus Ireland
Framework Regional Support Agency
Gay HIV Strategies
Home Start
Institute for Public Health in Ireland
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Irish Council for Social Housing
Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed
Irish Refugee Council
Irish Traveller Movement
Irish Wheelchair Association
Kerry Action for Development Education
Lennon, M.
MABS East Region
McArdle, A.
Men's Development Network
Migrant Rights Centre
National Consultative Committee on Racism and Multi-culturalism
National Disability Authority
National Women's Council of Ireland
National Youth Council of Ireland
Norman, P.
North Leitrim and West Cavan Carers Group
Older Women's Network
OPEN
O'Reilly T. J.
O'Shea, S.
Pavee Point
Physical and Sensory Disability Accommodation Project
Planet
Psychology Services, Refugees and Asylum Seekers Service
Rainbow Ireland
Ruhama
Simon Communities of Ireland
Social Inclusion Units
Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Tallaght Partnership
Teen Counselling (Mater Dei)
Threshold
Vincentian Partnership for Justice
Waterford Traveller Community Development Project
Women in the Home
Women's Aid

Consultation Seminars

on

NAPs/incl 2003-2005

Report by

Maria Hegarty

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Foreword

This report contains the views of people consulted in preparing the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005 (NAPs/incl).

The Consultation was undertaken by the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. This report summarises the key points made during the Consultation process. It is recognised that not all of the issues raised during the consultation process can be addressed in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005 (NAPs/incl), which was submitted to the European Commission. However, they have all been recorded and will inform the further development and implementation of social inclusion policy over the longer term.

The consultation process involved four regional seminars in Bundoran, Co. Donegal; Limerick, Co. Limerick; Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny; and Balbriggan, Co. Dublin. The regional seminars sought views on the local and regional implementation of social inclusion policy, regional and spatial issues and the urban and rural dimensions of poverty, as well as on the content of the Plan generally and on gender issues.

Three national seminars were held in Dublin on: Standards in Public Services; Migrants and Ethnic Minority Groups including Travellers; and Indicators of Social Inclusion including data issues. The seminars were held in late April, May and early June 2003. In total 660 people attended the seminars, including people experiencing poverty, anti-poverty non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local and community development representatives, local government officials and councillors, public and civil servants, representatives of the social partners and a small number of public representatives.

A wide range of views was sought, rather than consensus, and this report seeks to reflect the

diversity of views and comments made at the seminars, albeit in summary form, given the constraints of space. Participants at the seminars were invited to comment on draft chapters of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, either in round-table format or in structured workshops. At the national seminars participants responded to inputs on key issues which had been identified beforehand by the organising groups of Combat Poverty and the Office for Social Inclusion. The agendas for the seminars are contained in the Appendix to this Report. In total 70 discussions were recorded. The views have been reported according to the structure for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion set out by the European Commission, for ease of reference.

Combat Poverty records its thanks to all those who participated in the consultation seminars and gave freely of their time, knowledge and expertise. We also acknowledge the contribution of all those who made inputs, chaired, facilitated and recorded discussions. We are indebted to Maria Hegarty who put the material together into a coherent report and Eleanor Ashe for editorial work. We pay tribute to the Office for Social Inclusion for their support, openness and collaboration.

We hope that this is but the beginning of a process where we seek to 'mobilise all the actors' in the development, implementation and monitoring of social inclusion in Ireland. We can only bring about a society free from poverty and exclusion if we all work collaboratively towards identifying and implementing what works.

Helen Johnston, Director
Combat Poverty Agency

August 2003

Section One

Views on the Trends and Challenges for Implementing the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005

1.1 Introduction

This section sets out the views of the participants on the key trends and challenges in implementing the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion covering the two-year period 2003 to 2005. It pays particular attention to the economic and social context and the key challenges emanating from this. Issues were raised with regard to:

- (a) the economic context
- (b) the necessity for a rights-based approach
- (c) the need for dedicated resources
- (d) the regional context
- (e) gender mainstreaming
- (f) issues for lesbian, gay and bisexual people
- (g) Travellers, emigrants, returning emigrants, immigrants and ethnic minorities
- (h) public services
- (i) social indicators.

1.2 Economic Context

Participants expressed a view that there is a need for a stronger focus on social values in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion as to date there has been an over-emphasis on business and labour market values and on economic factors. The limitations of this approach were highlighted. For example, the fact

that we have just emerged from the celtic tiger era and that we still have 6 per cent of the population living in consistent poverty was raised. Further, the view that the approach to childcare provision is based on a labour market analysis as opposed to the needs of children, particularly children living in poverty, or at risk of poverty, was also raised.

Many participants were of the view that while an employment-based strategic approach has delivered a substantial reduction in consistent poverty, it cannot deliver social inclusion outcomes.

Participants commented that recent economic growth has led to a commonly held perception that poverty no longer exists and this contributes to reducing social solidarity in society in general. This in turn often results in the experience of a growing hostility to people living in poverty. These views need to be challenged as public support is critical to tackling poverty and achieving inclusion.

The view that incomes are not keeping pace with the cost of living was illustrated in a number of ways, and the erosion of social welfare gains by increases in charges for services arising from higher VAT rates was highlighted. Concerns regarding increasing indebtedness among greater numbers of people were also raised. In the current economic climate, with slower economic growth rates, job losses and rising unemployment, there is an increasing vulnerability and risk of poverty among people in insecure jobs and in low paid employment, particularly if they have high mortgages and other debts.

A key challenge that was posed was the need to take a life-course approach that embraces the needs of all people at all stages of their lives. A holistic approach was recommended that would

involve addressing people's needs all the way through from their childhood to their old age. This approach would view people as individuals with a contribution to make to society, and not merely as 'economic entities'. In adopting such an approach it was argued that structural change is required, underpinned by social, cultural, civil and economic rights.

1.3 Rights-Based Approach

There was a strongly held view that a rights-based approach is essential to bring about social inclusion. Participants argued that empowerment of people to make decisions and take control of their lives cannot be delivered in a vacuum. There is a need for a robust policy framework clearly underpinned by rights, from which resources will follow. A rights-based approach is viewed as key to removing many of the existing barriers that people living in poverty experience in accessing services. If individuals have rights, agencies delivering services should respond to those seeking their entitlements, without prejudice or discrimination.

1.4 Dedicated Resources

In the current economic context concern was expressed that there is a need for resources to underpin commitments to, and investments in, social inclusion. This may require the redistribution of resources to those most in need. The tax system may have an important role to play in this regard. Many participants were of the view that an over-reliance on the economic growth model has led to a widening of the gap between rich and poor. This was seen as evidence of the lack of priority attached to social inclusion. The point was raised that the budgets of recent years have been regressive from a social inclusion and redistribution point of view.

Thus, throughout the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion there needs to be a clear commitment to the explicit identification and ring-fencing of resources for social inclusion measures. A key challenge in this regard is to increase the proportion of GDP spent on social expenditure to bring it into line with European norms.

1.5 The Regional Context

The recently launched spatial strategy was seen to have a potential negative impact on poverty. For example, the development of larger scale 'satellite towns' without services or resource centres was viewed as contributing to future social exclusion in these communities. It was noted that the celtic tiger did not reach all areas and that there are still pockets of high unemployment with inadequate services throughout the country. A view is held that this newer urbanisation is reinforcing the poverty divide.

1.6 Gender Mainstreaming

A significant challenge highlighted was that of improving access to, and progression within, the labour market for women. This would require measures directed at closing the gender pay gap and addressing gender segregation in the labour market. In general the view is that equal consideration of both sexes is important and the following issues in particular were identified:

- (a) The need to set higher targets for female participation in local authority and state boards
- (b) The need to continue to improve the provision of accessible and affordable childcare to facilitate educational access for women

- (c) The need for social inclusion measures for women in the home who are experiencing poverty
- (d) The need for social inclusion measures for men, in particular to improve awareness of men's health issues, and to improve male take-up of second-chance and further education options
- (e) The need to identify and address the factors leading to higher rates of male suicide
- (f) The need to provide supports for women and their families who experience domestic violence
- (g) The need to improve data collection, disaggregation and analysis of gender and its effects on social inclusion.

A clear gender perspective within the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion will, in the view of the participants, lead to more strategic actions for gender mainstreaming.

