



**Office for Social Inclusion**

An Oifig um Chuimsiú Sóisialta

# Office for Social Inclusion Annual report 2005



Ireland

[www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie)

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## FOREWORD FROM THE MINISTER

Combating poverty and social exclusion is one of the major challenges to be addressed by any State and society. Ireland, together with its fellow EU Member States, pledged in Lisbon in 2000 to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010. Ireland is making significant strides towards achieving that goal. In less than a decade at least 250,000 people have been lifted out of deprivation and hardship as a result of concentrated and targeted measures and supports. Lives and living standards have been greatly improved. We have travelled some way towards eradicating the blight of poverty but the road ahead has many challenges to be confronted before we can satisfy ourselves that poverty has finally been consigned to history.

The causes and nature of poverty and inequality, as we all have come to realise, are varied and complex. Since 1997 a strategic process has been put in place which, incorporated into a similar EU process since 2001, facilitates and promotes multi-faceted, coordinated and integrated policies to meet clear objectives and targets for combating poverty. But policies, however well designed and resourced, will only achieve optimal outcomes if they are implemented effectively. Promoting greater coordination and integration at national and local levels is a core part of the strategic process, which also includes regular and structured monitoring and evaluation. Consulting with the stakeholders, not least those experiencing poverty, is also fundamental to the effectiveness of the process.

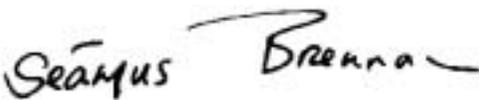
The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI), in my Department, has a major role in facilitating and promoting the coordination that the strategy requires, including the national, regional, local and international dimensions. I welcome this Annual Report, which outlines the progress made in 2005. The OSI website - [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie) provides detail on all aspects of their work and more generally on the strides being made by Ireland to combat poverty and social exclusion.

In the period since 1997, when the strategic process began, considerable progress has been made. For example, the number of unemployed fell by almost half from 171,000 to 80,000 persons - a reduction in the unemployment rate from 10.4 per cent to 4.4 per cent, one of the lowest in the EU. There have been major increases in expenditure and investment in services, with expenditure on social welfare alone more than doubling from €5.7 billion in 1997 to €13.6 billion this year (2006). Incomes, also, have generally benefited from substantial tax reductions. Between 2001 and 2006, the old age or State pension has increased by 55.5 per cent, well ahead of the 16.4 per cent increase in the Consumer Price Index, and the 28.2 per cent rise in gross industrial average earnings.

The best route out of poverty for many is employment. Key strategic priorities now are to remove the barriers to opportunities for work and to create more jobs. This approach has been the basis for a major strategic initiative, began in 2005, and directed towards households headed by lone parents or where there are large families. A similar approach is relevant to other groups, such as people with disabilities and older persons, who may wish to work. For this approach to work successfully it has to include more investment in child care, in education and training, in transport and in all the supports needed to enable people obtain and retain employment that pays in real terms. At the same time we must invest even more to bring essential services, such as health and care of the elderly, up to the levels that other developed countries have achieved.

These pivotal priorities will be comprehensively addressed in the next National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the National Development Plan which are being prepared. Both will also be greatly informed by the partnership talks and the findings of the consultation process coordinated by the OSI during 2005.

I wish to thank the Director, staff of the Office for Social Inclusion and all who work with them for the progress made during 2005. I look forward to significant further progress in 2006 and into the future, under both the new National Action Plan and the National Development Plan, as we strive to finally eliminate poverty and create a more inclusive and a more equal society.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Seamus Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Seamus Brennan TD**  
Minister for Social Affairs

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I am happy to introduce this second annual report of the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) on the work of the Office for 2005.

Our first annual report incorporated a detailed overview of the progress achieved during the first year (2003/2004) of the current National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, (July 2003 - June 2005). Our main focus during the first half of 2005 was on evaluating the implementation of the plan. A report on the evaluation, submitted to the EU in June 2005 included an update on further developments planned up to mid 2006. Copies are available from the Office and are also on the OSI website.

This annual Report, therefore, concentrates mainly on the work of the Office during 2005. The evaluation process during the first half of the year afforded a welcome opportunity to review the appropriateness of the commitments and targets entered into, the effectiveness of administrative structures, procedures for coordination, and, ultimately, the outcomes achieved. The evaluation process involved the key stakeholders, both Governmental and non- Governmental, including representatives of the social partners, people experiencing poverty and those working with them.

The evaluation showed that the NAP/inclusion process is working, especially in terms of the determined commitment to meet the objectives and targets, and the significant success being achieved in doing so. However, the process also identified where significant further progress is needed and the key challenges to be addressed, many of which were summarised in the EU summary analysis of Ireland's performance, which is reproduced in this report

Another major task for OSI in 2005 was the coordination of a nationwide consultation with stakeholders on the development of Ireland's next NAP/inclusion for 2006 to 2008. This commenced in September with requests for written submissions, followed by a series of regional seminars. A report on the outcome of the consultation was presented to the Social Inclusion Forum in February 2006 jointly organised by the National Economic and Social Forum and OSI. This Forum proved once more to be very successful in articulating the needs of those who are vulnerable and the priorities for meeting these needs.

Making a decisive impact on poverty requires an "across the board" coordinated approach to tackling the more deep seated challenges presented by the situations of certain vulnerable groups. Among such groups are lone parents and low income households with large families. OSI had a key role in a cross-departmental review of the barriers to employment and training faced by many lone parents and parents with large families. Details of this initiative are outlined later in the report.

It is becoming increasingly evident that promoting social inclusion is not just a matter for those Departments and agencies responsible for employment and social policies. Other apparently unrelated policies can also have an impact, positive or negative. During the course of the year the Office undertook a review of the poverty proofing guidelines

for use by all Departments and agencies to assess the impact of their policies on poverty and social exclusion. These have now been renamed *Poverty Impact Assessment* guidelines to reflect their more developed role and will be rolled out to all Departments during 2006.

Monitoring, evaluation and further policy development requires the necessary data to assess and measure progress and effectiveness. It also requires research to continually identify the causes of poverty and social exclusion and the best policy approaches to achieving effective outcomes. The Office continued to prioritise its support and coordinating functions in these key areas in 2005.

Another key support function is communications. Both good governance and transparency require that as far as possible all stakeholders are well informed on all aspects of the process. The OSI website, which has been up and running since the beginning of 2005, is making a major contribution to achieving our communications objectives both nationally and internationally.

The need to adopt a strategic approach to combating poverty and social exclusion is recognised internationally, especially by the European Union, Council of Europe, OECD and UN. The contribution being made by these organisations includes facilitating exchanges between member states of knowledge, analyses, expertise, experience, and the many good practices developed in meeting common challenges. A brief outline of this work in 2005 is given in what was a particularly significant year internationally in this sphere of policy. There is also a growing consensus on the economic impact of poverty, with the OECD, for example, pointing out that “...poverty and inequality are evidence of an inefficient society, which wastes human resources, opportunities and life chances...(and they)... will also weigh heavily on our capacity to sustain economic growth for years to come”.

This underlines the full nature of the challenge facing not just the State, but all of society, in combating poverty and social exclusion. Good governance and transparency, with the effective involvement of all stakeholders, which has been a key focus of the work of OSI especially during 2005, is a core objective in meeting that challenge.

I wish to thank all with whom we work on that objective for their support in 2005.

I would like to thank particularly all the staff of the Office for their dedication, commitment, and hard work during the year.

