



National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion

Office for Social Inclusion

First Annual Report

National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion Office for Social Inclusion First Annual Report **Implementation of Plan 2003–2004**

FOREWORD



Ireland has been remarkably successful in recent years in achieving economic progress and significantly improving the overall standard of living and quality of life of our citizens.

This is best illustrated by the huge increases in average incomes and in employment, the major reductions in unemployment and in involuntary emigration, and in the numbers experiencing basic (consistent) poverty.

But the progress achieved has been uneven. While all benefited, a minority continue to be socially excluded from the greatly improved living standards and opportunities that the majority of us enjoy.

Ireland pledged at Lisbon in 2000 "to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty" by 2010. This is within the context of the overall strategic goal agreed at that time by all EU Member States of making the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". A key part of this process is the preparation and implementation of National Action Plans to combat poverty and social exclusion. Our first National Action Plan for the EU was submitted in June 2001 and the second Plan, which applies for the period 2003 to 2005, was submitted in July 2003. This Plan incorporates the strategic approach to tackling poverty as set out in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and also, the Social Partnership agreements.

This Report outlines the progress made to date in working to make a decisive impact on poverty by 2010. By June of next year an evaluation of the progress being made under this plan will be submitted to the EU Commission. The evaluation will be made on the basis of this report. I invite all interested parties to help us with the evaluation.

As explained in the Report the process is led at the highest level by a Cabinet Committee chaired by the Taoiseach, and co-ordinated by the Office for Social Inclusion in my own Department. This reflects the multi-faceted nature of poverty which requires a co-ordinated multi-policy response.

Eradicating poverty also requires a response from the whole of society. This is being achieved through the social partnership process involving the social partners, including the community and voluntary sector. People experiencing poverty are also consulted. They know from their own direct experience what the causes of poverty are, what needs to be done to eradicate it, and what the priorities should be. I am determined that the process will above all endeavour to ensure that their voices are heard.

In an increasingly globalised world, the process must also take account of the knowledge, experience and best practice of other countries. A special section in the report outlines how Ireland, during its EU Presidency earlier this year, worked to advance consideration internationally of a number of key social and employment issues.

There is much uncertainty over how poverty is measured and on the level and nature of expenditure on social protection. Two articles in the report endeavour to bring greater clarity in these areas.

My aim is to ensure that we work to build on what has been achieved, as documented in the report, to be inspired by the evident progress already made, and to be determined to make up for where we fall short in promoting social inclusion to the standard of living and prospects a majority of us can now enjoy in our own country.

Finally, I wish to thank all those involved in compiling this report and in updating it further in the months and years ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Séamus Brennan".

Séamus Brennan TD

Minister for Social and Family Affairs

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INTRODUCTION

The second National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion (NAP/Inclusion) covering the period 2003-2005 was submitted to the EU Commission on 31 July 2003. The plan incorporates the commitments made in the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) – *Building an Inclusive Society 2002 to 2007*, and the social partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*.

The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) is the Government Office with overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving the NAP/Inclusion process. This is the first annual report on the implementation of the anti-poverty strategy produced by the Office.

This report deals with the implementation of the plan during its first year from 1 August 2003. It also incorporates information on the progress made to date on the revised NAPS. The report is divided into two parts. Part I contains an overview of the implementation process and of the main outcomes achieved during the first year. Part II provides a detailed account of implementation over the relevant policy areas, together with the full assessment of the plan by the EU taken from its Joint Inclusion Report.¹

The following are the main features of Part I.

Section 1: Strategic Process, provides a description and analysis of the process for preparing, monitoring, evaluating and further developing the strategy. It deals in particular with the role and functions of the Office for Social Inclusion, the Committees to which it reports on

implementation of the strategy, and on how it assists in co-ordinating the process. The issue of raising awareness of the strategy and of involving all the actors is also dealt with. Separate sub-sections deal with the social partnership process in relation to combating poverty, social inclusion in the NDP and the EU Open Method of Co-ordination on social inclusion in which Ireland participates.

Section 2: Key Trends and Outcomes, gives an overview and analysis of the trends in relation to poverty; how it is measured; and the scale and nature of Irish social protection expenditure. It also reproduces the summary assessment by the EU of Ireland's NAP/Inclusion. It looks forward to the further development of the process up to 2010, the end of the period by which the European Council pledged, at Lisbon in 2000, that Member States would seek to make a decisive impact on poverty.

Section 3: Main Developments 2003-2004, provides a summary of the progress achieved by the relevant Government departments in implementing the strategies.

Section 4: Irish EU Presidency Programme on Social Issues, summarises some of the main outcomes, relating to social inclusion, of the Irish EU Presidency programme (from January to June 2004) on social issues, entitled *More and Better Jobs and Greater Social Cohesion in an Enlarged Union*. The OSI was directly involved in the organisation of a number of presidency conferences.

¹ http://eurpoa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/joint_rep_en.htm

1.1 Strategies to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion: Making it Happen

The overall objective of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) is “to reduce substantially and, ideally, eliminate poverty in Ireland and to build a socially inclusive society”. Ireland has also pledged, with its EU partners, in the Lisbon Agenda, “to make a decisive impact on poverty” by 2010.

Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion

The revised NAPS, published by the Government in 2002, sets out the objectives, targets within the key policy areas, and the measures to be employed to meet these for the 5-year period from 2002 to 2007. This strategy was further developed in the second National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/Inclusion) for 2003 to 2005 which is part of a concerted EU “open co-ordination” process to meet the Lisbon Agenda goal on poverty. This NAP/Inclusion incorporates the revised NAPS strategy, and further policy commitments made since, including those in the partnership agreement *Sustaining Progress* adopted in April 2003².

Poverty – a multi-policy approach

Poverty is multi-faceted requiring a multi-policy approach. In order to achieve the common aim of progressively eliminating poverty, a strategic approach to tackling it is essential. This requires a concerted effort across the various policy areas by Government, with the support of the social partners, the community and voluntary sector, and families working together, within the wider EU context.

Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)

Effective implementation of the process requires co-ordination of its various elements. The revised NAPS provided for this to be entrusted to an Office for Social Inclusion, based in the Department of Social and Family Affairs, and reporting to the Minister. The OSI effectively became operational in January 2003, taking over from the NAPS Unit which had previously exercised the co-ordinating role. The work of the OSI is overseen by a management group of Assistant Secretaries drawn from relevant Departments, including the Departments of the Taoiseach and Finance.