1.7 Issues for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) People

A number of participants made reference to a recent report that highlights the invisibility of lesbian and gay people, particularly those experiencing cumulative disadvantage, in mechanisms established to address poverty and social exclusion. A series of recommendations were made in the report to the (then) Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, including that the Department should ensure that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005 should, at the consultation, address poverty and social exclusion amongst LGB people. This, it was stated, could be achieved through the targeting of resources, the explicit

inclusion of LGB people within mainstream initiatives to tackle disadvantage and exclusion, and the inclusion of representative groups of LGB people in decision-making. It was argued that the Plan needs to include awareness of the needs of the up to 10 per cent of those who experience poverty who are lesbian, gay or bisexual.

1.8 Travellers, Emigrants, Returning Emigrants and Ethnic Minorities

Issues for Travellers, emigrants, returning emigrants, immigrants and ethnic minorities were the subject of one specific consultation seminar. This section identifies the key challenges that emerged from this session. Issues were raised with regard to:

- (a) rights
- (b) direct provision
- (c) Travellers' issues
- (d) addressing racism.

1.8.1 Rights

The key challenge raised in the context of the growing diversity in Irish society was the need for a rights-based approach to underpin anti-poverty and social inclusion work in order to address the range of situations, experiences and identity issues among Travellers, ethnic minorities, refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers, emigrants and returning emigrants.

The point was made that many people are living in a state of uncertainty. For example, there are two-year waiting periods for decisions about people's legal status, some people face uncertainty about their legal status should they become

unemployed, there is uncertainty as to residential rights and access to welfare benefit without passport status, all with the potential to lead to poverty and social exclusion.

Participation in employment was viewed as absolutely key. Therefore, changes in the Back to Work scheme, i.e. where people now have to be unemployed for five years rather than one year, are viewed as creating a poverty trap, because asylum seekers have to wait at least two years to be processed by the system. Lack of access to benefits and welfare is seen as creating other poverty traps. With regard to unemployment payments, the view that the income is inadequate was aired. The view was also expressed that there is a need for regulation of the role of community welfare officers.

Many participants were of the opinion that denying people the right to work perpetuates poverty. In addition, the current work permit regime can cause social exclusion as work permits are held by the employer and employees have no rights should this relationship breakdown. The experience cited was that this system can lead to vulnerability, exploitation and discrimination by some employers towards migrants, as qualifications are ignored and people do not get interviews or jobs. Further, the attitudes of some employers and job agencies were also cited as negative, and examples were given of recent cases such as the Russian/Lithuanian workers who have been let go. The growing trend of some employers employing people without work permits and paying inadequate wages was also highlighted.

Exploitation, the denial of a living wage and of the opportunity to vindicate one's rights were seen to present significant challenges to the achievement of social inclusion.

1.8.2 Direct Provision

Addressing the poverty of those in direct provision was also raised as a key challenge to achieving social inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. The view is that the food provided directly to people in direct provision is often not suitable and is sometimes of poor quality, and that the weekly payments of €19.10 for adults and €9.20 for each child are not adequate.

Participants also highlighted the isolation experienced by people living in direct provision as a result of the location of the services and the splitting of communities to be accommodated around the country. A challenge in this regard is the need for multi-culturalism, anti-racism and equality training for staff within the direct provision centres, as well as the need for awareness-raising workshops focused on education about cultures and the nature of migration.

The difficulties in capturing the diversity of experiences, particularly the experiences of vulnerable groups were raised, e.g. immigrant women with children parenting alone, migrants in the informal economy and migrants on work permits being paid below the minimum wage. The recognition of different experiences that ethnic minority women, in particular, face was also highlighted.

1.8.3 Travellers' Issues

With regard to Travellers, the challenge remains one of implementing accommodation plans within certain local authorities, addressing health issues and establishing indicators for education outcomes for Travellers. The view was also held that while efforts appear to be underway to achieve social inclusion of the Traveller community, the inconsistencies across policies evidenced

through, for example, the recent changes in legislation regarding the Trespass Law and proposals relating to the Equal Status legislation present particular challenges.

1.8.4 Addressing Racism

The failure to tackle poverty in existing poor Irish communities is viewed as a significant contributing factor in promoting racism, as a 'them or us' mentality is built up. Questions as to the messages being generated about ethnic minorities, refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers were raised. The key role of the media in this regard was highlighted. Participants explained that they experienced racism everywhere, for example in the workplace and when socialising. This experience is then compounded by the fact that there is nowhere to complain about it when it happens and that the law is not enforced.

There is very little awareness of existing rights and supports for those experiencing racism and discrimination. A key challenge here is the training of staff and management in service delivery organisations to eliminate practices that perpetuate racism and discrimination. Addressing misconceptions held by the general public and inaccuracies and racism in the media were raised many times. In particular, the need to monitor the effect of the media on attitudes to ethnic minorities as a contributing factor to their social exclusion, was raised.

1.8.5 Summary of Key Issues

In summary, integration is viewed as a key objective that necessitates a dual approach with actions directed at all communities, those joining and those being joined. This requires action to establish rights, building an understanding and accommodation of diversity in all spheres of

economic and social life, challenging institutional and structural inequalities, discrimination and racism, and involving the diverse range of views in setting agendas for change. This, in turn, requires a change in the way in which language is framed, that is a move from describing people as vulnerable people to a language that places people in vulnerable situations and conditions that can be altered.

1.9 Public Services

Public services were the subject of another specific consultation seminar. This section identifies the key challenges that emerged from this seminar. Issues were raised with regard to:

- (a) quality
- (b) resources
- (c) access
- (d) customer services.

1.9.1 Quality

The key challenge posed was the necessity to build coherent and visible strategies to link quality service delivery with the achievement of social inclusion objectives, targets and outcomes.

There was a strong view that quality public services cannot be seen in isolation, but are a key mechanism to address poverty. The need for consistency with regard to standards, roles and accountability for tackling poverty was highlighted as a key issue that presents challenges to the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. Rolling out the national targets into local targets was also seen as a significant challenge, as was the role of the local offices in delivering on these targets. A view

was held that senior management in service delivery organisations need to put mechanisms in place to engage people experiencing poverty in setting and agreeing local and service specific targets, and in establishing monitoring mechanisms to measure progress and outcomes. This was viewed as critical to improving the quality of the experience for poor and socially excluded users of public services.

Participants also referred to the lack of explicit anti-poverty policies in service provider organisations, a lack of inclusive policies such as public/customer charters establishing rights and standards and a feeling that there is a resistance to changing long-practised procedures. The challenge is to facilitate movement and change that presents opportunities for improvements in quality, and to highlight the negative effects of bad practice such as institutional ageism and racism.

The key challenge with regard to the Quality Customer Service Initiative was identified as the need to poverty-proof it. Public service providers need to determine whether or not their service is being accessed and utilised equally by the most marginalised in society, i.e. the vulnerable and at risk groups targeted under the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. Poverty-proofing of this Initiative is viewed as one way of developing quality because providers will be addressing real need and barriers for service users. This would also be a cornerstone to the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. Linked to this is the view that the Quality Customer Service Initiative should be expanded, as many services of significance to socially excluded people are delivered by semi-state and other agencies currently not covered by this Initiative.

1.9.2 Resources

Resources, and the security of those resources, is in the view of participants a significant constraint for the implementation of the national Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. The identification of resources to be allocated to anti-poverty measures within services was raised, as was the enormity of the challenge in light of the historical lack of investment in services, for example in health services, transport facilities and childcare facilities.

1.9.3 Access

Access to information which is key to people's rights and entitlements was highlighted as a significant challenge, particularly the need to improve co-ordination of information on services through models such as one-stop-shops and customer feedback mechanisms. Participants highlighted that the language used about the services is often impenetrable. The issue of the diversity among customers was also raised in terms of information provided, e.g. in relation to literacy levels, first languages, different cultures and behaviours. The challenge is to train staff so as to understand these issues and build good practice. The internal customers and their training needs also emerged as an issue, as did the role of workplace ethics and equality policies in underpinning quality customer service.

With regard to service delivery, access to services and accountability to the customer presents significant problems for management and front-line delivery staff. Some participants reported being treated badly and felt that all too often the institutional view is that there is a problem to be solved, not that there is a person to be helped. Others identified bureaucracy and its layers as barriers to rights, as people find it very difficult

to know who is responsible for particular areas within complicated institutional structures, for example in health boards. A key challenge in this regard is to ensure that people who are good at frontline work are given incentives to remain in that role, i.e. that quality customer service is linked to promotion. A view was held that internal management are not always trained on good interpersonal behaviour and that good customer care requires high staffing levels. Access needs differ and these need to be taken into account, e.g. from an urban/rural perspective, from the perspective of people with disabilities, and from a gender perspective.