**Gerry Mangan**  
Director, Office for Social Inclusion

## WELCOME TO THE OFFICE FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION (OSI)



The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) is the Government office, located in the Department of Social and Family Affairs, with overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving Ireland's National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion).

The NAP/inclusion process recognises that the causes of poverty and its effects are multi-faceted and require an integrated, multi policy response at national, regional and local levels. The current National Action Plan (2003-2005) incorporates the strategic approach to tackling poverty set out in the original National Anti-Poverty Strategy and also reflects the social inclusion commitments agreed in Sustaining Progress - Ireland's National Social Partnership Agreement.

## THE STAFF OF THE OFFICE



**Gerry Mangan**  
Director



**Orlaigh Quinn**  
Principal



### **Cathy Barron**

#### **Assistant Principal**

Cathy represents OSI on the NAPS/Health working group and works with Darren and Lorcan in the areas of responsibility outlined below.



### **Eamonn Moran**

#### **Assistant Principal**

Eamonn represents OSI on the EU Social Exclusion Programme (SEP) Committee and works with Ciaran, Stephen and Peter in the areas of responsibility outlined below.



### **Peter Duffy**

#### **Higher Executive Officer**

Peter's areas of responsibility include

##### **Liaison officer to -**

- Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (including Travellers)
- Department of Finance
- National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism

##### **Supports OSI management in the area of -**

- Social Partnership Initiatives
- International Fora
- Non EU

##### **Co-ordination -**

- Social Partnership

##### **Administrative Duties -**

- Liaison with the Combat Poverty Agency



**Darren Malone**  
**Higher Executive Officer**

Darren's areas of responsibility include -

**Liaison officer to -**

- Department of Social and Family Affairs
- Department of Arts and Culture

**Secretariat support for -**

- Management Group of Assistant Secretaries (MGAS)

**Co-ordination -**

- Production of NAP/Inclusion 2006-08
- Annual Social Inclusion Forum



**Lorcan O'Malley**  
**Higher Executive Officer**

Lorcan's areas of responsibility include -

**Liaison officer to -**

- Department of Health and Children
- Office of the Minister for Children
- Department of the Taoiseach (E inclusion and Standards of Access)
- Department of Transport

**Support OSI management in the area of -**

- Communication Strategy/Website
- Support for liaison officers

**Co-ordination -**

- 2005 OSI Annual Report



### **Stephen Hanna**

#### **Administrative Officer**

Stephen's areas of responsibility include -

#### **Liaison officer to -**

- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
- Local Authorities

NDP/CSF - current and future

#### **Supports OSI management in the areas of -**

- Poverty Impact Assessment and other proofing

#### **International Fora -**

- EU

#### **Secretariat support for -**

- Social Inclusion Consultative Group (SICG)



### **Ciaran Diamond**

#### **Administrative Officer**

Ciaran's areas of responsibility include -

#### **Liaison officer to -**

- Department of Education and Science
- Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

#### **Supports OSI management in the areas of -**

- Data Strategy

#### **International Fora -**

- British Irish Council

#### **Secretariat support for -**

- Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

### **Ann Murphy**

#### **Clerical Officer**

Ann's areas of responsibility include -

- Providing clerical support to all OSI staff
- Arranging and supporting the co-ordination, production, launch and dissemination of reports, plans and correspondence.
- Processing financial payments
- Arranging meetings

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF THE OFFICE?

1. Co-ordination of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.
2. Monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the plan.
3. Development of support functions to underpin the process e.g.
  - Data strategy
  - Poverty Impact Assessment
  - Research
4. Supporting regional and local implementation.
5. Implementing a communication strategy and a consultation process in relation to the NAP/inclusion.
6. Facilitating exchanges, good practices and reporting requirements at international level.

### 1. Co-ordination

The NAP/inclusion process involves the development, by EU Member States, of strategic plans which identify trends and major challenges in relation to poverty and social exclusion. It incorporates common objectives agreed at EU level, sets key targets from some of those objectives and sets out the implementation measures across relevant policy areas to meet the objectives and targets. The process also involves the use of indicators, some agreed at EU level, to measure progress in achieving policy targets. The Office for Social Inclusion works with relevant Government Departments to co-ordinate this process, identifying priorities to combat poverty more effectively, especially in the light of emerging trends and challenges. Our work also involves promoting a co-ordinated, integrated approach across a number of policy areas to provide more effective support to certain vulnerable groups.

A key priority in this area for 2005 was the organisation of an extensive consultation process to inform the development of Ireland's next National Action Plan which will cover the period 2006-2008.

### 2. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring implementation of the social inclusion objectives and targets contained in the National Action Plan is an ongoing part of the OSI's work with Departments. Evaluation involves determining, towards the end of the period of the plan, whether implementation of the policy measures is achieving the desired outcomes, as measured by indicators. A key task for the Office in 2005 was the production of an implementation report for the EU in June, setting out progress achieved under the 2003-2005 NAP/inclusion in meeting the objectives and targets and in achieving the desired outcomes.

### 3. Support Functions

The OSI co-ordinates the following support functions designed to facilitate and to assist the process:

**Data strategy** - the aim is to progressively develop systems to ensure that all the necessary data is available for monitoring, evaluation, policy prioritising, targeting and overall policy development.

**Poverty Impact Assessment** - a review of existing poverty proofing guidelines was undertaken during 2005, involving consultation with key stakeholders and increased co-ordination with similar processes, such as gender and equality proofing in consultation with the Equality Authority, the Combat Poverty Agency and other interested bodies.

**Research** - OSI worked with relevant organisations to ensure that research on the causes of poverty and social exclusion and on policy outcomes was commissioned and disseminated to inform policy decision-making

The OSI works closely with various agencies including the Combat Poverty Agency, the Economic and Social Research Institute, the Central Statistics Office, the Family Support Agency, the National Children's Office and the Equality Authority in developing these support functions.

#### **4. Regional and Local Implementation**

Many of the measures to combat poverty and social exclusion are implemented at regional and local level. Effective implementation requires co-ordination to ensure that local variations on the nature, extent and causes of poverty are taken into account in both policy design and implementation. The office is working with the Department of the Environment, Housing and Local Government, the Department of Health and Children, other Departments with regional and local structures, and with the Combat Poverty Agency, to develop a more effective focus on the regional and local implementation of the NAP/inclusion.