The main functions of the Office are as follows:

1. Co-ordination

A strategic process for tackling poverty requires that plans are developed which identify trends and major challenges in relation to poverty and social exclusion, that objectives, targets and implementing measures to meet these are set across the relevant policy areas, as well as indicators to measure achievement of the outcomes sought. The OSI co-ordinates this process. Preparation of the second NAP/Inclusion 2003 to 2005, submitted to the EU in July 2003, was the first to be co-ordinated by the Office. Preparations for the next plan to cover the period 2006 to 2009 have already begun.

Co-ordination includes working with Departments on identifying priorities and the ongoing development of measures in each policy area to combat poverty more effectively, especially in the light of emerging trends and challenges. It may also involve promoting a co-ordinated, integrated approach across a number of policy areas to provide more effective support to certain vulnerable groups.

² A summary of key milestones in the development of the Irish national Anti-Poverty Strategy is included in Appendix 1.

2. Monitoring and Evaluation

Effective implementation of the strategy, including meeting the targets, is a crucial element of the process. Monitoring implementation is, therefore, a key part of the OSI's work with Departments. The second part of this report provides a detailed description of implementation after the first year of the NAP/Inclusion.

Evaluation involves determining whether implementation of the policy measures is achieving the desired outcomes, as measured by indicators. The OSI will co-ordinate a full evaluation of the NAP/Inclusion in 2005. This evaluation will provide the basis for development of the next strategic plan.

3. Support Functions

The OSI also has responsibility to develop three support functions to assist the process:

- a. *A data strategy*, designed to ensure all the necessary data is available for monitoring, evaluation, policy prioritising, targeting and overall policy development. The current evaluation process has identified some of the gaps. In addition, it is the responsibility of each Department to ensure that the necessary data to report on their NAPS targets is contained in their data strategies, currently being devised.
- b. *Poverty proofing*, designed to evaluate policies for their impact on reducing and eliminating poverty. Work is ongoing in this area, including 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. The current poverty proofing guidelines will be reviewed in 2005.
- c. *Research* on the nature and causes of poverty and social exclusion in today's society and on

the effectiveness of the policies and programmes designed to meet these challenges. A number of organisations are to the fore in research in this area. The OSI will continue to ensure that relevant research is commissioned and disseminated and that it informs policy decision-making.

The OSI works closely with various agencies including the Combat Poverty Agency and 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 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 OSI is working with the Department of the Environment, Housing and Local Government, the Department of Health and Children, and 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

Tackling poverty is not just a task for the State, but for society as a whole. There is a need, in the first instance, for effective communication on the trends and challenges in relation to poverty, and on the ongoing process for tackling it. This communication must involve 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, the people experiencing

poverty themselves. A communications strategy to meet this need is at an advanced stage of development.

There is a similar need for effective consultation on all aspects of the process with key stakeholders. Institutional arrangements to facilitate and promote the necessary consultations are in place.

6. International Dimension

The eradication of poverty is a major priority at international level. There is much to be learned from the experience of other countries in tackling this common challenge, and from the policy analysis and research findings of the international organisations. Officials of the OSI participate in the work of relevant Committees of the EU, the Council of Europe, the OECD and the UN. OSI also participates in the EU Community Action Programme to combat social exclusion 2002-2006.

Making it Happen

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. Appendix 1 describes the institutional arrangements within which OSI operates.

Increasing Awareness of Social Inclusion and Involving all Actors

A number of initiatives are underway aimed at increasing awareness of and involvement in NAPS and the embedding of social inclusion at central, regional and local levels. Participation of all the relevant actors in the ongoing development of the NAPS is essential. Brief details of these initiatives follow. Further information on all of the initiatives is contained in Part II of this report.

Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network

In late 2000, the Combat Poverty Agency, in conjunction with the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the OSI, established the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network. The overall aim of the Network is to promote and support the development of a strong anti-poverty focus within a reformed system of local government.

The Network 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. It also supports local authorities in incorporating a strong anti-poverty focus within their work.

Anti-Poverty work in the health services

Work to support health service staff in implementing actions to achieve the key NAPS health targets is being taken forward by the NAPS and Health Project Planning Team with representatives of the Department of Health and Children, the Health Boards, the Health Board Executive (HeBE), the Institute of Public Health, the Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty Agency.

This work aims to raise awareness of NAPS targets and social inclusion issues in the wider health service and lay the foundation for a learning network to ensure, *inter alia*, that social inclusion issues are better addressed in health service staff training; and that actions to address further NAPS health target achievement in the context of all major policy implementation are mainstreamed.

The first phase of the work is nearing completion. This relates to information gathering and agenda setting including scoping of anti-poverty work in

health boards; a survey of senior health board staff to identify strategic issues; and a baseline survey of health board staff to measure awareness of anti-poverty work.

Gender Mainstreaming

The NDP Gender Equality Unit, based in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and co-financed by the European Social Fund, supports policy makers in Government Departments and Agencies to implement gender mainstreaming in the policies and programmes funded by the NDP. The work of the Unit includes training, development of gender disaggregated statistics and indicators, and research into gender equality issues. The Unit also advises on the impact of the NDP on disadvantaged women, where relevant, and liaises with the Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty Agency in this regard.

National Economic and Social Forum (NESF)

The role of the Forum is to monitor and analyse the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified in the context of social partnership arrangements, especially those concerned with the achievement of equality and social inclusion. As part of its mandate, the NESF also has a role in facilitating public consultation on policy matters referred to it by the Government from time to time.

Social Inclusion Forum

The NESF convenes a Social Inclusion Forum to provide individual members of the social partner organisations, the community and voluntary and other sectors, and people experiencing poverty, with an opportunity to contribute to the process. Progress in relation to the NAPS is reported to the Forum with provision made for feedback on its implementation and further development. The Forum is seen as an important mechanism to

facilitate consultation with all those who have a stake in the NAPS process. The next meeting of the Forum will take place in January 2005 and will include a particular focus on those groups who are most vulnerable to experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Consultation via the Forum was supplemented in 2003 by a series of regional and national fora on specific topics, jointly organised by the Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty Agency, as part of the preparations for the second NAP/Inclusion. A report on this consultation process was published as a valuable companion volume to the NAP/Inclusion.³

1.2 The Social Partnership Process and Combating Poverty

Combating poverty and social exclusion requires not just a governmental response but a wider societal response to the challenge. The development and implementation of the strategies, therefore, involves the social partners, employers, trade unions, farmers and the community and voluntary sector. Continued economic development is essential to underpin the strategy, and the ongoing redistribution of resources to the less well off can best be achieved through consensus among all the parties in the partnership process.