1.9.4 Customer Services

Quality customer feedback, taken on an on-going basis, was identified as an important element of evaluative processes that are necessary to improve customer service. As the feedback on outcomes for clients and effects of processes on clients is very valuable in this regard, appeals systems were highlighted, not only as being crucial mechanisms for underpinning people's rights, but as an essential element of any quality customer service system.

Integration of service delivery was raised on two levels: with regard to provision and with regard to individual access. The view was held that while integration of policies may exist at cabinet level, it is diluted at departmental level and further diluted at agency level (health boards, local authorities, FÁS etc). The concern is that there is no one person whose job it is to check across institutional boundaries that vulnerable people are getting the services that they need. This is a significant challenge for the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, i.e. bringing together the range of service deliverers at local, regional and national levels

to identify customers' needs in an integrated manner, in consultation with those whom they are trying to serve. The development of joined-up solutions requires a focus on inter-departmental collaboration on policy development and service delivery in order to achieve the targets in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Representation of socially excluded people is a fundamental challenge in this regard, particularly in the absence of a standardisation of structures, to ensure the voice of the person living in poverty is heard. A view is held that client-focused services can only be developed if customers are consulted to identify a core set of rights that people can expect from service providers.

1.10 Social Indicators

Social indicators were also the subject of a consultation seminar. The key issues raised in the course of this seminar are described in chapter 5.

Section Two

Views on Current Anti-Poverty Policies

2.1 Introduction

The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion by its very existence was identified by participants as an important tool that contributes to efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion. The focus of actions and measures was also seen as a strength, that is, on helping the most vulnerable, preventing the risks of exclusion and focusing on facilitating participation in employment. Most crucially the explicit statement of the necessity for action and measures on access by all to rights, goods and services was highlighted as a key strength. The fact that the mobilisation of all relevant bodies emerged as a key action, as demonstrated through this consultation process, was identified as an essential element of the strategy to make progress towards achieving the targets.

A view was expressed that many useful policies and strategies have already been recommended in various reports relating to social inclusion. In this context, it was suggested that the next National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion needs to make specific reference to the implementation of strategies and actions agreed in a number of such relevant reports. These reports are highlighted throughout this consultation report.

2.2 Mobilising All Actors

While this objective and the current consultation process was welcomed, the need for consistent involvement of all actors, particularly those representing socially excluded and vulnerable groups, in developing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion was raised (see

detailed treatment in Section Five, Institutional Structures). At this point, it is important to highlight that there are significant challenges with regard to meaningful consultation. There was a view among some participants that some consultation feels like 'our feathers are being smoothed and we don't appreciate it'. This is reinforced when policy decisions contradict or negate the social inclusion objectives contained in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Many examples of this trend were highlighted, such as establishing the SSAs in the absence of 'evidence-based' policy processes and the existence of 'glossy plans' alongside recent decisions to reduce funding for community projects tackling poverty and social exclusion. Other examples given included the introduction of legislation that criminalises Travellers, and cutbacks in the Community Employment Programme. A view was held that contradictions in policy have not been challenged in the draft chapters of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. Meaningful consultation, it was argued, will remain illusive in the absence of 'honest debate' about problems, the ways of addressing them and strong anti-poverty critiques of all policy developments as part of monitoring.

2.3 Policies to Eliminate the Poverty Trap

The persistence of the poverty trap was highlighted as a significant barrier to achieving the targets contained within the previous National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion and any new ones for the next plan. Participants highlighted that current policies appear to be achieving little to address the inadequacy of

incomes, the loss of social welfare income in low paid employment, the sudden loss of essential secondary benefits and the high marginal tax rates for people on the minimum wage, and other low-paid jobs. A related issue is the need to address the needs of the working poor, given the precariousness of their position in times of job losses.

Participants were of the view that anti-poverty and social inclusion policies will not be effective if the barriers within the system that prevent people from moving securely from social welfare to employment are not systematically removed.

A separate, but related issue, is the need for a clear target on an acceptable level of income equality in the income distribution as wage differentials widen.

2.4 Health Policy

With regard to health policies, the existence of the two-tiered health system, where those who are most vulnerable and cannot afford to pay are not accessing their health benefits, was raised as a key strategic weakness that perpetuates inequality and poverty of health status.

The key issues raised in relation to current health policies and their impact on poverty include:

- the lack of cancer facilities in the regions, for example in the North West
- increasing primary care costs
- lack of services for older people's health needs
- the fact that chronic illnesses are not included on medical cards
- lack of access to health services due to lack of transport, particularly for those living far from Dublin.

There remains a need to address the linkages between inadequate income, low health status, and lack of access to health services for some low-income people.

2.5 Social Housing and Accommodation

A strategic approach to social housing and accommodation is required to counteract the current trend whereby the provision and design of housing is controlled by developers and speculators, rather than driven by need. Participants were of the view that the trend of reducing exchequer spending on social housing and the shift in the policy focus to 'affordable housing' was a serious concern and fundamentally regarded as contrary to social inclusion objectives. The view was held that 'affordable housing' is not in the grasp of people living in poverty and that housing inequality was being created through the neglect of social housing.

With regard to accommodation in the private rented sector, a significant challenge is to deal with the poor standards and insecurity of tenure that exposes vulnerable people to homelessness. Fundamentally, the view was expressed that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion needs to address security of tenure for tenants as a right, and to prioritise the provision of social housing over and above affordable housing.

Another significant challenge to achieving social inclusion is the need to make better progress with regard to Traveller accommodation. The experience was shared that there has been no effort by some local authorities to meet their Traveller accommodation targets. Ultimately, Traveller accommodation targets that have been agreed and set but that are not being met are causing poverty traps for the Traveller community.

It was suggested that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion should make specific reference to the implementation of the Traveller accommodation plans.

2.6 Transport

Transport emerged as a key issue in the consultation process. The lack of transport in rural areas, in particular, and in the newer urban areas is problematic for certain groups, for example older people, people parenting alone and people with disabilities. The task was seen to be to ensure that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion addresses transport issues in the context of access to, participation in, and inclusion in, labour market programmes, health programmes, education schemes and community development activities.

2.7 Resources for Community Development and Inclusion Work

Community development models were highlighted as key to tackling social exclusion and poverty. Community Employment schemes were viewed as important in helping people to avoid welfare dependency. Thus, funding withdrawals from key projects on the ground and restrictions on public sector employment were viewed as detrimental to the achievement of social inclusion.

2.8 People with Disabilities

The commitment to collect data to identify the levels of poverty among disabled people was welcomed as a positive action for the next National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. However, current policies that are based on the medical model rather than a social rights-based model, and inconsistencies in the definition

of disabilities across Government departments and agencies, were regarded as serious weaknesses.

It was suggested that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion will need to address the absence of transport services for people with disabilities, especially in rural areas. The low wages and poverty trap faced by people in sheltered employment, the inadequate needs assessment methodologies applied for determining social welfare entitlement, and the fact that 70-80 per cent of people with disabilities are unemployed are significant challenges to the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Suggestions to work towards the full inclusion of people with disabilities included 'disability proofing' of state contracts and the representation of people with disabilities by people with disabilities.

2.9 Disadvantaged Families and their Children

The targets to reduce consistent poverty to 2 per cent by 2007, to increase the employment of women and to expand provision of childcare places under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme were highlighted as significant improvements in the position of disadvantaged families and their children. In addition, substantial progress in reducing consistent poverty among children, the commitment to ensure that Child Income support is 33-35 per cent of the minimum adult social welfare rate, and the increased focus on the development of Family Policy were also welcomed.

Concerns were expressed about the absence of a rights-based approach and the lack of direct and transparent links to budgetary provisions. Key

challenges in this regard related to the need for a stronger gender perspective with clear gender specific targets. The need for local experience to inform priorities and actions, and to address the difficulties of engaging the most disadvantaged communities and groups, were also highlighted. There was a view that achieving inclusion would be more feasible if there were to be regular reviews of activity and progress in the context of changing socio-economic trends, with subsequent reprioritising of resources.

2.10 Older People

The introduction of transport schemes, particularly in isolated rural areas, and the inclusion of the heating target for older people in the Revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2002 were regarded as two positive outcomes of recent policy decisions. Despite these, however, significant challenges remain if the social inclusion of older people is to be achieved. The strategic framework requires the identification of the specific needs of older people, underpinned by the ethos that older people are contributors to society. Thus, the inclusion of targets for people over sixty five years of age was regarded as a fundamental requirement of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, as was the need to recognise the issue of security, and the need to address the lack of social supports within communities for older people.