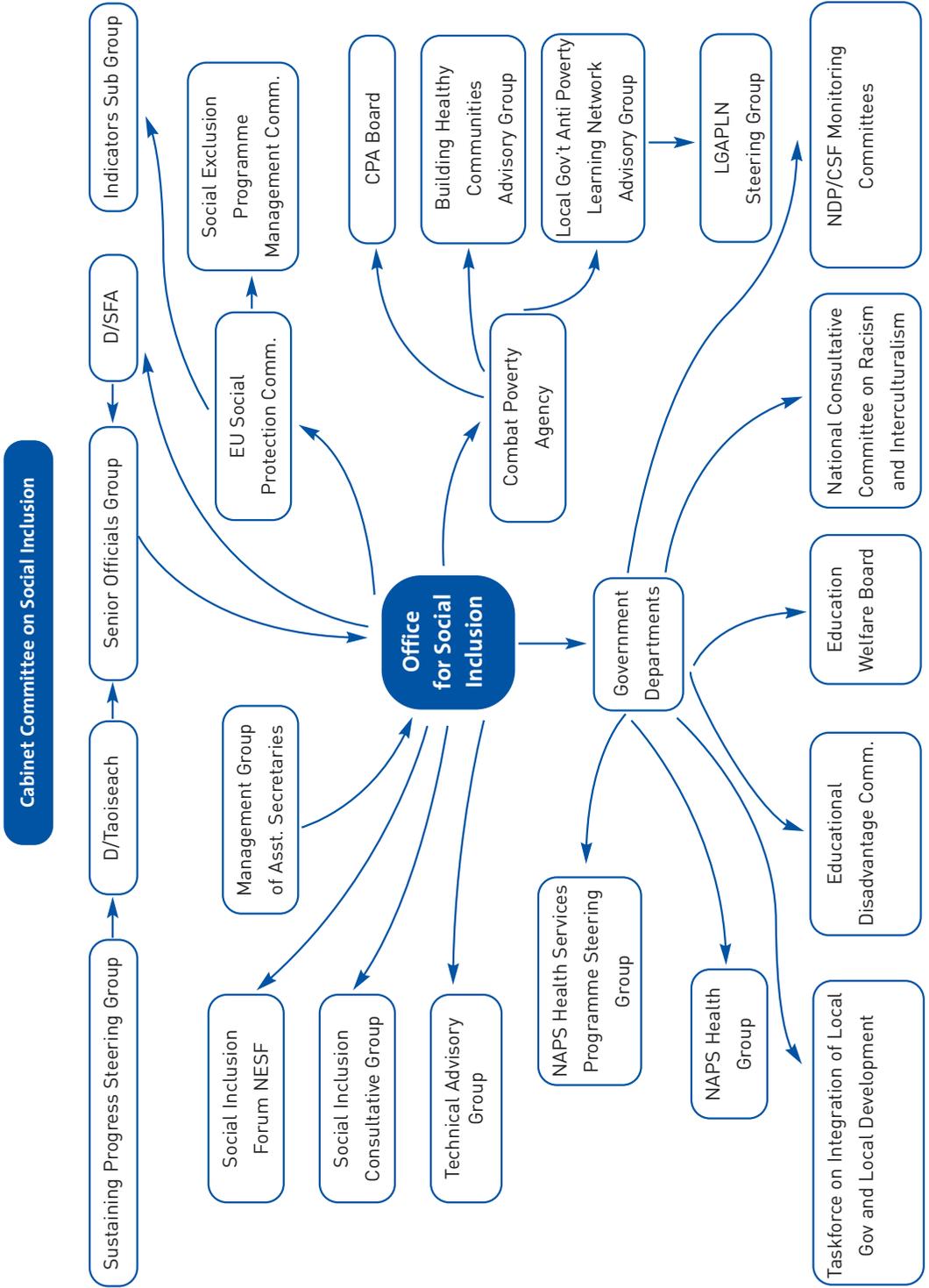
#### **5. Communications and Consultation**

Effective communication on the trends and challenges in relation to poverty, and on the ongoing strategic processes for tackling it is essential to achieve the transparency necessary for all involved. Key stakeholders include all those within the governmental system, the Social Partners, the community and voluntary sector, the academic and research communities, the media, the wider public and, above all, people who are experiencing poverty. A communications strategy to meet this objective was finalised and implemented during 2005.

#### **6. International Dimension to our work**

The eradication of poverty is a major priority EU wide and beyond. There is much to be gained from sharing the experience of other countries in tackling this common challenge, and from the policy analysis and research findings of international organisations. During 2005, officials of the OSI participated in the work of relevant Committees of the EU, the Council of Europe, the OECD and the UN. OSI also participated in the EU Community Action Programme to combat social exclusion 2002-2006 and in the work of the Social Inclusion strand of the British-Irish Council. Details on activities in 2005 are provided elsewhere in the report.

# WORKING TOGETHER ON SOCIAL INCLUSION NAPS / SOCIAL INCLUSION STRUCTURES



## HOW DOES THE OSI WORK?

### > **Institutional arrangements.**

Making the NAP/inclusion and its further development happen requires the direct involvement of a network of different entities within the Governmental and Oireachtas system. The institutional arrangements within which OSI operates are:

- > Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development;
- > Minister for Social and Family Affairs and Department's Management Advisory Committee;
- > Oireachtas Committees;
- > Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion;
- > Management Group of Assistant Secretaries;
- > Social Inclusion Units located in Government Departments;
- > Social Inclusion Consultative Group - representatives of Social Partners;
- > Social Inclusion Forum
- > National Development Plan (NDP)/Community Support Framework (CSF) Monitoring Committees; and
- > Technical Advisory Group.

### **Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development:**

This Committee, chaired by the Taoiseach and composed of relevant Ministers, gives overall strategic direction to the development of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion and ensures that their implementation is regularly monitored and promoted at the highest level. It is supported in this work by the Senior Officials Group and the Management Group of Assistant Secretaries.

### **Minister for Social and Family Affairs and Department of Social and Family Affairs' Management Advisory Committee:**

The OSI regularly reports on developments to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, who has specific responsibility for the office and for reporting on its activities to the Oireachtas (see also below). The OSI Director reports to the Department's Management Advisory Committee, of which he is a member.

### **Oireachtas Committees:**

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs may be called to present regular progress reports on the implementation of the National Action Plan to the Joint Oireachtas Committees on Social and Family Affairs, and on European Affairs.

### **Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion:**

This Group is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach. It maintains a broad overview of social inclusion issues and brings emerging topics to the attention of the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. It also deals with policy developments relating to meeting the objectives of social inclusion strategies.

### **Management Group of Assistant Secretaries:**

This group, chaired by the OSI, is composed of high level representatives of the key Departments involved in combating poverty and social exclusion. It is responsible for overseeing the work of OSI and the implementation of the National Action Plan generally.

### **Social Inclusion Units/Liaison Officers:**

These are established in key Government Departments and co-ordinate their Department's contribution to the process in liaison with the OSI and under the general direction of members of the Management Group of Assistant Secretaries.

### **Social Partnership - Social Inclusion Consultative Group:**

This group constitutes an important vehicle for involving the social partners in the NAP/inclusion process. It is co-chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and the OSI and comprises representatives of the relevant Government Departments, the social partners, community and voluntary sector and certain statutory agencies, e.g. the Combat Poverty Agency, the Equality Authority and the Economic and Social Research Institute. The Group meets at least twice a year to offer its advice and observations.

### **Social Inclusion Forum**

The Social Inclusion Forum was established as part of the revised NAPS institutional structures for monitoring and evaluating the NAPS to give individual members of the public and representatives of the community and voluntary sector an opportunity to inform and be informed about the NAP/inclusion process. The forum met for the first time in 2003, and held its second meeting in January 2005.

### **National Development Plan (NDP)/Community Support Framework (CSF) Monitoring Committees:**

The OSI has responsibility for supporting the social inclusion horizontal principle within the NDP/CSF. To assist the progression of this process and generally increase the social inclusion focus of the NDP, the OSI participates on all NDP Monitoring Committees and works with the Combat Poverty Agency, in providing technical assistance.

### **Technical Advisory Group:**

This group assists the OSI in the development and implementation of an appropriate Data Strategy to underpin the NAP/inclusion process. Membership includes representatives from key Government Departments, the Central Statistics Office, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Economic and Social Research Institute and the Equality Authority.