The first NAPS, *Sharing in Progress*, was drawn up in 1997 after widespread consultation and subsequently endorsed in a social partnership agreement, *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*. A commitment was also made to extend the scope of the NAPS and revise key aspects. Following a further extensive consultative process, the revised NAPS, *Building an Inclusive Society*, was launched in February 2002.

³ Report on the Consultation for National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005

In April 2003 the next partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*, recognised that the challenge then, in a more difficult economic climate, was to achieve the targets set out the previous year in the revised NAPS. This agreement also set down a major part of the agenda for the further development of the NAPS through the agreed commitment to pursue a series of special initiatives on the basis of dialogue between Government and the social partners. The ten Special Initiatives chosen for inclusion in the national agreement relate to all major crosscutting issues that require mobilisation of a range of resources across sectors, organisations and individuals and at different levels of Government, and are as follows:

- Ending child poverty (the Office for Social Inclusion has lead responsibility for co-ordinating this initiative);
- Tackling educational disadvantage – literacy, numeracy and early school leavers;
- Long-term unemployed, vulnerable workers and those who have been made redundant;
- Care – children, people with disabilities and older people;
- Migration and interculturalism;
- Housing and accommodation;
- Alcohol/drug abuse; and
- Including everyone in the information society.

The emphasis, in pursuing these initiatives, has been on all the social partners working together, building consensus and adopting a problem-solving approach to finding practical solutions. There are obvious synergies between a number of

the initiatives which are of key importance to the National Action Plan:

Social Inclusion Consultative Group (SICG)

Representatives of the social partners who ratified *Sustaining Progress* are represented on the *Social Inclusion Consultative Group* which offers advice and observations on the NAPS process as it develops. The establishment of this Group is provided for in the revised NAPS. It is chaired jointly by the Department of the Taoiseach and the Office for Social Inclusion. Topics considered to date included: the development of the second NAP/Inclusion; monitoring implementation of this plan in the context of drawing up this first Annual Report on the plan, and EU and other relevant international developments.

The main subjects on which advice will be sought in 2005 will include the evaluation of the implementation of the NAP/Inclusion, the outcomes being achieved, based on this annual report, and the priorities for action in the next NAP/Inclusion covering the period 2006 - 2009.

Special Initiatives - Consultation

Representatives of the social partners are involved in the development of the special initiatives and in monitoring and evaluating their progress, a process co-ordinated by the Department of the Taoiseach. Regular reports on progress on the Initiatives are provided, which relate both to current actions, and to identifying initiatives and priorities for future policy development.

As part of the mid-term review of *Sustaining Progress* a progress report on the special initiatives was published. The experience from the first phase of work on the initiatives has underlined their complexity and multidimensional nature. The process has meant that greater clarity and focus

has been brought to complex issues and it has highlighted the need for differing or more collaborative ways of working.

1.3 Social Inclusion in the National Development Plan/Community Support Framework

The National Development Plan/Community Support Framework (NDP/CSF) involves an investment of over €52 billion of Public, Private and EU funds (in 1999 prices) over the period 2000-2006. The Plan involves significant investment in health services, social housing, education, roads, public transport, rural development, industry, water and waste services.

The promotion of social inclusion is one of the four key objectives underpinning the NDP/CSF. This involves a multi-faceted approach to the promotion of social inclusion, including both mainstreamed and targeted interventions aimed at areas and groups affected by poverty and social exclusion throughout the community. A key element of the overall strategy is the continuation of sustainable economic growth to promote jobs. There is also substantial investment in education and training, childcare and recreational infrastructure and investment in people through lifelong learning and skills development, community development and family services. The objective is that employment is opened up to all sectors of society as this is viewed as the best way to counter poverty and social exclusion. However, the Plan also recognises that ensuring the correct overall economic environment for job creation is not sufficient on its own to alleviate poverty in areas and groups throughout the community. Targeted interventions are therefore provided for, primarily in the Regional Operational Programmes,

to deal with these problems. In total, some €19 billion is provided in the Plan directly to promote Social Inclusion.

The 2003 mid-term evaluation of all operational programmes of the NDP/CSF and the evaluation of the mechanisms to monitor social inclusion measures revealed the need for significant further development of these mechanisms to measure progress. The reports also highlighted considerable problems around the integration of the cross-cutting objective of social inclusion in the Operational Programmes.

Subsequent to these evaluations, the NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit in the Department of Finance conducted a "Review of the Relevance of NDP/CSF Horizontal Principals to NDP Operational Programme Measures" in 2003, and brought forward proposals to prioritise certain measures for social inclusion reporting, and other relevant areas. They have sought to build consensus on embedding the social inclusion principle for selected measures so that subsequent monitoring can be taken forward for the remainder of the programme period (i.e., to end 2006). These proposals were subsequently approved at Operational Programme Monitoring Committees. On foot of this, the Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty Agency have engaged with relevant Departments and agencies with a view to assisting them in achieving greater focus on the Social Inclusion Horizontal Principle. The expected outcome of this process, which is also being conducted in relation to the Equality, Environment, and Rural Development Horizontal Principles, will be a clear focus on the Principles, incorporated in revised Programme Complements, and a more in-depth, focused monitoring effort for the period to end-2006.

Part of the remit of the Office for Social Inclusion is to ensure that the key objective of social inclusion is addressed in the NDP/CSF. To assist the progression of the NDP/CSF Horizontal Principles process and generally increase the social inclusion focus of the NDP, the Office will sit on all relevant Monitoring Committees. In addition, the OSI will continue to emphasise the linkages between the NAP/Inclusion process and the NDP/CSF.

1.4 EU Open Method of Co-ordination - to make a Decisive Impact on Poverty

In 2000 the European Council of Heads of State and Government of the then 15 Member States pledged in Lisbon *to make a decisive impact on poverty* by 2010. This is to be achieved in the context of the overall strategic goal for that 10-year period of making the European Union

“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

Open Method of Co-ordination – overall aims

The *Open Method of Co-ordination* (OMC) has been developed as a process to support and facilitate Member States in meeting the goal on poverty eradication and linked goals in employment and other social areas, such as pensions, health care and making work pay. The process recognises what has come to be termed the inter-linked and inter-dependent *policy triangle* of economic, employment and social policies. Economic development is, of course, essential to make progress in the employment and social spheres. However, it is often not sufficiently recognised that economic development is also dependent on both employment and social development.