2.11 Urban Disadvantage

Integration of policies and service delivery was identified as a key challenge in developing responses to spatial poverty, be it in rural or urban settings. With regard to urban issues specifically, the multiple experience of disadvantage in certain urban areas needs to be addressed. The view was

put forward that the breakdown of family networks has had an acute impact in urban disadvantaged areas. The inclusion of people who are seen to be different was identified as the most significant challenge, i.e. people of colour, people with disabilities etc, especially in communities already experiencing disadvantages.

Further challenges highlighted were:

- the need for local anti-poverty strategies, including neighbourhood issues
- the need for the articulation of issues regarding family support services, policing, cultural, leisure and sporting opportunities
- the building of local economies within local communities
- the role of local authorities in implementing local anti-poverty strategies
- the need to increase participation of poor people and people who represent them in deprived areas.

2.12 Rural Disadvantage

Countering isolation and improving access to services were identified as key challenges in developing responses to spatial poverty in rural settings. The lack of transport services, information services, and local offices for utilities, as well as shops and banks, were all highlighted. Key suggestions included: rural proofing the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion; consulting with vulnerable rural groups; and targeting resources in key areas of need.

2.13 Employment Policies

A number of positive initiatives were cited.

These included: employment schemes such as the Job Assist; the FÁS supported employment programme for people with disabilities; enterprise supports; the Family Income Supplement scheme; the PRSI exemption for employers creating new jobs; the retention of secondary benefits on take-up of employment; schemes supporting the return to second-chance education. The individualisation of tax allowances was highlighted as being positive in encouraging female participation in the labour market. However, the need for a clear, transparent policy that balances the recognition of a woman's right to work in the home or enter the labour market was stressed.

Three recent trends were raised as being problematic. These were the reduction in Community Employment (CE) places, changes in the eligibility criteria for the Back to Work Allowance scheme, and the lack of progress with regard to skills development and recognition, the latter being particularly important for the prevention of exclusion among the immigrant workforce. For example, in relation to the Back to Work Allowance, the threshold for eligibility was raised to five years and for many people who are unemployed for over five years there are multiple problems that they need assistance with. It is thus harder for partnership companies etc to reactivate such people to this type of scheme. With regard to Community Employment, some people who are on this scheme are not able to compete in the open labour market and their jobs are threatened as places on CE are cut. In the view of participants, consultation is particularly weak with regard to changes in employment policy and schemes.

Participants highlighted that, given the importance of employment schemes for people who are unemployed, the challenge for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion is to guarantee that the positive and progressive elements of the schemes will not be eroded but that they will be improved and resourced accordingly.

Key priorities for employment policy were identified as:

- tackling income inadequacy
- improving the quality of employment
- protecting rights and preventing discrimination
- providing and sustaining the childcare sector

2.13.1 Tackling Income Inadequacy

Tackling income inadequacy through the commitment to raise social welfare payments to €150.00 per week by 2007 was welcomed, with the proviso that the finance to achieve this be ring-fenced. A further view was put forward that benchmarking increases to wages would address equality and inclusion objectives simultaneously. Taxation rates and allowances were also highlighted as crucial to creating income adequacy for people on low incomes and in preventing poverty traps.

2.13.2 Improving the Quality of Employment

In achieving a long-term route out of poverty, the view was expressed of the need to create good quality well-paid jobs, as low-paid insecure jobs exposed people to the risk of poverty.

2.13.3 Protecting Rights and Preventing Discrimination

Another significant challenge for the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion is to prevent discrimination against people from disadvantaged areas in accessing the labour market. Experience has indicated that people have been discriminated against in accessing the labour market because of their address. It was suggested that to tackle this issue, address and social class could be added as additional grounds under the equality legislation.

2.13.4 Providing and Sustaining the Childcare Sector

The necessity for childcare facilities and the long-term sustainability of the childcare sector emerged as a key issue. The view was expressed that adequate, appropriate and affordable childcare is essential for employment and lifelong learning. Given the diversity of people's needs, mixed provision is required, not only to cater for children of all ages, but also to ensure that people can take up the range of flexible employment positions that now exist. Participants highlighted a number of anomalies in the current system and on the need to iron these out as a priority. Anomalies identified included the need to address the lack of provision so that allowances could be availed of and the need to ensure that the allowances are available for all training courses.

Section Three

Strategic Approach – Views on the Long-Term Vision and Objectives for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion

3.1 Introduction

Making a difference in poor people's lives was identified as the key challenge. In order to achieve this the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion needs to advance specific strategic challenges, as follows.

3.2 Strategic Challenges

Three strategic challenges were identified:

- Resourcing implementation of the Plan
- Mainstreaming
- Consultation.

3.2.1 Resourcing Implementation of the Plan

The most significant challenge identified was to ensure that the resources are provided to implement the Plan and its objectives. The view was put forward that this will require significant amounts of money to be invested in service delivery, particularly in areas of disadvantage. Nevertheless, it was felt that a consistent, long-term approach was needed, and that this would require investment to be complemented by maintenance of programmes such as the Community Development Programme, the PEACE II programme, the Community Employment Programme and the Back to Work Allowance.

3.2.2 Mainstreaming

A second strategic challenge identified was mainstreaming. It was argued that mainstreaming of anti-racism, anti-discrimination and the gender dimensions of anti-poverty work was essential. In this context, the need for further work on the gender dimensions of poverty was highlighted. For example, it was felt that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion could benefit from further gender analysis, e.g. with regard to the uptake of different measures.

3.2.3 Consultation

There was a strong view that consultation processes that provide an opportunity to discuss issues in greater depth, which involve the range of local actors and players, and which concentrate on particular aspects of the Plan, would prove very useful.

3.3 Key Recommendations

Key recommendations are presented as follows:

3.3.1 Approaches Necessary for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion

- Rights-based approach needs to be developed and operationalised
- Adopt targets on relative income poverty
- Support participatory democracy especially for the poverty voice
- Make the resources available, i.e. cost Plan
- Direct funding to regions/local structures

- Widen the definition of social exclusion to include equality grounds as well as lack of income and resources
- Develop clearly articulated principles to inform the whole Plan, for example inclusiveness, integration and participation.

3.3.2 Long-term objectives (7-10 years) for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion

- Provide consistent, reliable, long-term funding by ring-fencing funding targeted at vulnerable groups, e.g. CE schemes, health boards schemes programmes, etc
- Listen to input from the ground
- Implement an integrated approach across Government departments. Co-ordination of policies is needed, so that they are complementary at national and local level
- Build a rights-based, legally backed National Strategy for Social Inclusion.

3.3.3 Short-term objectives (2 years) for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion

- Widen the tax base
- Develop an information strategy and actions to provide information to individuals on their rights and entitlements
- Develop linkages between the community and voluntary sector and agencies such as the VEC, local authorities and health boards and the CDBs
- Develop regional approaches to tackling poverty

- Develop a National Migration Policy and a National Immigration Policy that address economic development and social inclusion

- Identify activities that underpin the implementation of anti-poverty measures within the National Plan against Racism, the National Action Plan for Women, the Task Force on People with Disabilities, the Task Force on the Traveller Community, the Traveller Accommodation Plans and the Homeless Action Plan

- Address data deficiencies, particularly in relation to poverty among homeless people and households, prisoners, Travellers and other groups not in private households but who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Disaggregation of data to DED level is also required

- Develop indicators that reflect the real outcome of policies and measures on the quality of people's lives and collect data, resolve anomalies and report figures in a timely fashion

- Outline plans and details to be followed up on to achieve mainstreaming

- Put in place an information strategy and actions to provide information to individuals on their rights and entitlements.

Section Four

Actions and Measures

Views are summarised under each of the common objectives.

4.1 To Facilitate Participation in Employment and Access by all to Resources, Rights, Goods and Services

4.1.1 Employment/Unemployment

The overall desire was for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion to adopt a holistic approach to people and to contain specific employment targets for those that lack resources.

This would require addressing the needs of those who are experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage as a result of, for example, their race, their gender, their age, or a disability, and to provide guidance for all stakeholders to translate national employment targets into local policies and actions. It was felt that this objective must utilise the tax and welfare systems to support positive employment outcomes for disadvantaged people and the emphasis must be on providing choice. Actions were identified in four key areas:

- (a) Actions with employers
- (b) Actions with employment services
- (c) Actions to provide inclusive employment measures
- (d) Actions to ensure integration.