### **The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA):**

This is a statutory body working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion through advice to Government, developing innovative anti-poverty measures, examining the nature, causes and extent of poverty in Ireland and promoting a greater public understanding of poverty and social exclusion. The OSI meets regularly and works closely with the Agency, particularly in relation to poverty research, promoting regional and local government involvement in the process, EU social inclusion projects, communications and public consultation. The OSI also works as the Department of Social and Family Affairs liaison with the CPA in relation to Board and financial and media matters.

The following are examples of work areas on which the OSI and CPA are closely involved (details on these are provided elsewhere in this report);

- > Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network
- > Building Healthy Communities programme
- > NAPS and Health Project Planning Team
- > Community Action Programme to combat Social Exclusion
- > Social Inclusion in the National Development Plan.
- > Poverty Impact Assessment
- > Social Inclusion Forum
- > Social Inclusion Consultative Group
- > Research including the NAP/inclusion Technical Advisory Group
- > Working Group to review the income support arrangements for lone parents

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

- 2nd NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, co-funded and organised by OSI and NESF, held in January in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham
- Implementation of revised and strengthened NAP/inclusion monitoring and evaluation procedures in close liaison with senior officials and liaison officers in relevant government departments
- Report on implementation of Ireland's 2nd NAP/inclusion presented to Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and submitted to EU Commission in June as part of EU Open Method of Co-Ordination
- Development and monitoring of indicators to measure and report on impact of social inclusion in the National Development Plan
- Examination of poverty measurement in Ireland was progressed through the Technical Advisory Group, which assists the Office for Social Inclusion. A National Seminar on the subject was held in September. Report to Cabinet Committee on social inclusion in November who requested that further work on outstanding issues continue in 2006.
- Review of poverty proofing guidelines completed following a wide consultation process, including a national seminar held in October. New national guidelines on Poverty Impact Assessment introduced by year end.
- Communications Strategy introduced including a dedicated OSI social inclusion website and an OSI recognisable brand/identity
- OSI made a major contribution to the work of a DSFA Working Group established in March to review income supports for lone parents (OPFP), and to the work of the Senior Official's sub-committee set up to examine and report to Cabinet on obstacles to employment for lone parents. The Cabinet Committee agreed to publish reports of both working groups as part of a consultation process to be held in early 2006.
- Written consultation process for the development of Ireland's next National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion 2006-2008) launched by OSI in September. Seven public consultation seminars held throughout the country during November/December 2005.



MAKING IT HAPPEN

The background is a solid light blue color. In the lower right quadrant, there are several overlapping, curved shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from a medium blue to a dark blue. These shapes create a sense of depth and movement, resembling stylized waves or abstract architectural elements.

## A. MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

### **Reporting to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion**

The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion (CCSI), which is chaired by the Taoiseach, brings together all relevant Ministers and Ministers of State to provide a strategic focus on tackling the problems of poverty, social exclusion, disadvantage and marginalisation in Irish society. The CCSI met on six occasions during 2005.

The work of the Committee is supported by a Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach, which meets prior to each Cabinet Committee meeting, providing a mechanism for senior civil servants to consider cross cutting social inclusion issues.

Items discussed at these meetings during 2005, which related to the work of the Office for Social Inclusion included, Lone Parents, Poverty Measurement/Data issues and the implementation and ongoing development of Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion).

A sub-group of the Senior Officials Group, comprising the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Finance and the Office for Social Inclusion, were tasked with examining obstacles to employment faced by lone parents - a group identified as being at particular risk of poverty and social exclusion. A second group, convened by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to feed into the interdepartmental review, carried out an examination of the One Parent Family Payment - the Department's main income support for lone parents. Regular updates on progress were given to the Cabinet Committee and, towards the end of 2005, the Cabinet Committee agreed to the publication of their reports and to a formal consultation process with stakeholders on obstacles to employment for lone parents, which will take place in 2006.

On the issue of poverty measurement, the Cabinet Committee considered an alternative approach to the measurement of poverty developed through the OSI Technical Advisory Group. It was decided that work on this issue should continue, drawing on the latest EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) results.

In June 2005 the Committee considered the Implementation and Update report on the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003 - 2005 (NAP/inclusion). This report was produced by OSI, in liaison with Government Departments, and provided an analysis and evaluation of the implementation of Ireland's second NAP/inclusion under the open method of coordination (OMC) for the period 2003 -2005. It also gave an update on the key policies and priorities for the continued implementation of the strategy during 2006.

## A. MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS

### **The Social Inclusion Consultative Group**

The Social Inclusion Consultative Group (SICG) brings together senior government officials, representatives of the social partners, the community and voluntary sector, the ESRI, the Combat Poverty Agency and other stakeholders on a periodic basis to advise on issues related to the development, implementation and evaluation of Ireland's National Action Plan.

The SICG met on two occasions during 2005. At its meeting in early June, it discussed the development of Ireland's *NAP/inclusion 2003-2005 Implementation and Update Report* to the EU, which was due to be submitted to Brussels later that month. The views of SICG members contributed to the finalisation of the report (see pages 23-24 for the Commission's comments on Ireland's implementation report).

Other items discussed at the June meeting included the development of the OSI Data Strategy and the proposed review of the Poverty Proofing Guidelines (now known as Poverty Impact Assessment). The OSI communications strategy, including the OSI website, was also discussed.

In October 2005, SICG focused on the OSI Data Strategy and the review of the Poverty Impact Assessment Guidelines. The other major item discussed was the approach to be taken to the development of Ireland's next National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2006-2008).

## A. MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROGRESS



### Developing Ireland's Implementation Report to the EU Commission

Under the EU's Open Method of Co-Ordination (OMC) on Social Inclusion, all Member States were required to submit a report on progress achieved in relation to the social inclusion targets contained in their 2003-2005 National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion, by June 2005.

The OSI coordinated preparation of this report. This was the culmination of a concentrated monitoring and evaluation process during the first half of 2005, involving over fifty senior officials in seven key Government Departments. The report was also informed by the social partners through the NAPS Social Inclusion Consultative Group and by people experiencing poverty and their representatives, through the annual NAPS Social Inclusion Forum which took place in January 2005.

In preparing the report, the OSI conducted an evaluation of 58 specific targets and commitments contained in the 2003-2005 NAP/inclusion and found that 6 had already been achieved and 45 were in progress, with limited or insufficient progress on the remaining 7.

**Table : Summary Analysis**

Progress on targets and commitments	Number
Achieved	6
In progress	45
Limited progress	4
Insufficient progress	2
Unknown	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>58</b>

Thirty of the targets/commitments were time-bound and an analysis of the likelihood of these being achieved within the specified timeframe concluded that 8 would be met, 15 were likely to be met, 2 were unlikely to be met and 5 would not be met.

The report noted that, during the period since 2003, Ireland's high levels of economic growth had translated into high levels of employment participation - particularly among

women, and low unemployment - particularly long term unemployment. Growing net immigration had replaced high involuntary emigration, and there had been major improvements in standards of living, resulting particularly from an increase in two income households. Significant improvements in services had been made across the board but, further investment will be required in the years ahead to bridge the gap with standards in other developed countries.

Those most at risk of poverty included families with children, especially lone parents and larger families, people with disabilities and older people living alone. Travellers, migrants or ethnic minorities, and people living in disadvantaged urban and rural areas were also identified as particularly vulnerable.

As part of the EU's monitoring and evaluation process, upon submission of their Implementation Reports, Member States then met with EU Commission officials to discuss their findings, prior to a composite report being prepared by the Commission.

The following is an extract from the Commission's composite report commenting on Ireland's social inclusion implementation report.