It is no longer only a case of creating jobs through economic development, but also of ensuring that workers have the necessary education, training, skills and confidence to attract jobs in the dynamic, knowledge based economy required to maintain competitiveness. It is acknowledged that poverty is not only a major source of human suffering, but it also retards economic competitiveness both now and, in the case of child poverty, into the future. It can prevent those affected and their families from achieving their full human potential and from contributing positively to social and economic development. It can also serve to retard the achievement of *greater social cohesion*, which is a key element for both social and economic development.

Achieving the employment and social goals of the Lisbon Strategy, while at the same time striving to be *the most dynamic and knowledge-based competitive economy in the world* is a major challenge. Member States also share common challenges to a greater or lesser degree in the social area which include:

- Ageing of the population;
- Changing employment patterns, including unemployment, especially long-term unemployment;
- Increasing cost of healthcare;
- Increasing family diversity and breakdown;
- Poverty and social exclusion.

They also share a common goal of maintaining and enhancing the European social model, which involves a major role for the state, in a spirit of solidarity, in providing social protection and promoting greater social cohesion.

The Process

In light of these realities it is accepted that meeting the social goals will be greatly assisted by a co-ordinated approach. This process facilitates a pooling of knowledge, experience, and best practices from the various Member States in their diversity of traditions, political philosophies, levels of economic development, and degrees of State, private sector and family involvement in combating poverty and achieving other positive social outcomes. However, it is also an *open* process which leaves Member States free to choose the mix of policies and priorities which they consider is best suited to meet the agreed set of common objectives. There is no blueprint under *open co-ordination* to which Member States must adhere, but through participation in the process they can learn in detail how other Member States are meeting the common challenges, and have their approaches evaluated by the Commission and other Member States.

Common Objectives

Member States, in December 2000, agreed a common set of objectives for combating poverty and social exclusion. These were revised in December 2002 and are as follows:

1. To facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services

- To promote access to stable and quality employment for all women and men who are capable of working;
- To prevent the exclusion of people from the world of work by improving employability, through human resource management, organisation of work and life-long learning;

- To organise social protection systems in such a way that they help, in particular, to: guarantee that everyone has the resources necessary to live in accordance with human dignity; overcome obstacles to employment by ensuring that the take-up of employment results in increased income; and by promoting employability;
- To implement policies which aim to provide access for all to decent and sanitary housing, as well as the basic services necessary to live normally having regard to local circumstances (electricity, water, heating etc.);
- To put in place policies which aim to provide access for all to healthcare appropriate to their situation, including situations of dependency;
- To develop, for the benefit of people at risk of exclusion, services and accompanying measures which will allow them effective access to education, justice and other public and private services, such as culture, sport and leisure.

2. To prevent the risks of exclusion

- To exploit fully the potential of the knowledge-based society and of new information and communication technologies and ensure that no one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities;
- To put in place policies which seek to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of social exclusion, such as indebtedness, exclusion from school and becoming homeless;
- To implement action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms.

3. To help the most vulnerable

- To promote the social integration of women and men at risk of facing persistent poverty, for example because they have a disability or belong to a group experiencing particular integration problems such as those affecting immigrants;
- To move towards the elimination of social exclusion among children and give them every opportunity for social integration;
- To develop comprehensive actions in favour of areas marked by exclusion.

4. To mobilise all relevant bodies

- To promote, according to national practice, the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion, in particular in regard to their situation and the policies and measures affecting them;
- To mainstream the fight against exclusion into overall policy, in particular: by mobilising the public authorities at national, regional and local level, according to their respective areas of competence; by developing appropriate co-ordination procedures and structures; by adapting administrative and social services to the needs of people suffering exclusion and ensuring that front-line staff are sensitive to these needs;
- To promote dialogue and partnership between all relevant bodies, public and private.

A detailed guide based on these objectives has been prepared to assist Member States in drawing up their National Action Plans. A set of common indicators has also been agreed for determining the outcomes from the process (see Section 2.1 on measuring poverty).

The first National Action Plans were submitted to the Commission on 1 June 2001, to apply for two years. The second plan was submitted on 31 July 2003, to apply for the period up to 31 July 2005. The timetable for production of future National Action Plans is shown in Section 2.4 of this report.

The Commission arranges for a thorough analysis of each Plan to be performed. As part of this process, representatives of each Member State meet with Commission officials to discuss the Plan. The Plans are also examined by the Member States in a peer review process organised by the Social Protection Committee (SPC). A draft Commission analysis of the Action Plans is then produced for discussion by the SPC. This forms the basis for a Joint Inclusion Report on all the Action Plans agreed by the SPC. This report is then submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval before being submitted to the European Council.

Open co-ordination thus greatly facilitates exchanges between Member States on all the main aspects of the process to combat poverty and social exclusion. It is serving to greatly improve understanding of the causes and new emerging forms of poverty and to identify how best these can be addressed while maintaining economic competitiveness and continuing to achieve high levels of employment.

SECTION 2

KEY TRENDS AND OUTCOMES

2.1 Measuring Poverty

Poverty has been defined for the purposes of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) in Ireland as follows:

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

The core objective under the NAPS, which is fully consistent with the corresponding EU objective, is *to reduce substantially and, ideally, eliminate poverty in Ireland and to build a socially inclusive society.* As the definition above shows, poverty involves inadequate income and inadequate access to the resources and services required to meet basic human needs, such as health care, education and housing. It arises mainly from lack of employment that would provide such income and resources, or being unable to work due, for example, to age, disability or family responsibilities.

The NAPS is designed to provide, and to further develop in an integrated way, the range of policies and programmes such as income support, health, education or housing, required to reduce and, in time, eliminate poverty.

Outcomes and Indicators

A key part of the monitoring and evaluating process under the strategy is through measuring the outcomes being achieved by policies and programmes and by the resources spent and invested. This is not straightforward. Combating

poverty effectively requires a series of policies to meet its different dimensions - income, employment support, health, care etc. These policies may also need to be tailored to the particular circumstances of the various groups experiencing poverty, such as older people, people with disabilities, unemployed people, lone parents and larger families.

The outcomes are measured by indicators which cover the main dimensions of poverty. EU Member States have agreed on 10 primary indicators and a further 8 secondary indicators to supplement these (commonly referred to as the Laeken indicators). Individual Member States may choose to use additional indicators to measure specific outcomes considered important in the context of their strategy against poverty. One of the key such indicators developed by Ireland is *consistent poverty*.