(a) Actions with employers

- Encourage employers to use schemes, e.g. Jobstart
- Develop guidelines and rules to assist employers to employ people from

disadvantaged areas, and develop a sense of corporate social responsibility

- Develop concrete initiatives to support work-life balance, for both parents, and in particular for those on low incomes, and provide support for family friendly policies in SMEs
- Introduce an initiative to develop the skills of those in low-paid work employment
- Develop better links with employers to deliver training that more accurately fits with labour market needs and provide incentives to employers to train low-skilled workers.

(b) Actions with employment services

- Encourage and support employment services to address anti-poverty targets
- Engage with young people before they sign-on to the Live Register and help them to develop an appropriate career path or progression route (to prevent movement from school to the Live Register). This initiative should be particularly targeted at those in the most disadvantaged areas. In this context, the option of employment services going into schools should be considered
- Monitor labour market outcomes for the formerly long-term unemployed to assess what kind of jobs people are getting with regard to sustainability and security, levels of pay and protection from discrimination.

(c) Actions to provide inclusive employment measures

- Communicate to individuals about their rights and entitlements

- Review schemes to assess obstacles to people taking them up
- Review the welfare system for new poverty traps
- Identify and address under-employment as a cause of poverty
- Address the needs of women through actions to:
 - reduce the gender pay gap
 - support women accessing the labour market, e.g. through improved childcare facilities at community level and increased emphasis on the provision of workplace childcare support
 - provide for the needs of young female lone parents in low paid and part-time employment
 - assist poor women working in the home
 - provide a labour market information guide for women
- Provide the medical card to all children and graduate the income assessment for medical card eligibility
- Pay more attention to the needs of the working poor by taking steps to reform tax for the low paid, e.g. by taking everyone on the minimum wage out of the tax net
- Provide integrated supports for ex-prisoners
- Grant the right to work to asylum seekers
- Revert eligibility for the Back-to-Work Allowance to 1-2 years on the Live Register.

(d) Actions to ensure integration

- Ensure an Inter-Agency approach and closer co-ordination with local groups to implement the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Ensure co-ordination between county/city councils, Government Departments, partnerships and national agencies in addressing their respective roles in delivering actions to achieve employment targets.

4.1.2 Income Adequacy

Throughout the consultation process, many participants suggested that there should be a relative income poverty target and income inequality indicator. This emphasis is viewed as essential, particularly in light of social welfare increases that are effectively eroded by inflation and increased service costs. In addition, there is a challenge to ensure that social welfare payments can accommodate additional costs for people who are excluded, e.g. people with a disability, people with dependants.

The view was put forward that continuous assessment of the way in which the social welfare and taxation systems interact and their impact on low-income workers and people dependent on social welfare is essential to the effective implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. Many participants felt that social welfare rates should be quoted in percentage terms of average industrial earnings, e.g. as 30 per cent of average industrial earnings, as is being done for pension increases.

In addition, the view was expressed that tackling exclusion necessitates targeting those on lower social welfare payments in order to achieve greater equality through proportionate and substantial increases in these lower payments. In this context, the role of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) was highlighted, with the suggestion to graduate payments against means, and to provide supportive steps to facilitate people moving out of poverty. Ultimately, the concern was to ensure that the Social Welfare targets in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion are specific, realistic, ambitious and achievable.

Other actions were identified in two key areas:

(a) Actions to provide adequate incomes

(b) Actions to improve information provision.

(a) Actions to provide adequate incomes

- Incorporate a provision on adequate income into the Finance Bill each year up to 2007, with a view to achieving the welfare target of €150 by 2007 (at 2002 prices). To do this, it was suggested that social welfare payments should be benchmarked against wages, by expressing social welfare rates in terms of a percentage of gross average industrial earnings
- Address the issue of secondary benefits which create a poverty trap
- Address employment disincentives created by tax system
- Ensure income adequacy estimates reflect real 'cost of living' by focusing on a living wage rather than the minimum wage
- Increase social insurance take by 2 per cent

- Address the costs of disability

- Individualise social welfare payments so that each adult gets a payment in his or her own right. The use of adult dependant and qualified dependant would no longer be relevant or necessary.

(b) Actions to improve information provision

- Improve the take-up of welfare benefits through the provision of one-stop-shop services that deal with people, information provision, payments and complaints all under one roof
- Utilise the range of information giving models that assist those with literacy difficulties.

4.1.3 Education

The critical role that schools and the educational system have to play in tackling poverty and achieving social inclusion was emphasised. The challenge was seen to be to ensure that the activities under the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion clearly improve the quality of the educational experience and focus on the achievement of equality outcomes for those who are socially excluded. This means measuring the range of educational outcomes. For example, including a target for those who do not sit the Junior Certificate was suggested. An emphasis on life skills and the development of the role of community education were also proposed. The provision of adequate resources to achieve inclusion within the education system was regarded as key to the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Activities were identified in the following key areas:

- (a) Actions to provide an inclusive educational system
- (b) Actions to improve the delivery of education services.

(a) Actions to deliver an inclusive educational system

- Improve progression paths and the quality of educational outcomes for groups at risk of, and experiencing, poverty
- Address specific gender issues that are age related in terms of access to employment, e.g. younger women who are lone parents and who have educational difficulties, older redundant men who have difficulty in finding new work
- Provide more second chance education places and options, particularly focusing on people with literacy and numeracy needs. In addition, focus on addressing literacy problems in the workplace through highlighting corporate social responsibility
- Reduce the age threshold of VTOS to eighteen years
- Improve support for third-level programmes, including a summer payment. For example, pay the Back to Education Allowance over holiday periods as well as term time
- Encourage the take-up of education programmes by men
- Ensure childcare provision is adequate to meet the needs of adults undertaking second-chance education options

- By 2006, double the participation of Traveller and refugee women in second-chance education schemes and in third-level courses
- Provide 2,000 extra further education places per year for the educationally disadvantaged.

(b) Actions to improve the delivery of education services

- Provide transport and outreach facilities for people in isolated rural areas
- Expand the role of libraries with regard to the provision of literacy, IT literacy, and distance learning
- Ensure parental involvement in second-level schools, particularly in disadvantaged areas, by involving parents to help them to support their children
- Develop partnerships between Youthreach and local schools to enable maximum use of available facilities
- Review desirable level of quantity and quality of homework
- Review assessment procedures to facilitate learners who may not be suited to once-off exams
- Provide supports for the community education sector
- Ensure that colleges facilitate alternative routes to third-level for disadvantaged people
- Develop specific options streams, for those with skills at crafts and creative fields, in all levels of the education system

- Review the role and composition of the Education Disadvantage Committee in light of the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

4.1.4 Health

Participants stated that health for all requires that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion defines health in its broadest sense, i.e. in terms of health status and social well-being. Poverty proofing and mainstreaming health issues into a range of services and projects are seen as key strategies required to meet this objective. In this context, the view was expressed that priority must be given to actions to support equal health outcomes for vulnerable target groups, particularly when resources are scarce. Key issues were identified which need to be addressed. This was highlighted in the context of current health spending cut-backs. As long as the targets remain uncostered the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion will not be converted into an implementation plan. There is a need for a strong emphasis on health protection measures, health education and community involvement in the healthcare area. A holistic approach to health is essential through improved integration across government departments. There was a strong view that this was not currently the case. For example, for Travellers who lack accommodation and face eviction, their access to the medical card and the use of medical services is severely restricted. In this case the Traveller health strategy and the new trespass law do not sit well together, nor do they strategically support the achievement of inclusive health objectives.

Activities were identified in the following areas:

- (a) Actions to improve service provision
- (b) Approaches to achieving equal health outcomes.

(a) Actions to improve service provision

- Put in place universal minimum health care standards, and as a priority within them, actions that target excluded groups to raise their health standards
- Provide medical cards for all children under 5 years of age
- Increase the eligibility thresholds for the medical card and taper them to relieve pressure on low income families just above the threshold. Consider linking FIS to medical card eligibility
- Provide more beds
- Provide more primary care services
- Support more community models and community health networks including carers in the home
- Promote better access to information through the establishment of health communication mechanisms and systems that take into account community forums and literacy and cultural diversity issues
- Use a holistic definition of support, to include counselling etc, to address the needs of those with mental health issues
- Review green cards, and increase number of illnesses listed, e.g. include asthma on the list

- Address the healthcare implications of debt and of marital breakdown, especially for women
- Increase the number of accessible breast cancer screening services for women
- Implement an injury prevention strategy for women.