## IRELAND

**Situation and key trends:** Ireland's performance is characterised by sustained economic growth (GDP +5.4% in 2004), an improving employment rate and continued low levels of unemployment (4.5%) and long-term unemployment (1.6%). In this context, inactivity levels are relatively high (30.5%, close to the EU average), and Ireland is increasingly dependent on migrant workers to meet the demand for labour. Significant increases in incomes from employment, and particularly the growth of two-income households, contributes to the proportion at risk of poverty (21%) remaining amongst the highest in the EU, with elderly people, larger families and lone parents particularly at risk. The moderate level of coverage of income-related pension provision is reflected in the average incomes of older people (about 60% of that of the population aged 0-64). Expenditure on social protection has increased substantially in real terms in recent years, and has also increased as a proportion of GDP - from 15% (2001) to 16.5% (2003) (EU 28% in 2003 - ESSPROS data). Life expectancy (75.8 and 80.7 years for males and females in 2003) is about average as is healthy life expectancy (63.4 and 65.4 years for males and females in 2003). Total health expenditure as a percentage of GDP (7.3% in 2002 - WHO-HFA database) is below average, while per capita PPP\$ (2367 in 2002 - WHO-HFA database) is above average.

**Social inclusion:** Ireland has continued to follow the strategic approach set out in 2003, which takes into account the multi-dimensional and complex nature of poverty and social exclusion, and is centred on increased employment and employability and improvements in benefit levels and in access to services. A shift in emphasis towards addressing the issue of jobless households (and inactivity) is signalled in the 2005-06 update report. Progress across the range of 35 targets set out in the 2003-05 NAP has been variable. Increases in social security payments should ensure that the key income support target will be met while progress is also being made on reaching employment rate targets. A more mixed picture emerges in relation to other areas such as health and

education but the recent establishment of the Health Services Executive and the recent publication of an action plan on educational inclusion (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) are both potentially positive steps. As regards vulnerable groups, progress is particularly evident in relation to people with disabilities and the elderly, compared with other groups, notably Travellers. The absence of base-line data limits reporting capacity but efforts are underway to address these deficiencies. While progress is being made in raising awareness among policy makers of gender issues, continuing efforts are required to ensure that the gender dimension is fully taken into account in the development and implementation of policies.

**Challenges ahead:**

- > To sustain investment in service provision, notably in relation to childcare and elder care;
- > To address the high proportion at risk of poverty, affected particularly in recent years by increased employment and economic growth, and reflected in income disparities which are amongst the highest in the EU;
- > To ensure the ongoing adequacy of income support for pensioners, in order to avoid their exclusion in a context of rapidly rising general living standards and to achieve wider coverage by supplementary private schemes;
- > To increase healthcare capacity in various areas and improve service integration and coordination to improve patient flows.

## B. INVOLVING ALL ACTORS



Minister Seamus Brennan, Social Inclusion Forum

### Second NESF Social Inclusion Forum

The second annual NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, held on the 26th January 2005 in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, was attended by approximately 250 participants from the voluntary and community sector, the statutory sector, local representatives, and members of the NESF. The annual Forum provides people who are affected by poverty and social exclusion and their representatives with an

opportunity to contribute their views on, and experiences of, the implementation of the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion).

The 2005 Forum was chaired by Dr. Maureen Gaffney Chairperson NESF and included keynote addresses from Jerome Vignon, Director of the Social Protection and Social Integration Directorate, EU Commission, Professor Brian Nolan of the ESRI, Gerry Mangan, Director, Office for Social Inclusion and Robin Hanan Coordinator of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland. Minister Seamus Brennan attended the afternoon plenary and panel discussion and delivered the closing remarks.



Social Inclusion Forum

The Office for Social Inclusion co-funded the event with the NESF, and both bodies worked closely with the Combat Poverty Agency and the European Anti-Poverty Network in planning and organising the Forum.

Five workshops focused around the vulnerable groups identified in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy - Older People (Care Services in the Community); Children and Young People (Educational Disadvantage); People with Disabilities (Access to Education); Minority Groups (Strategies for Integration); and Women (Decision Making and Participation). Each of the workshops had both a national policy and a local focus and was specifically aimed at ensuring that participants were given the opportunity to have their voices heard.

The report on the 2005 Social Inclusion Forum containing the keynote addresses and workshop reports was presented to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and is available from the National Economic and Social Forum.



Gerry Mangan, Director

## C. DEVELOPING IRELAND'S NEXT NATIONAL ACTION PLAN AGAINST POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The consultation process for Ireland's next National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion) 2006-2008 commenced in September 2005, with newspaper advertisements in the national media seeking written submissions from organisations and individuals on the broad objectives and policy measures to be reflected in the Plan. Guidelines to assist in the preparation of views were available from the OSI. Submissions were also invited via the OSI website - [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie).



Consultation seminar for National Action Plan

In total, 81 submissions were received from individuals and organisations. The majority of submissions were made by national networks or national voluntary groups (31), and local, community or regional groups (15). The next largest area of submissions came from public bodies (11), local authorities (6) and from within third-level institutions (5). Nine submissions were received from individuals, two from religious bodies and two from trade unions.

The written stage of the consultation process was followed by a series of seven regional and national seminars organised by the Office during November and December 2005 in Dublin, Carlow, Cork, Limerick, Mullingar, Carrick on Shannon and Donegal. The seminars were designed to facilitate the participation within the NAP/inclusion process of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion and those who work with them. A total of 512 people attended the seminars countrywide.



Consultation seminar for National Action Plan

The seminars sought participants' views on the local, regional and national implementation of the NAP/inclusion policies and measures and were structured in workshop format to elicit their views on the implementation and success to date of the current plan. Policy areas covered included employment, education and training, health and care, housing and income supports. Seminars also sought to explore the urban and rural dimensions of poverty, and gender issues.

Participants were asked to consider a number of key questions -

- > Identify what policies are working
- > Identify policies and measures that are not working/could be improved
- > Suggest ways that policies/measures could be improved
- > Identify priorities for change

A report of both stages of the consultation process was prepared independently for the Office by Sinead Riordan of the Policy Institute at Trinity College Dublin. This report formed an important input to the 3rd NAPS Social Inclusion Forum which took place in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham on the 15th February 2006 and was also available for the Social Partnership talks that began later that month. Copies of the report are available from the Office or online at [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie)

## D. GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

### OSI's Communications Strategy



Tackling poverty is not just a matter for the State, but for society as a whole. The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion) recognises therefore that there is a need for effective ongoing communication on the trends and challenges in relation to poverty and on the ongoing process for tackling it, both within Government and between Government and all stakeholders.

A key element of the work of the OSI during 2005 related to the development and implementation of a communications strategy to meet this objective.

In developing the communications strategy, OSI identified a wide range of stakeholders to be targeted.

These include:

- > Members of the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion;
- > Government Departments;
- > Social Partners and community and voluntary sector;
- > People experiencing poverty and other vulnerable groups;
- > EU and international bodies;
- > Research and academic communities.

### Objectives of the communications strategy

To provide:

- > Information on trends and challenges in relation to poverty;
- > A clear understanding of the role of Office for Social Inclusion, within the public sector and by key stakeholders including people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and society as a whole;
- > Increased awareness and knowledge, especially among people experiencing

poverty, about the existence of and progress on Ireland's NAP/inclusion and its requirements in the public sector and non-governmental organisations.