Consistent Poverty

A major priority of Government has been to reduce the numbers who are most deprived. To identify those in that situation, the ESRI developed an indicator for what is termed *consistent poverty*. Applying this indicator requires using relative income (in this case *mean income* which is the average of all incomes) to identify those who are at risk of poverty. It then involves identifying those suffering deprivation using indicators of deprivation based on surveys of what Irish people consider are necessary to ensure a basically adequate standard of living.

Consistent poverty is the agreed measure for the key target in the NAPS, which is, by 2007, *“to reduce the numbers of those who are ‘consistently poor’ below 2 per cent and, if possible, eliminate consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty”*.

The priority afforded to eliminating *consistent poverty* has already borne fruit. There have been major reductions in the numbers of households in this category – falling from 15.1 per cent in 1994, to 9.7 per cent in 1997, and to 5.2 per cent in 2001. *Consistent poverty* among children has also reduced substantially from 15.3 per cent in 1997 to 6.5 per cent in 2001.

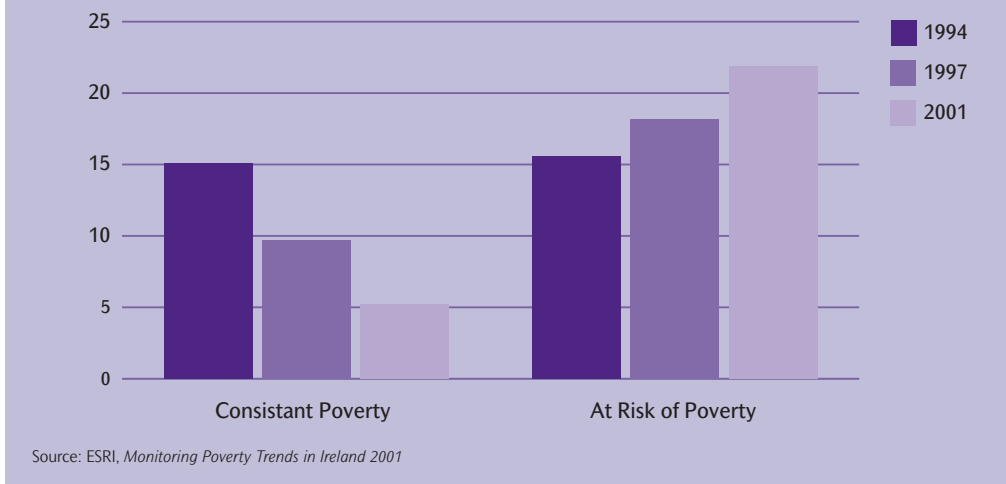
However, despite the improvements in the numbers experiencing consistent poverty, the number of persons *deemed to be at risk of poverty* increased from 15.6 per cent in 1994, to 18.2 per cent in 1997, and to 21.9 per cent in 2001. Percentages for comparative purposes are illustrated in the table below:

threshold is 60 per cent of the median income. (The median is the figure that divides the income distribution in society into two equal parts, half having incomes above the median, half having incomes below the median.)

It should be noted that people below this income threshold are not necessarily *in poverty*. The EU refers to them instead as being *at risk of poverty*. Whether they are in poverty will depend on a number of factors. These include:

- The degree to which income is below the relevant thresholds;

TABLE 1: “Consistent Poverty” and “At Risk of Poverty” rates (% , 1994–2001)



At Risk of Poverty

The “at risk of poverty” indicator is based on relative incomes and is the main such indicator used for the purposes of international comparisons. The indicator identifies those who are *at risk of poverty* as having an equivalised individual income, which is below a certain income threshold. For the EU the

- The length of time on this relatively low income – a long such period can lead to real deprivation, as a person’s assets run down and cannot be fully maintained or replaced;
- Possession and use of other assets, especially one’s own home.

For example, there is a relatively high rate of home ownership in Ireland, especially among older people. As a result they do not have a significant outlay on housing which means they are less at risk of poverty than those having to pay rent and other housing costs. For Ireland also, the household allowances for electricity, fuel, telephone rental and travel payable to most pensioners are not counted for the purposes of the *at risk of poverty* indicator either, but they further reduce the risk of poverty for the pensioners receiving them.

Social Transfers – Impact on Poverty

One of the main ways of combating poverty for those who cannot work is through social transfers – mainly benefits and pensions. In the 10-year period since 1994, social welfare rates have risen substantially in real terms and have increased at a greater rate than gross average industrial earnings, as shown in Table 2:

However, in the same 10-year period, incomes in general rose more substantially, resulting from the high levels of economic growth and taxation reforms of the past decade. This is reflected in the fact that the 60 per cent median income threshold almost doubled from just over €83 in 1994 to €164.28 weekly or €8,542.56 per annum in 2001. People in single-person households with incomes below this amount would, therefore, be regarded as being *at risk of poverty*. Incomes of households with more than one member are adjusted, or individualised, using equivalence scales, to take account of different household sizes and family composition. For example, in 2001 the members of a household with one adult and one child with total household income of less than €218 per week (€11,361 per annum) would be classified as being *at risk of poverty*. In the case of a household comprising a family with two adults and two children, the equivalent amount is €381 per week (€19,819 per

TABLE 2: Typical Social Welfare Payments and Gross Average Industrial Earnings – comparisons between 1994 and 2004

SW payment/Gross Average industrial earnings	Rate 1994 Euro	Rate 2004 Euro	Increase (%)	CPI increase 1994-2004 (%)	Real Increase (%)
Old age contributory pension (1 person)	90.15	167.30	85.6%	34.9%	37.6%
Unemployment Assistance (1 person)	74.79	134.80	80.2%	34.9%	33.6%
Child Benefit (1st child)	25.39	131.60	418.2%	34.9%	284.1%
Gross Average Industrial Earnings	342.60	560.60	63.6%	34.9%	21.3%

Rebased from data from the Central Statistics Office. 2004 GAIE – 2nd qtr. preliminary estimate

annum). Despite the significant increases in real terms in social welfare rates, therefore, growing numbers were classified as being at risk of poverty, because the increase in their incomes was less than the growth in incomes generally.

Those at risk of poverty

The increase in employment and reduction in unemployment have resulted in a shift in the categories at greatest risk of poverty from the active (i.e., employed or unemployed) to the inactive population.

The reduction in unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, has been a major factor in producing this outcome. In all the employment and unemployment indicators, Ireland scores more favourably than the EU average.

In 1994, 41 per cent of those at risk of poverty were unemployed compared to 7 per cent in 2001, but, for example, just one in twenty of the elderly was below the relative income poverty line in 1994 compared to nearly one in two by 2001.