(b) Approaches to achieving equal health outcomes

- Provide anti-racism and poverty training for health care professionals
- Give local authorities an 'official' remit for health, with a role in developing healthy communities through, for example, play and exercise
- Ensure that area health service audits are carried out in conjunction with local communities, and that inter-agency work is developed
- Establish health forums for all stakeholders to promote change at local level
- Provide transport so that people can get to health services
- Address the rising cost of health care medical insurance (VHI, BUPA), as a contributor to poverty, particularly for older people.

4.1.5 Housing and Accommodation

A key message from the consultations was that building communities, as well as building houses and accommodating people, was regarded as a foundation for inclusion.

Key challenges in this regard are the need to prioritise the elimination of the housing waiting lists, tackle homelessness and provide for the implementation of Traveller accommodation plans. Ensuring that the resources directed at 'affordable housing' do not detract from the resources needed for these anti-poverty measures was raised as a key challenge to implementing the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. A social contract model for housing and accommodation, as a means of operationalising the rights-based approach, was emphasised, along with actions to involve social housing groups.

Activities were identified in the following areas:

- Actions to improve provision
- Actions to improve delivery of services
- Actions to achieve inclusion.

(a) Actions to improve provision

- Increase the number of social housing units built each year
- Reinstate the 20 per cent of social housing provision
- Include a capital investment programme to provide social housing and accommodation for homeless people, Travellers etc
- Improve accommodation for respite care
- Improve planning laws and regulations so that housing and accommodation needs are determined first and that developments are then identified with those needs
- Reform the planning legislation and regulations by poverty proofing them to prevent holiday homes bias, for example

- Review Part V of the Planning Act
- Put in place controls to regulate the private renter sector
- Increase rent allowances to meet real costs
- Review the cost of subsidies for private investors as against expenditure on public social housing to assess the extent to which housing and accommodation profiteering are affecting the ability to meet anti-poverty targets
- Identify actions to implement the Homeless Act and Traveller Accommodation Act and put homelessness plans on a statutory basis
- Improve the quality of housing by addressing specific issues like fuel poverty.

(b) Actions to improve delivery of services

- Acknowledge the right to housing and accommodation. Put in place standards to meet that right and monitor progress in meeting those standards
- Provide support for community development principles to underpin estate management and build capacity, to enable people who are socially excluded to participate in estate management initiatives
- Provide for an estate management officer for each local authority.

(c) Actions to achieve inclusion

- Address the gender dimension of homelessness
- Provide safe housing for people who have been subject to domestic violence

- Address the needs of older women living alone
- Identify actions to ensure that the Traveller accommodation targets are met
- Ensure that people under 50 years of age have access to social accommodation.

4.1.6 Culture/Sport/Leisure

A number of participants were of the view that the challenge for this National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion is to acknowledge social/cultural barriers to inclusion. Cultural change within public institutions regarding attitudes to people experiencing poverty was viewed as one way to address these cultural barriers to inclusion.

4.2 To Prevent the Risks of Exclusion

Five key areas were highlighted as requiring immediate action in preventing the risks of exclusion within the context of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

4.2.1 Debt

- Instigate specific strategies to deal with the problem of exposure to debt and its effects on increasing the risk of poverty and vulnerability to social exclusion.

4.2.2 Homelessness

- Implement the Homelessness Action Plans.

4.2.3 Family Supports

- Provide more support for low income families who are not on social welfare, e.g. those who have to pay fees for the Back to Education initiative or who have to pay for medical care. These families are very vulnerable to unemployment and poverty

- Provide resources for early intervention strategies for families at risk
- Provide targeted nutritional education, as expensive processed foods and convenience foods contribute to poverty
- Provide affordable childcare.

4.2.4 Transport

Transport was raised in all the consultation seminars as a fundamental need with regard to achieving inclusion. The actions proposed included the following:

- To provide rural transport services so as to ensure that people can get access to education, childcare, work, healthcare, etc
- To ensure that public transport, particularly in urban disadvantaged areas, adequately meets the needs of residents.

4.2.5 Work Permits

- Conduct a review of the impact of the restricted work permit system on competitiveness and inclusion objectives.

4.3 To Help the Most Vulnerable

The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion presents a significant opportunity to focus on vulnerable groups, their needs and their competencies. Issues raised during the consultations with regards to vulnerable groups in general included the need to deal with experiences of discrimination and racism, and the unequal treatment of older people and people with disabilities. In addition, the inclusion of other groups such as ex-offenders and smallholders was suggested.

4.3.1 Children and Disadvantaged Families

The clear view stated at the consultations was that early family support is key to tackling child poverty and parenting within families. Participants were of the view that poor families pay more for house needs and services and experience exclusion from banking, transport and housing services because of inadequate income. The challenge is to ensure that family income is sufficient to meet the real family costs. Thus, indicators need to be developed which can take account of the costs of childcare, for example.

The following actions were identified to improve social inclusion of children and disadvantaged families:

- Monitor the risk of relative poverty among women
- Remove any barriers to women entering the labour force
- Review the One Parent Family Payment
- Ensure that data can record the real living situations of people, such as the extent of families within families
- Recognise and pay for childcare, elder care and other care costs in the home.
- Address consumer pressures on families
- Provide for early intervention, particularly for families with children under five years of age.
- Deal with drug addiction at an early stage
- Address the issue of domestic violence and its impact on families and their risk of poverty

4.3.2 Older People

The main view on the limitations in addressing poverty and social exclusion among older people was that a coherent approach is required to achieve the inclusion of older people. This will necessitate identifying local needs, and involving older people in decision-making and in monitoring the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The key actions identified were as follows:

- (a) Meet real needs
- (b) Encourage participation
- (c) Improve services.

(a) Meet real needs

- Conduct audits with older people to ascertain the numbers of older people in the community and to assess their needs.

(b) Encourage participation

- Provide resources to active older age groups to ensure that older people have their own place in social partnership
- Ensure that consultation processes are underpinned by awareness and consciousness raising strategies around age issues
- Take steps to oppose discrimination against older people at work and educate employers and society in general about discrimination against older people
- Incentivise the employment of older workers through actions to replace compulsory retirement by a range of flexible approaches and provide supports for older people to stay in employment, e.g. by providing tax

incentives for people to work on, post-retirement age

- Make training relevant and flexible for older people
- Provide tax incentives for employing carers and subventions for families providing care for relatives
- Involve older people as information providers
- Provide training on the needs of older people as service users.

(c) Improve services

- Improve and expand the 'doctor on call' service
- Provide integrated housing with care facilities and social support
- Provide transport as this is the key to rural inclusion for older people
- Ensure older people are included in data collection through the abolition of any existing age limits
- Ensure that supports put in place are attractive to older people.

4.3.3 People with Disabilities

Adopting an approach that focuses on the abilities, skills, experience and rights of people with disabilities presents significant opportunities for their social inclusion. The key challenges for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion is to address issues of access, income adequacy and participation. Disability proofing is crucial for the achievement of equality and inclusion for people with disabilities.

Key activities were recommended in the following areas:

- (a) Actions to support disability proofing
- (b) Actions to improve access
- (c) Actions to provide an adequate income
- (d) Actions to improve the range of supports available

(a) Actions to support disability proofing

- Ensure that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion incorporates the 402 recommendations from the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities
- Put in a specific recommendation to conduct a National Disability Survey to identify exclusion issues
- Provide a breakdown of all targets to include disability
- Conduct an audit of state spending on disability services
- Take steps to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in the political process
- 'Disability proof' all rural transport initiatives.

(b) Actions to improve access

- Ensure the implementation of Part M of the building regulations
- Include accessibility as a criterion within value for money criteria for award of contracts
- Set targets for housing provision that respond to the needs of people with disabilities

- Improve the accessibility of documents and process, particularly public documents and consultations such as this
- Enforce disability access regulations and policies (even though these are weak).

(c) Actions to provide an adequate income

- Provide payments directly to disabled people to purchase their own services, as required
- Include a 'cost of disability' payment target in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Give an extra allowance for the costs of disability and/or provide a tax credit for people with a disability to take into account the extra costs of disability
- Remove the practice of withdrawing people's income allowances once they are in long-term care
- Reform disability grants and ensure that they are no longer means tested.