### Messages to be communicated

In developing the communications strategy it was decided to focus initially on a limited number of key messages as follows:

- The role and responsibilities of OSI as the office within Government tasked with developing, co-ordinating and driving the NAP/inclusion;
- The commitment made by EU countries including Ireland to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010;
- The NAP/inclusion process, providing a mechanism to deliver on this commitment by setting and meeting key objectives, targets and timescales;
- The responsibilities of individual Government Departments for the implementation of the NAP/inclusion;
- An ongoing update of the key achievements of the process to date;
- The importance of consultation with key stakeholders in implementing the NAP/inclusion;
- Improved awareness of where the NAP/inclusion fits in with other national and local processes.

### Implementing the Communications Strategy



The OSI website - [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie) was developed and launched by the Minister at the end of 2004. During the twelve months since its launch, the website has been widely used (over 300,000 hits) and significantly developed to reflect the growing emphasis at national, regional and local level on social inclusion in Ireland. It contains links with a broad range of organisations and bodies in Ireland and internationally and has come to be acknowledged as a valuable

resource and an important communications tool in raising awareness about Ireland's implementation of its strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion.



## E. RESEARCH/DATA

### OSI Data Strategy

The development of a data strategy is one of the key support functions for which the Office has responsibility. The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that the necessary data is available in a timely manner for monitoring, evaluation, prioritising, targeting and overall NAP/inclusion policy development. OSI coordinates this process with the assistance of a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) comprising representatives of relevant Government Departments, the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA), the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Equality Authority. The Office has sought to develop synergies between its work and related work being done through the Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics, including the development of departmental data strategies.

#### The main focus of work in 2005 was on:

- > Identifying and filling data gaps to facilitate improved targeting and measurement of progress under the NAP/inclusion process; and
- > Reviewing the method of poverty measurement used in the NAP/inclusion.

### Data Gaps

As part of the preparation of the Irish report to the EU in June 2005 on the implementation of the NAP/inclusion 2003-05, OSI engaged with Government Departments to address the issue of data availability, both in the context of the objectives and targets in the existing plan and in the NAP/inclusion 2006-2008. This engagement resulted in the identification of a number of areas where data deficiencies persist. A priority requirement for the preparation of the new plan will be to ensure that arrangements are in place towards remedying these deficiencies and filling remaining data gaps.

### Measurement of Poverty

OSI, at the request of the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, undertook a review of poverty measurement in 2005 with the assistance of the TAG. A national seminar, held in September 2005 as part of the review, addressed two main issues:

- (i) the basis on which consistent poverty is measured; and
- (ii) the concept of having a tiered approach to poverty measurement and targeting, rather than relying on any single measure.

This consideration was largely based on an analysis performed by the ESRI. The seminar was attended by a wide range of stakeholders, including policy makers from Government Departments, the social partners, representatives from the community and voluntary pillar, and other experts from both Ireland and abroad.

Reports on the outcomes of the work on poverty measurement were submitted for consideration to the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion and the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion to inform decisions on future approaches.

### **EU-SILC Results**

In January 2005, the first results from the new EU-SILC (Survey on Income and Living Conditions) were published, in respect of the year 2003. Because of methodological differences between the new survey and the earlier LIIS (Living In Ireland Survey), which was conducted at regular intervals between 1994 and 2001, it was not possible to directly compare the findings of the two surveys concerning the measurement of poverty, particularly the consistent poverty measure. The commencement of the new survey provided a further impetus to the work on poverty measurement performed by OSI. EU-SILC results for the year 2004, together with revised results for 2003, were published late in 2005. The results showed a fall in the level of consistent poverty to 6.8% in 2004 and a slight decrease in the 'at risk of poverty' level to 19.4%.

### **Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee**

OSI is also represented on the Indicators Sub-Group (ISG) of the Social Protection Committee in the EU. The ISG is responsible for developing EU indicators concerning poverty and social inclusion as part of the Open Method of Co-ordination, which facilitates Member State co-operation on social protection and social inclusion policies. In 2005, the main areas for indicator development were in relation to the identification of poverty traps in social protection systems and the issue of 'making work pay'. In 2006 common deprivation indicators based on the EU-SILC survey will be examined by the group.

## F. MAINSTREAMING SOCIAL INCLUSION - KEEPING SOCIAL INCLUSION ON THE POLICY AGENDA

### Revising Ireland's Poverty Impact Assessment (PIA) Guidelines

Poverty impact assessment is defined as -

*“the process by which government departments, local authorities and state agencies assess policies and programmes at design, implementation and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have, or have had, on poverty and on inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction”.*

Poverty proofing, as poverty impact assessment was formerly known, was introduced in 1998 as a result of a commitment in the original National Anti-Poverty Strategy. Since that time it has been a requirement in the Cabinet Handbook that Memoranda for Government involving significant policy proposals “indicate clearly the impact of the proposal on groups in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty”. Guidelines to assist government departments in carrying out poverty proofing exercises were circulated in 1999.

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) carried out a review of the poverty proofing process in 2001 and recommended a number of improvements. During 2005 OSI undertook its own review to take account of further experience of operating the guidelines. As part of the review, views were sought from a wide variety of organisations including social partners, government departments, state agencies and the voluntary and community sector. In total 29 submissions were received.

Based on this consultation process and the earlier NESC review, OSI has developed a new set of guidelines for poverty impact assessment. The change of name from poverty proofing to poverty impact assessment seeks to make it clear that assessing the impacts of policies on poverty should form an inherent part of the mainstream policy making process, rather than a perfunctory exercise which takes place after a policy has been adopted.

The guidelines were significantly strengthened with the introduction of a screening mechanism to determine which policies require a full impact assessment. Consultation has also been added as a requirement, as has the monitoring of policy effects. Departments are required to forward a summary of each PIA to the OSI.

The revised guidelines were presented at a national seminar on 20th October 2005 organised by OSI, where they were discussed by policy makers and other key stakeholders. Over 40 representatives from a wide variety of organisations attended the seminar. Valuable feedback was received at the seminar and a number of amendments were made to the guidelines as a result.

During 2006 the new guidelines will be rolled out to government departments and can be modified, as appropriate, in the light of experience of their application. Training will also be provided for policy makers in the use of the new guidelines. After this introductory phase, use of the guidelines will be extended to the wider public service. The guidelines are currently available on the OSI website [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie)

## G. SOCIAL INCLUSION - A NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP ISSUE

### **NAPS target on Child Poverty**

A key target of the revised NAPS, Building an Inclusive Society, is to significantly reduce and work towards the elimination of consistent child poverty.

The most recent statistics on poverty rates were released by the Central Statistics Office on 12 December 2005. The 2004 results indicate that 9.5% of persons under the age of 15 are in consistent poverty. Revised results for 2003 were also released by the CSO and put the consistent poverty rate for persons aged 0 - 14 at 12.2%. Prior to EU-SILC, the Living in Ireland Survey (LIIS), undertaken by the ESRI between 1994 and 2001, was the main source of poverty data. Results from the 2001 Living in Ireland Survey (LIIS), showed that 6.5% of children were living in consistent poverty, having continuously fallen from a level of 15.3% in 1997. Due to methodological differences between the LIIS and EU-SILC, both the CSO and the ESRI have confirmed that it is not possible to draw any conclusion on how the situation on consistent poverty changed between 2001 and 2003.

### **Sustaining Progress Ending Child Poverty Special Initiative**

The Sustaining Progress Partnership Agreement introduced ten Special Initiatives to be progressed during its lifetime, focusing on key issues of economic and social policy. In the light of the key target contained in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion to - significantly reduce and work towards the elimination of consistent child poverty, the OSI was given lead responsibility for co-ordinating the Ending Child Poverty Initiative.