The main categories *at risk of poverty* now are those with one or more of the following characteristics:

- Not in employment due to age, incapacity, family responsibilities, and solely dependent on weekly social welfare payments;
- Living alone, mainly the elderly, especially women;
- Households with children, especially if parent or parents are not in employment, or if in employment, but on low earnings.

Strategic Response

The strategic response, as reflected in the National Action Plan, includes greater priority being given to

pensioners, who have received increases of €32.71 per week over the period 2002 to 2004. The *Agreed Programme for Government* contains a commitment to increase pensions to €200 per week by 2007. There are also commitments to make progress towards implementation of improvements to widow(er)'s pensions and to increasing the level of adult allowances for pensioner spouses to the level of the old age (non-contributory) pension.

The NAPS strategy also includes commitments to increase the lowest rates of social welfare payment to €150 per week in 2002 terms by 2007. Further increases in child benefit are also planned, and there is particular focus on the whole issue of child poverty, under one of the special initiatives in *Sustaining Progress*. For those in the active age groups, there is increasing focus on improving employability through education and training, and removing obstacles to employment through, for example, extending the provision of affordable child care.

Maintaining high employment levels is also a key priority, which requires maintaining economic competitiveness. In addition, ensuring that those on low pay have the opportunity to progress to better paid and more skilled employment is an important objective.

Indicators of outcomes, therefore, can greatly assist in determining what the priorities should be in relation to social transfers and other social interventions. However, it is also essential to ensure that measures of poverty which focus solely on income do not reduce the priority that should also be accorded to improvements in other essential services in kind such as education, health, care, housing etc.

Finally, the ESRI has noted that, unlike the relative income poverty measure, the consistent poverty

measure does not reflect the changing relativities in levels of incomes and so divergent trends between the two measures become apparent. They also note, however, that both measures, taken together, provide a coherent set of underlying trends which represent different aspects of the complex realities associated with Ireland's unprecedented period of economic and social change. The findings of the recent report of the ERSI on relative income poverty in Ireland, commissioned by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, will form a useful input to consideration of this issue.⁴

2.2 Irish Expenditure on Social Protection in an International Context

The level of expenditure on social protection in Ireland appears to be low by EU standards. Much of the discrepancy, however, can be explained by demographic differences, and by the way the Irish social protection system has evolved and is currently constituted. Clarity as to the nature and extent of the differences is essential for meaningful debate on what the appropriate overall level of expenditure should be.

What is social protection?

The term *social protection* is used at EU level and increasingly at national level in most EU countries to cover expenditure on the main social schemes. It is defined in the *European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics* (ESSPROS) manual as:

“Social protection encompasses interventions from public or private bodies intended to relieve households of the burden of a defined set of risks or needs, provided that there is neither a simultaneous reciprocal nor an individual arrangement involved. The list of risks or needs that may give rise to social protection is fixed by convention as follows: sickness/health care, disability, old age, survivors,

family/children, unemployment, housing and social exclusion not elsewhere classified.”

The term interventions could cover weekly cash payments, such as pensions, or services such as health care. The interventions do not cover arrangements between individuals on a reciprocal basis or arrangements made by individuals themselves which could provide protection, but not *social* protection. The term *disability* means the more long-term incapacity called *invalidity* under the social welfare code in Ireland and *survivors* refers to pensions and other benefits for widows and widowers.

Measuring social protection expenditure

There are two main indicators of social expenditure that can be used in comparative research; the share of social expenditure of a country's *GDP* or *GNP* and the amount of social expenditure in *Purchasing Power Standards* (PPS). Comparisons on the basis of percentages of GDP have been commonly used in international studies.

There are difficulties in making comparisons between countries based on levels of social expenditure. The results are influenced by the nature of social expenditure and the extent of the risks covered, and by changes in a country's wealth. Ireland differs in a number of key respects from other countries in relation to the proportion of older people, the level of development of its social security system and its reliance on occupational and private pension provision. In recent years, social expenditure has risen strongly but has been surpassed by even stronger growth in GDP during the 1990s. This trend may have been reversed somewhat in recent years.

The use of GDP figures for comparison purposes is particularly problematic in the case of Ireland. Irish

⁴ Why is Relative Income Poverty so High in Ireland? ESRI, Dublin, September 2004.

GNP is significantly lower than GDP, as the repatriation of profits by multi-nationals is much more significant in Ireland than in other countries given our reliance on foreign direct investment and the relatively low number of Irish multi-nationals repatriating their profits to Ireland. GNP is, therefore, a more acceptable basis for assessing the resources available to the Government in Ireland to fund social protection expenditure, but is not normally used in international comparisons.

Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) per capita

Comparisons based on PPS per capita circumvent the problems, which arise when using GDP comparisons, as the base is simply the number of persons in a country. Table 3 below shows how expenditures under the main functions for Ireland compare to the EU – 15 average and selected EU countries in 2001.

Breakdown of Expenditure

Ireland is significantly below the EU average in relation to just three functions, old age, disability, and to a lesser extent, unemployment.

When the old age function is excluded from the analysis above, Irish social protection expenditure per capita in PPS is at 82 per cent of the EU-15 average, compared to 61 per cent including old age expenditure. There are specific issues with international comparisons of expenditure under this function that should be noted:

In the case of old age, the population in Ireland aged 65 and over in 2001 was a third less than the EU average - 11.2 per cent in Ireland compared to 16.6 per cent in the EU-15. Social insurance cover for old age and widows' pensions was extended to all workers late in Ireland relative to most EU

TABLE 3: Social expenditure by function, Ireland, EU-15 average and selected countries, 2001, PPS per head of population

	Total exp.	Sickness/ Health care	Disability	Old age	Family, Children	Unemp.	Housing
EU-15	6404.9	1730.3	493	2536.1	491.2	381.4	126.6
Ireland	3875.2	1609.6	192.7	708.2	461.4	307.6	127.1
Irish exp as per cent of EU-15	61	93	39	28	94	81	100.4
Denmark	7805.1	1536.5	946.8	2877.1	1004.5	758.8	176.1
Germany	7328.6	2029.7	546.5	2883.6	730.2	577.5	48.3
Spain	3866.6	1131.3	285.2	1600.7	96.8	487.6	34.2
Netherlands	7391.8	2098.2	797.1	2495.8	303.9	344.5	97.8
UK	6180.7	1673.9	561.5	2542.2	403.8	171.9	333.7

Source: *European social statistics – Social protection expenditure and receipts, Eurostat, 2004*

countries – 1974 to all employees, other than public servants (widows' pensions only), 1988 to the self-employed, 1991 to part-time workers and 1995 to new entrants to the public service. As a result, a higher but shrinking proportion of pensioners are eligible for means-tested social assistance pensions only.