(d) Actions to improve the range of supports available

- Extend and mainstream the personal assistants programme
- Provide training for staff working with people with disabilities
- Promote and support community activity for people with disabilities
- Support networks for anti-poverty programmes for disabled people
- Provide resources for advocacy networks and groups

- Address isolation issues, especially for men with learning difficulties and mental health issues
- Improve formal education delivery for people with disabilities, tackle early school leaving, and set targets with regard to primary and secondary education for people with disabilities
- Apply the employment support scheme to the public and private sector.

4.3.4 Travellers

The implementation of existing policies and plans, specifically the Traveller Accommodation Plans and the Task Force Report on Travellers, were seen as presenting significant challenges for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. The collection of Traveller specific data and, more generally, the disaggregation of all data by ethnicity and by gender were highlighted as key to redressing the exclusion of Travellers. ‘Traveller proofing’ was seen as crucial for the achievement of equality and inclusion of the Traveller Community.

The key actions suggested were the following:

- Ensure inter-departmental and inter-agency work to address the multiplicity of needs within the Traveller Community
- Devise actions and mechanisms to ensure accountability, where practices and services are not equitably delivered
- Ring-fence resources for Traveller accommodation, health, education, employment and cultural programmes
- Take steps to improve retention and educational outcomes among Travellers, particularly in primary and secondary level

- Develop, in co-operation with the Traveller Community, intercultural approaches to be used in education.

4.3.5 Ethnic Minorities

The inclusion of ethnic minorities requires an approach that is based on accommodating diversity, and which recognises and supports the many situations, experiences and identities that exist. The collection of data to improve our knowledge of poverty and social exclusion among ethnic minorities, using sensitive and non-intrusive approaches, was recommended. The key challenge for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion is to engage with people from ethnic minority communities and to address the following key areas of activity:

- (a) Actions to improve the range of supports available
- (b) Actions to ensure participation and inclusion.

(a) Actions to improve the range of supports available

- Develop an Integration Policy for ethnic minorities, with clear policy commitments and clear lines of responsibility
- Ensure poverty proofing activities address language and cultural barriers
- Put in place programmes that provide job opportunities for ethnic minorities, including setting employment quotas and targets for members of ethnic minorities
- Set a timeframe within which the issue of recognising qualifications from other jurisdictions will be resolved

- Address the needs of low paid workers from ethnic minorities, in particular with regard to accommodation issues which may be poverty traps

(b) Actions to ensure participation and inclusion

- Ensure that ethnic groups are consulted in the implementation of this Plan and the monitoring and review of its progress
- Tackle racism within the implementation of the Plan
- Provide resources on a sustained basis to ethnic minority community development groups and migrant centres
- Ensure that the range of administrative data collected is used to build an understanding of the exclusion issues for ethnic minorities
- Ensure that children born outside the state but now resident here are covered by the Department of Education's grants schemes
- Ensure that the current situation with regard to residency applications, because of Irish-born children, is resolved in a way that achieves inclusion
- Put in place positive action programmes for ethnic minorities in the public services, including anti-racism training
- Reform the work permit system to provide the permit to the individual and not the employer
- Address the needs of pregnant women in dormitory accommodation with regard to nutrition
- Improve housing and accommodation facilities for ethnic minorities.

4.3.6 Refugees and Asylum Seekers

This section identifies the particular needs of refugees and asylum seekers, as a sub group of ethnic minorities, since very particular issues for their social inclusion were raised during the consultation process. A strong view put forward during the consultations was that denying asylum seekers the right to work perpetuates poverty, creates costs for the state and can result in mental health issues for the individuals concerned. Addressing the poverty of those in direct provision was also seen as a key challenge, with inadequate incomes of €19.10 per week for adults and €9.20 per week for each child being raised as a key issue. The tendency for accommodation arrangements to keep communities apart, and the lack of ethnicity, multi-culturalism, racism and discrimination training for staff within the direct provision centres, were presented as significant challenges to social inclusion.

In addition, the need to educate and train media personnel about racism and discrimination was identified as one strategy, along with the need to monitor the effect of the media on attitudes to ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers, as a contributing factor to their social exclusion.

Key actions suggested include the following:

- Reform the current system to allow people to work
- Provide adequate income for refugees and asylum seekers
- Speed up the process of application for asylum
- Improve services in direct provision
- Prevent the separation of communities

- Provide language services
- Address gender issues
- Explore the possibility of establishing an employment agency for refugees
- Ensure that time spent on courses for asylum seekers counts for qualifying for the Back to Work allowances
- Mainstream the work of the FÁS asylum seekers unit into FÁS.

4.3.7 *Those Living in Disadvantaged Areas (Rural and Urban)*

Involving people in identifying the causes of poverty on a local basis, and identifying the key dimensions of change required, were presented as key strategies to tackle rural and urban disadvantage.

Key elements of this approach include:

- identifying the specific locations of social exclusion
- exploring and supporting people in these communities to bring about a positive change.

This section presents three actions identified during the consultations:

- (a) Actions to achieve social inclusion in urban disadvantaged areas
- (b) Actions to achieve social inclusion in rural disadvantaged areas
- (c) Actions to achieve the participation and empowerment of disadvantaged communities

(a) Actions to achieve social inclusion in urban disadvantaged areas

- Provide continuous financial and technical support for existing community development groups and ensure that good practice is not lost, particularly with regard to education and community development programmes which help people to get involved, i.e. which promote civic and political participation
- Build on existing local structures and improve them, particularly with regard to equal participation of all actors
- Ensure that the control of resources flows through participative structures
- Agree benchmarks regarding targets locally with the anti-poverty sector
- Make links between the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, and the national and local Drugs Strategies and the National Health Strategy
- Develop, and provide for, better project opportunities for young people
- Put in place confidence building measures with the police
- Provide better facilities for vulnerable groups, such as playgroups for Travellers sites or in disadvantaged estates.
- Provide additional resources to support a mixture of approaches to building social capital
- Consider ways in which the social economy and social lending can act as mechanisms for tackling poverty

- Consult the ombudsman on public service access at local level, when people need a clear focus of redress where services have failed them.

(b) Actions to achieve social inclusion in rural disadvantaged areas

The general view from the consultations was that the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion needs to develop a clearer rural perspective, i.e. the Plan needs to be rural proofed. The need for local flexibility to implement the Plan was highlighted as a means of ensuring applicability to the rural context. Key factors causing social exclusion in rural areas were identified as lack of transport and difficulties in accessing education, good jobs and services. Activities were recommended as follows:

- Rural proof the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Establish cross-county and regional National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion
- Conduct a major study of rural transport in the context of shifting demographics and the effect of transport services on social inclusion. In the interim additional service-orientated transport needs to be supported, such as bus/taxi services to the doctor, etc. This will require mixed forms of rural transport to be provided
- Develop separate indicators to measure disadvantage for rural areas
- Develop lifelong learning opportunities for people in rural areas
- Invest in indigenous development in rural areas

- Provide facilities for sport and leisure services in rural areas
- Provide support for actions to mobilise actors and community workers
- Ensure that schemes are secure and not threatened with funding withdrawals. It was stated that CE contributes significantly to rural areas
- Provide eligibility for smallholders to employment, education and training schemes
- Address the lack of community meeting facilities by exploring access to schools in the evening and converting rural post offices into community offices
- Develop a role for the county development boards in tackling rural poverty
- Provide for the needs of older men and women isolated in rural areas. Such isolation can lead to alcoholism and mental health problems
- Provide more youth facilities.

(c) Actions to achieve participation and empowerment of disadvantaged communities

The participation of people living in poverty is viewed as crucial in the development, implementation and monitoring of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. In this regard it would be helpful if the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion make a definitive commitment to participation. Establishing legal grounds for participation would be one way of guaranteeing it. The need for independent, critical voices was stressed as was the need for specific actions to mobilise all actors behind the Plan. The voice of the community development and anti-poverty sector is critical in this regard.

Activities were recommended as follows:

- Provide a budget for participation
- Devise, in consultation, a protocol on rules of engagement, and ensure that the autonomy of groups is maintained. The principles of engagement could include the facilitation of access for all stakeholders, using a co-decisions approach, focusing on outcomes and giving space and recognition for equal, independent and self-nominated voices of the community
- Ensure community representation is supported and maintained through the provision of resources for community forums and community platforms. Funding should be ring-fenced for this work
- Support different forms of consultation
- Address the specific supports required for some groups, as they experience particular barriers to participation, e.g. women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and older people. Supports to enable participation such as childcare, accessible transport and personal assistants are crucial in this regard
- Provide more predevelopment and capacity building supports to enable people to participate
- Proof consultations for 'active' target group representation
- Ensure recognition of, and support for, creative methods of participation, e.g. through arts, news media and other media. This should include visual and audio versions of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Section Five

Institutional Structures

5.1 Introduction

Defining roles in relation to rolling out the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion and monitoring its implementation presents significant challenges that require constant dialogue and efficient 'evidence-based' policy making.