The OSI worked closely with the National Children's Office, relevant government departments, the Combat Poverty Agency and the social partners in developing and implementing a multi-dimensional policy response to this problem. The following key actions under the Initiative were progressed during 2005 -

### **Review of Obstacles to Employment for Lone Parents**

The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion (CCSI) established a Working Group, comprising the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Finance and the Office for Social Inclusion, to consider the obstacles to employment faced by lone parents - a group identified as being particularly vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, particularly those lone parents in receipt of the One-Parent Family Payment. In parallel with the Group's work, and in recognition of the importance of income supports for lone parents, the OSI chaired a Department of Social and Family Affairs review of the One Parent Family Payment - the Department's key support for lone parents - during 2005. The CCSI was updated on the progress of both working groups and agreed to the publication of both reports as a Government Discussion Paper. This will involve a formal consultation process with stakeholders, which will take place in April 2006.

### **National Economic and Social Council (NESC) review of Child Income Supports**

The NESC is carrying out an in-depth examination of child income support arrangements focusing on Family Income Supplement and Child Dependent Allowances. The work by the NESC is aimed at examining how these payments could be merged to provide a seamless source of child income support to low income families.

### **Strategic approach to Strengthening Families**

Work continued during 2005 on the preparation of proposals to develop a strategic process to strengthen families. This work is being undertaken, by the Family Affairs Unit of the Department of Social and Family Affairs and is supported by the Office for Social Inclusion.

### **National Longitudinal Study of Children**

Responsibility for conducting the survey was assigned to the Department of Health and Children (Office of the Minister for Children). The Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Central Statistics Office are also associated with the study and are involved in the governance arrangements. The aim of this study is to examine the factors which contribute to, or undermine, the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families. 10,000 infants aged 9 months and 8,000 children aged nine will be recruited to participate in this study and the initial contract, spanning seven years, will facilitate two major data collection sweeps for both cohorts. The contract for the work was awarded, in April 2006, by the Minister for Children to the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin.

### **High Level Group on Early Childhood Care and Education**

The OSI is represented on the High Level Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, which is chaired by the National Children's Office. This High Level Group was established to recommend an integrated national policy on childcare and early education which will result in improved coordination at national and local level and which incorporates a child-centered approach to service delivery. In April and July 2005, the Group prepared two interim reports for the Cabinet Committee on Children, followed by an Options Paper submitted to the Cabinet Committee in early October. As part of Budget 2006, the Government announced a new childcare package based on the High Level Group's considerations. This includes a five-year strategy to increase the supply of childcare places and to assist parents with the costs of childcare.

## H. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The promotion of social inclusion is one of the four key national objectives of the current National Development Plan (NDP/CSF Community Support Framework) which covers the period 2000-2006. It is identified as a cross-cutting theme to be considered within all sections of the Plan. For the purposes of the NDP, social inclusion is defined (as per the Partnership 2000 national agreement) as 'cumulative marginalisation from production (employment) from consumption (poverty), and from social networks (community, family and neighbours) from decision making and from an adequate quality of life'.

Under the current NDP approximately €19 billion (36 % of the total NDP budget) is being spent on direct social inclusion measures over the period. In addition other measures and actions within the NDP should have an indirect impact on poverty and social inclusion.

The NDP has a major impact in helping to achieve many of the targets contained in the NAP/inclusion due to direct expenditure on social inclusion measures and the indirect positive benefits of other non-specific social inclusion measures. There has been substantial investment in the provision of affordable housing, capital investment in the public health services, measures targeting educational disadvantage, childcare and community and local development.

The Office for Social Inclusion is represented on the Operational Programme Monitoring Committees of both regions. OSI is also represented on the Economic and Social Infrastructure Operational Programme (ESIOP), the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRDOP), as well as the overall NDP/CSF monitoring committee. The main focus of OSI on the committees is to promote social inclusion as a horizontal principle and to monitor and progress social inclusion issues. The OSI has worked closely with the CPA to provide technical supports for all departments and agencies involved in the NDP/CSF. This work has led to improved reporting and monitoring of Social Inclusion.

Preparations are currently being made in respect of the next NDP which will cover the period 2007-2013. The Office for Social Inclusion is representing the Department of Social and Family Affairs on the High Level Group set up to develop the next NDP. It will be involved in developing the social inclusion elements of the plan, as well as inputting into specific programme proposals.

## I. GROWING THE LOCAL/REGIONAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

### **OSI and the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network**

The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network was established by the Combat Poverty Agency in late 2000, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the then National Anti-Poverty Strategy Unit (now the Office for Social Inclusion).

The learning network promotes and supports the development of a strong anti-poverty focus within a reformed system of local government. It provides a forum in which local authorities can share experiences and best practice and consider how to make the maximum contribution to policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion. The network also supports local authorities in incorporating a strong anti-poverty focus in their work.

A review of the network, commissioned by the CPA was undertaken by independent consultants in 2004 to measure its effectiveness and make recommendations for its future development. As a result it was decided that it would continue, albeit in a slightly revised format. A new steering group was set up, chaired by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and comprising representatives of OSI, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB) and the Institute for Public Administration. The role of the steering group is to oversee the working of the network and to examine other ways in which social inclusion can be promoted in local authorities.

During 2005, the OSI developed a section of its website dedicated to a local focus on social inclusion, which local authorities can use to promote relevant social inclusion developments and events. The OSI is also working with the Combat Poverty Agency and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government as part of a steering group overseeing an evaluation of mechanisms to link local and national anti-poverty strategies.

### **OSI Supporting Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Work in the Health Sector**

The Office for Social Inclusion continued in 2005 to support social inclusion work in the Health sector through membership of the NAPS and Health Project Planning Team. The Department of Health and Children, in consultation with this team, produced a promotional brochure on NAPS and the health services. This resource spells out very clearly what NAPS is, the relevance of NAPS to the health services and current NAPS health targets and proposed developments. The brochure was published in 2005.

Policy development in the area of social inclusion, within the department of Health and Children, is further informed by the NAPS Health working group. OSI plays an active role in this group and also has members on two of the three sub-committees (Child Health Inequalities and Research) formed by the group.

## J. THE EU AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT OF OUR WORK

### **Co-operation at EU level - the Open Method of Co-ordination**

The Heads of State and Government of the EU Member States (European Council), meeting in Lisbon in 2000, adopted the goal of making the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. Related to this goal was a pledge “to make a decisive impact on poverty” by 2010.

To facilitate coordinated provision of support for Member States in working to achieve these goals, a system called the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was developed. This mainly facilitates the exchange of knowledge, experience, expertise, and good practices in meeting common challenges in the social field. The system applies to the strategic approach being taken by all Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion and to promote social inclusion. A Social Protection Committee (SPC) was established, comprising representatives of the Member States and the European Commission, to coordinate the implementation of the OMC in relation to social protection and social inclusion. This includes co-ordinating the NAP/inclusion process, whereby Member States produce National Action Plans to combat poverty and social inclusion. The agreed framework for the plans includes an analysis of relevant challenges and trends, common agreed objectives, a strategy for pursuing the objectives, a series of policies and programmes to give effect to the strategy, with targets, where appropriate, on progress to be made, and a series of common indicators to assist in measuring and evaluating progress. A peer review of plans by other Member States, together with detailed review by the EU Commission, is carried out, with the outcome published in a Joint Inclusion Report submitted to the Council of Ministers and European Council. Progress reports on implementation must be submitted by Member States each year, and an evaluation report is submitted during the final year of the plan.