Unlike most other EU-15 countries Ireland does not provide cover for supplementary earnings-related pensions under social insurance. Occupational and private pensions cover is and has been encouraged, mainly through a system of generous tax treatment, and regulation of such schemes is provided for under the Pensions Act to safeguard entitlements. However, coverage has reached just over 50 per cent of the workforce, with the proportion of current pensioners with such cover being even lower. In any case, expenditure on occupational pensions is not included in the Irish ESSPROS statistics due to a lack of data availability. Private pensions expenditure, however, is included in the data for other countries where such pensions are well developed (particularly the Netherlands and the UK).

Disability

This function relates to long-term and, in many cases, permanent incapacity for work and what is termed invalidity under the Irish social insurance system. A significant proportion of those who qualify for invalidity pensions are in effect taking early retirement. Ireland, however, has a relatively high effective retirement age relative to the rest of the EU (62.4 years compared to 60.8 years for the EU-15 in 2002, *Structural Indicators*). Cover for invalidity pensions has not been extended to the self-employed and those who entered the public service before 1995 are covered for this contingency under occupational schemes only.

High levels of early retirement are an expensive burden for many countries, especially in the context of an ageing population, and raising the average exit age from the labour force is a key objective under the Lisbon Agenda. The Lisbon Council set a target to increase the average EU employment rate among older women and men (55-64) to 50 per cent by 2010. Table 4 sets out the employment rate of the group concerned since 1993 for Ireland and other EU countries.

TABLE 4 Employment rate, age 55-64 (%)

	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003
Ireland	38.4	39.2	40.4	43.7	46.5	49.0
EU 15	35.8	36.0	36.4	37.1	38.8	41.7
Ireland Male	59.4	59.7	58.8	61.7	64.2	64.7
Ireland Female	17.7	18.6	21.6	25.5	28.5	33.1

Source: *Employment in Europe 2004 – Recent Trends and Prospects* (EU Commission 2004)

Unemployment

The rate of unemployment in Ireland is among the lowest in the EU, with Long Term Unemployment falling from 8.9 per cent in 1993 to 1.2 per cent in 2002. This would explain in part why expenditure on unemployment is lower than the EU average.

It is also the case that in times of high unemployment, there can be a higher incidence of claims for invalidity pensions, where people with chronic conditions and little prospect of employment opt to retire on health grounds.

Tax treatment

Social expenditure is currently recorded on a gross basis in the ESSPROS methodology. Recording expenditures on a net basis would require inclusion of tax reliefs for social purposes and deduction of taxes levied on social benefits. Tax reliefs are important in Ireland, especially under the pensions and health insurance headings. It is estimated that for 2000/2001, (the last available tax year), the total value of tax reliefs on occupational and private pension schemes amounted to some €2,615 million (2000/2001 estimate).⁵

The annual contribution of 1 per cent of GDP to the National Pension Reserve Fund could also be considered as social protection expenditure, but is not included.

Future Expenditure Trends

Expenditure on social protection, especially pensions and health, will rise steadily in the years ahead, as the population ages and increasing proportions of those retiring qualify for full social insurance pensions. The rapidly increasing participation of women in the workforce will also lead to a significant increase in the proportion of women qualifying for pensions in their own right.

A clearer picture of the actual levels of expenditure in Ireland should also emerge as ways are found to incorporate expenditure on occupational and private pensions, including the cost of tax reliefs, into the overall level of social expenditure amounts.

The main overall objective going forward for Ireland will be to continue to develop its social protection system for an ageing society, in ways that ensure financial sustainability. The experience of other countries, which are already reaching the stage of having a significant and growing proportion of their population over age 65, will be instructive in that regard.

⁵ The OECD also attempts to deduct indirect taxes paid by recipients of social benefits in arriving at net expenditures.

2.3 Extract from Joint Inclusion Report 2003 – Summary Assessment of Irish Nap/Inclusion

This assessment from the Joint Inclusion Report is a commentary on the Irish NAP/Inclusion 2003-2005, which was submitted to the EU in July 2003. Therefore, it does not take account of progress made across policy areas since then. (Office for Social Inclusion)

IRELAND

Situation and key trends: *The slowdown in the global economy has impacted on the pace of economic growth, resulting in a slight rise in unemployment and increasing pressure on Exchequer finances. Analysis of poverty trends shows that the national 'consistent' poverty measure continues to fall, from 8.2% in 1998 to 5.2% in 2001. However, the 60% risk of poverty indicator has risen from 19% to 21% over the same period, indicating continued income disparities affecting, in particular, elderly people, large families and lone parents.*

Progress made in 2001-2003: *The national anti-poverty strategy was reviewed and ambitious new targets and institutional arrangements have been established. An active engagement with all unemployed people at an early stage continues to record sustained success and progress has been achieved in the area of early school leaving and adult literacy. Social security payments have increased in real terms and investment in infrastructure continues to exceed the EU average. However, life expectancy remains low, relative to other EU states, and affordability of housing and homelessness continue to be a problem.*

Strategic approach: *This NAP presents a greatly improved strategic approach that is based on a more complex understanding of the causes of social exclusion and better addresses the common objectives. There are a large number of targets that are quantifiable and time focused. A new framework to tackle social exclusion has been established, with overall co-ordination and responsibility allocated to a new Office for Social Inclusion, although one would have to question if the resources allocated to this office are sufficient for the ambitious work programme outlined. A wide-ranging consultation process and the establishment of a Social Inclusion Forum have increased civic society involvement. The key objective is to consolidate the economic success of recent years to ensure that high levels of employment are sustained and a more equal society is achieved.*

Key policy measures: *Ireland is active in addressing all four objectives, with particular emphasis placed on access to employment and raising standards of education. While employment is seen as the major route out of poverty, the Plan recognises that not everyone can use the labour market as a way out of poverty. A number of targets are, therefore, set in relation to the provision of adequate income support. Special programmes are targeted at groups who have particular difficulties, such as people with disabilities, immigrants, Travellers and ex-prisoners. Other groups, such as the homeless and ethnic minorities are identified as especially vulnerable. A range of social problems are highlighted for particular attention, such as domestic violence, indebtedness, and alcohol and drug misuse. The importance of care systems and preserving family solidarity are also addressed.*