Seminar participants gave the perspective that implementing the Plan requires linking the targets to the Annual Budgets. This would involve a statement of the financial commitment being allocated to the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, an identification of the impact of the Budget on wealth and income distribution, and actions to achieve the targets set.

Four key issues regarding institutional change to implement the Plan were highlighted:

- The need for greater strategic co-ordination between agencies
- The need for anti-poverty strategies to be localised
- The need to involve the community and voluntary sector in decision-making and monitoring
- Data and research (indicator/monitoring) issues.

5.1.1 Strategic Co-ordination

Implementing poverty proofing, and integrating equality proofing, remain key challenges to achieving the targets of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. Meeting these challenges will involve working to embed proofing in the day-to-day work of Government

departments. It will also require vertical and horizontal linkages across departments and agencies to ensure that various policies work together to promote inclusion, through 'joined up' Government, rather than having contradictory policies in place. The need to provide Government departments and agencies with the opportunity to indicate what they are doing to achieve the targets was highlighted.

5.1.2 Local Implementation

Local implementation of the policies in the Plan is important and could be addressed through the provision of guidance for local authorities to ensure that agencies are targeting services to meet local needs. This will require translating policies at the national level to address micro-level needs. The Strategic Policy Committees could have a role to play here. There was also a view that each County should have a National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, with specific targets, and that the Social Inclusion Measures Working Groups should identify data collection issues at county level.

The need to customise indicators to local contexts and to the needs of specific groups was also raised. A model of a county anti-poverty strategy could be developed, involving all actors and consulting with the most vulnerable. The development of the strategy could include the following elements:

- Awareness raising
- Training
- Identification of local leadership
- Local relevance
- Local implementation and consultation mechanisms.

5.1.3 *Mobilising All Actors*

Resources are required to support the participation of socially excluded people and improve their participation in governance. Evidence-based decision making needs to take account of the knowledge and views of the NGO/anti-poverty sector in a meaningful way. The involvement of the NGO/anti-poverty sector in monitoring and reviewing progress was recommended. The objectives of the Plan, and the most effective use of resources, will only be achieved if, in consultation with those experiencing poverty, the barriers to achieving the targets can be speedily identified and addressed. In undertaking the consultation, it was highlighted that information provision and awareness raising is required before consultation so that people and groups can consider the issues beforehand and make an informed input to the consultation process.

The mechanisms for the delivery of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion are crucial. It was suggested that there is a need to assign roles and responsibilities for the implementation of activities, including 'mobilising all stakeholders' and ensuring effective participation and consultation.

5.1.4 *Poverty and Social Inclusion Indicators*

There was a broad welcome for the common EU social inclusion indicators. Their application in a national policy context was seen to have two main benefits: first, the indicators can help to interpret national poverty trends in a comparative context, allowing us to track convergence and divergence with other member states; second the indicators

can be used to strengthen the current range of poverty reduction targets, many of which are hard to measure or tend to emphasise policy inputs over outputs.

At the same time, it was important to develop national-specific indicators to capture particular issues. This was highlighted in regard to housing where affordability, accommodation quality, homelessness and access to housing were identified as important policy concerns. Indebtedness meanwhile was highlighted as a complementary measure of financial welfare. In addition, the scope to incorporate the predominant Irish measure of poverty (income poverty and deprivation of basic necessities) in a common EU set of indicators should be explored.

It was recognised that indicators required robust data sources to enable regular and consistent reporting. The potential of secondary and administrative data sources to complement dedicated surveys such as the ECHP was highlighted. It was also accepted that monitoring the situation of vulnerable and minority groups, such as Travellers and migrants, would require the production of specific data.

There was also an emphasis on the application of indicators to track poverty trends in various spatial milieux: urban, rural and local. Existing national data sources curtailed detailed geographical analyses of poverty and alternative approaches were required, including the development of geo-coding and local databases.

APPENDIX 1: AGENDA FOR CONSULTATION SEMINARS

1 AGENDA FOR NATIONAL CONSULTATION SEMINAR ON MIGRANTS, ETHNIC MINORITIES AND TRAVELLERS – ACTION ON POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

- Chair:** Anastacia Crickley, Chairperson, National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
- 9.30** Registration
- 10.05** Welcome
Helen Johnston, Director, Combat Poverty
- 10.10** **Overview of the NAP/incl**
Gerry Mangan, Director
Office for Social Inclusion
- 10.20** **Panel: Key poverty issues and challenges**
- Migrants: Bridget Shirto, Migrants Rights Centre Ireland
 - Emigrants: Anthony Finn, Emigrant Advice
 - Ethnic Minorities: Salome Mbugua, Akina Dada Wa Afrika, and
 - Travellers: David Joyce, Irish Traveller Movement
- 11.00** Break
- 11.15** Roundtable Discussion
- 12.20** **Setting the context and common issues**
Philip Watt, Director, National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
- 12.45** Open Forum
- 1pm** Lunch
- 2pm** Workshops
- 1 Emigrants and returning emigrants
 - 2 Immigrants
 - 3 Ethnic minorities
 - 4 Travellers
 - 5 Promoting participation and involvement of diverse communities
- 3.30** Break
- 3.45** Feedback from workshops
- 4pm** Open Forum
- 4.15** Next Steps and Close

2 AGENDA FOR NATIONAL CONSULTATION SEMINAR ON QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES

9.30am Registration

Morning Session

Chair: Mary Doyle, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach

10.00am Welcome - Gerry Mangan, Director, Office for Social Inclusion

10.05am **Overview of the day and background to NAP/incl**

Helen Johnston, Director, Combat Poverty Agency

10.25am Questions and Clarifications

10.30am **Rights and Standards**

Dr Rory O'Donnell, Director, National Economic and Social Council

10.50am Questions and Clarifications

11am **BREAK**

11.15am **The Quality Customer Service Initiative**

Michael Moore, Assistant Principal, Department of the Taoiseach

11.35am **Developing Quality Standards - a case study**

Mary Van Lieshout, Head of Research and Standards Development,
National Disability Authority

11.55am Questions and Clarifications

12.00pm Facilitated round table discussions

12.45pm Open Forum

1.00pm **LUNCH**

Afternoon session

Chairs: Gerry Mangan, Director/Marie O'Neill, Principal Officer
Office for Social Inclusion

2.10pm **Rights and Standards - an NGO perspective**

Ray Dooley, Chief Executive, Children's Rights Alliance

2.30pm WORKSHOPS

- 1 Social Welfare
- 2 Health
- 3 Housing
- 4 Education
- 5 Employment
- 6 Participation

3.45pm **BREAK**

4.00pm Report back - key issues from workshops

4.15pm Next steps and close

3 AGENDA FOR REGIONAL SEMINAR SERIES ON NATIONAL ACTION PLAN AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN BUNDORAN, LIMERICK, KILKENNY AND BALBRIGGAN

A common agenda was used for the seminar series. Workshop contributors varied across the four seminars as these were drawn from local and regional service providers and anti-poverty groups.

10.00am Registration

10.30am Welcome

10.35am **Overview & Introduction to NAPincl**

Helen Johnston, Director, Combat Poverty Agency

11.00am Questions & Clarification

11.05am **Socio Economic Analysis & Strategies to address poverty**

Gerry Mangan, Director, Office for Social Inclusion

11.25am Small Group Discussion

12.30 Plenary

12.45pm **Ireland NAPincl – Key Issues and Challenges**

Robin Hanan, European Anti-Poverty Network

1.00pm **Lunch**

2.00pm Facilitated workshops:

1. Employment and Income Support
2. Children/disadvantaged families
3. Older people
4. People with Disabilities
5. Rural Disadvantage
6. Urban Poverty

3.30pm **Break**

3.45pm Workshop Feedback - Key Points

3.55pm Open Forum

4.10pm Next steps

Marie O'Neill, Principal Officer, Office for Social Inclusion

4.15pm Close of Seminar



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An Oifig um Chuimsiú Sóisialta



Combat Poverty
*working for the prevention
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