In June 2005, Ireland together with other Member States produced a report evaluating implementation of the 2003-05 plans. These reports were examined by the EU Commission and the SPC. The outcome of this examination was fed into the 2006 joint social protection and social inclusion report, which was then submitted to the Council of Ministers and the European Council.

In 2005 the Office for Social Inclusion actively participated in the above work of the SPC and of the sub-group charged with the development of social inclusion indicators. OSI was also involved in the SPC evaluation of the OMC, including proposals for streamlining the process.

OSI also represents Ireland on the committee for the Social Exclusion Community Action Programme 2002-2006 (SEP). The SEP was created to encourage co-operation between Member States in a concrete way, by providing part-funding for a range of activities. These include: research and analysis on poverty and social exclusion; EU-level networking; and co-operation and exchange of best practices, through Transnational Exchange Projects (TEP) and Peer Review seminars. Irish partners are members of several TEPs and Ireland participated in a number of peer review seminars during 2005.

## British Irish Council

The British Irish Council (BIC) was established under the Belfast Agreement and works as a forum within which Member Administrations' consult and exchange information with a view to co-operating on issues of mutual interest. One such issue is social inclusion and the Office for Social Inclusion co-ordinates Irish involvement in this strand of work. To date the work has focussed on 2 specific areas of work, financial exclusion and access to employment and training for people with disabilities. Both reports were approved at BIC ministerial meetings and are available on the BIC website, [www.britishirishcouncil.org](http://www.britishirishcouncil.org).

## Council of Europe

The Office for Social Inclusion represents Ireland on the European Committee on Social Cohesion, set up following the 1997 Summit of Heads of State and Government of Member States of the Council of Europe. The principal achievement of the Committee over recent years has been the completion of a major programme of work on access to basic social rights. This has included the adoption of policy guidelines on access to social protection, employment, and housing, together with a comprehensive report on the whole issue of access, and a recommendation by the Committee of Ministers to member States on the subject.

A committee of experts is currently preparing guidelines on good, effective, parenting for the full and harmonious development of the child in modern society, with special reference to the needs of parents experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Work is also in progress on how personal social services can more effectively meet the complex needs of people in situations of social exclusion or at risk of social exclusion.

The Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Council of Europe took place in Warsaw on 16-17 May 2005 and reiterated the earlier commitments to social cohesion. One of the actions arising from the Summit is the establishment of a *High Level Task Force on Social Cohesion in the 21st Century*. Ireland's nominee, Professor Mary Daly, Queens' University, Belfast, was appointed as one of the eight members of the Taskforce in December, 2005 and has since been selected as Chairperson.

## Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

A meeting of OECD Social Affairs Ministers took place on 31st March - 1st April, 2005. The overall theme of the meeting was *Extending Opportunities: How active social policy can benefit us all*. Ministerial mandates given for further work in the coming years in order of priority are as follows:

1. Well-being of children and support for families
2. Future social and economic implications of pensions policies
3. Disabled people in the Labour Market
4. A new balance between rights and responsibilities in social security
5. Life risks, life course and social policy

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<sup>1</sup> Irish & British Governments, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Isle of Man, Guernsey, Jersey

## United Nations

The 10th Anniversary of the UN World Summit on social development in Copenhagen (1995) was marked in 2005. It was following this event that preparations began in Ireland for the introduction of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy which was introduced and implemented from 1997. This work was initially coordinated by the National Anti Poverty Strategy Unit, which preceded the Office for Social Inclusion in the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Seamus Brennan TD Minister for Social and Family Affairs, led the Irish delegation at the meeting, in New York in February, of the UN Commission on Social Development, which has been mandated to monitor and evaluate progress in achieving social development worldwide in accordance with the strategies agreed at Copenhagen. Progress achieved has been mixed depending on levels of economic success. For countries such as Ireland, which has been successful economically over the period since Copenhagen, significant social development has been achieved and the strategic approach has been working well. *The United Nations Development Report* (UNDP) for 2005 recorded high levels of economic success for Ireland across the various indicators. However, this is not apparently reflected in comparable ratings in relation to social development. A special box on what is called the “Two stories of poverty in Ireland” was included in the report to explain in part this phenomenon, and is reproduced here.

**Box 3 Two tales of Irish poverty**

To ensure comparability across high-income countries, most comparative databases, such as the Luxembourg Income Study ([www.lisproject.org](http://www.lisproject.org)), measure poverty on a relative basis. Instead of an absolute poverty line (for example, the \$1 a day international poverty line for developing countries), relative poverty measures define the poverty rate as the proportion of people with disposable income less than 30% or 50% of adjusted average national disposable income. For point-in-time comparisons across countries, this is the most informative approach. But when countries experience rapid economic growth—as in the case of Ireland in the late 1990s—relative poverty measures on their own can sometimes be misleading.

Based on the 50% and 60% of median income measures, the table presents two different time series of poverty estimates for Ireland—relative and anchored—for 1994–2000. A relative poverty line shifts yearly according to the annual median income of a country. An anchored poverty line maintains the initial year poverty line, adjusting it to each subsequent year only according to changes in consumer prices.

According to the relative poverty line of 60% of annual median income, the preferred measure of the European Union, poverty rose 11.3% between 1994 and 2000 in Ireland (see table). But if we set the poverty line at 60% of the 1994 median income and adjust the poverty line only by the change in consumer prices for subsequent years—the anchored poverty line approach—Irish poverty fell by 55.9% during the same period. Similar patterns are evident for the 50% of median income line—a measure favoured by most international analysts of poverty and used in the human poverty index in this Report. According to the table, a poverty rate of 11.9% in 1994 increases to 16.5% in 2000 on a relative basis, while falling by more than over three-quarters to only 3.5% using the anchored approach. The two different sets of poverty lines—relative and anchored—tell two different stories of Irish poverty trends.

It is clear that when economic conditions change rapidly, relative poverty trends do not always present a complete picture of the ways that economic change affects people's lives. The relative poverty trends suggest that not all incomes in Ireland grew at the same rate and that low incomes grew at a slower rate than higher incomes (or relative poverty would also have fallen). But even so, lower incomes grew enough to reduce the anchored poverty by almost half. In particular, social transfers rose substantially in real terms, so pensioners, for example, saw their living standards improve markedly though they still lagged behind rapidly rising incomes resulting from employment and profits. Whether this represents “pro-poor economic growth” remains debatable. But both sides of the poverty story must be recognized.

**Differences between relative and anchored poverty lines for Ireland**

Year	50% of median income		60% of median income	
	Relative poverty line	Anchored poverty line	Relative poverty line	Anchored poverty line
1994	11.9	11.9	11.9	11.9
1995	12.3	11.1	12.3	10.7
1996	12.3	10.1	12.3	10.0
2000	16.5	3.5	22.7	3.0
Percentage change 1994–2000	38.7	-70.9	91.3	-74.8

Source: Nolan, Maude and Smeeding 2005.

### **Visitors from Overseas**

During 2005, staff of the OSI met with a number of overseas visitors to explain the work of the office and the central role that we play in seeking to eliminate poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. These meetings usually took the form of a presentation from OSI, followed by a question and answer session and an exchange of information. Visitors included students from France and the Netherlands undertaking social policy studies, academics from Japan engaged in research on social capital, officials of government departments from France and the UK and a parliamentary delegation from Hong Kong.







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