Challenges ahead: *The major challenge will be to ensure that resources are made available to implement the agreed targets, particularly if the economic downturn continues. Key priorities will be enhancing infrastructure and access to services, particularly for those living in rural areas. Efforts to tackle educational disadvantage and the integration of refugees and immigrants must continue. The growing income inequalities require greater focus and a target in this area would be useful. The commitment to research the problem of high relative income poverty is welcome. While the Plan does identify significant gender inequality issues, it is weak in establishing targets and developing policy responses. Monitoring and evaluation of the NAP requires further clarification. Also, it is crucial that social inclusion co-ordination be strengthened at local and regional level to ensure an integrated approach.*

2.4 Looking Ahead to 2010

The European Council, at its meeting in Lisbon in 2000, pledged to make a *decisive impact on the eradication of poverty* by 2010. Next year (2005) marks the half way stage in the period over which that goal is to be reached. A streamlined open-co-ordination process at EU level has been developed and approved by the Council of Ministers. If the social partnership process at national level continues to apply to social inclusion issues, it will have a major role in the development of future strategies to combat poverty. It is important, therefore, to look ahead to the further development of the process. Some key milestones leading up to 2010, which assume continued social partnership involvement, are set out in the timeframe below.

Timeframe	
Date	Milestone
2004 December	First OSI Annual Report on implementation of second NAP/Inclusion 2003-2005, plus 'light' update for EU Commission
2005 June	Report to EU on implementation and evaluation of second NAP/Inclusion
2005 December	Second OSI Annual Report, with focus on second NAP/Inclusion
2006 Early	Completion of negotiations on successor to Sustaining Progress
2006 October	The third National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion to be submitted to EU - to cover the period 2006-2009. This is the last major Action Plan for making a decisive impact on poverty by the 2010 deadline
2006 December	Third OSI Annual Report – linking second and third NAP/Inclusion and marking end of revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)
2007 January	Possible commencement of new National Development Plan
2007 February	End of period of application of revised NAPS "Building an Inclusive Society"
2007 December	Fourth OSI Annual Report dealing with Third NAP/Inclusion
2008 December	Fifth OSI Annual Report – on implementation of Third NAP/Inclusion
2009 February	Negotiations for a further Partnership Agreement may be due for completion
2009 July	The fourth NAP/Inclusion to be submitted to EU for period 2009-2012

Pursuing the Lisbon Agenda

The use of the words *decisive impact* in the Lisbon pledge on eradicating poverty means not just a significant amelioration of poverty, but tackling and removing at least some of the root causes. The main priorities will include those identified by the EU under the heading “challenges ahead” in its Joint Inclusion Report (see section 2.3), especially in relation to infrastructure and services such as health and education, and income inequalities.

This is to be achieved within the context of the Lisbon strategic goal which is to make the European Union by 2010:

“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

Developing further the national strategic approach to combating poverty and social inclusion is helped by examining the Lisbon goal from both a social protection/social cohesion perspective and from an economic perspective. This is in line with the *policy triangle* approach of applying the economic, employment and social protection dimensions to policy development, in an integrated way, in recognition of the fact that they are mutually supportive and mutually reinforcing.

Social policy, for example, is increasingly being seen as an important “productive factor” and not as a brake on economic activity. It is increasingly recognised, especially among EU Member States, that social policies, which provide for investments in human and social capital (in the fields of employment supports, education, housing, health and income support) contribute significantly to higher economic efficiency as they improve productivity and the quality of the labour force. In addition, negotiated social partnership agreements

that deliver sustained social benefits and employment peace have become important factors in encouraging inward investment and higher productivity. Making a decisive impact on poverty through this process, therefore, will not alone contribute to greater social cohesion, but also to sustainable economic growth and more and better jobs as well.

EU Process

The streamlining of the EU “Open Co-ordination process” will mean that Social Protection/Social Inclusion Reports for the European Council and subsequent publications will cover pensions, health care and, possibly, “making work pay”, as well as social inclusion, with analysis of the latter becoming broader. This should allow for a more developed and general approach that addresses a number of separate, but related, policy areas in the social field. The streamlined process should further facilitate exchanges of knowledge, experience and best practice between the 25 Member States across the key social policy fields.

National Process

The NAP/Inclusion for 2006 to 2009 will take into account the evaluation of what had been achieved under the current Plan in relation to social inclusion. It will at a minimum make provision for meeting the objectives and targets for 2007 as set out in the revised NAPS, *Building an Inclusive Society*. It may incorporate the concrete outcomes of the relevant *Special Initiatives*. It may also include a further “*Special Initiatives*” approach, identifying other cross-cutting areas for policy development involving the social partners, with a view to having agreed policies developed for these areas for incorporation, at the latest, in the NAP/Inclusion for the period 2009-2012. Any future social inclusion developments concerning the NDP/CSF could also form part of this process.

SECTION 3

MAIN DEVELOPMENTS 2003 – 2004

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report highlights some of the key actions which were progressed or initiated by Government Departments to combat poverty and social exclusion during the period covered by the Annual Report. (More detailed information on these actions and on other initiatives is contained in Part II of this report.) Many of these actions commenced prior to the timeframe of this report and are still ongoing. In addition, certain actions are included which are not directly referred to in the NAP/Inclusion. However, in order to present a complete picture of all Government actions and policies which impact on social inclusion, the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) believes that it is appropriate that they be included. Where there are specific policy targets in the NAP/Inclusion, these are highlighted at the beginning of each section.

In many instances, as data is incomplete or unavailable, it is not possible to report on the outcome of various initiatives. This is an issue that the OSI will be addressing as part of the development of a Data Strategy. Certain aspects are descriptive in nature and less focused on outcomes. Measuring benefits and outcomes can be difficult, due to the nature of the intervention, the many factors which impact on poverty and social inclusion, and the fact that the impact may not be experienced in the short term. A good example of this can be seen in the equality framework, which does not easily lend itself to measures, for example, relating costs and benefits. Effectiveness here is not measured simply in terms of monetary value but on grounds of fairness and equity. In this case, the subjective nature of the policy makes evaluation more difficult, and is one that is usually developed using qualitative type measures. However, there are other areas where

measurement can be more explicitly focused, particularly in terms of questioning whether certain expenditures and programmes are sufficiently targeted at defined social problems, specific vulnerable groups or areas of disadvantage. There is a need to improve skills and reporting in this area to ensure that the development of future policy and future decisions is based on informed and valid information. Poverty proofing of policies is one way of developing a better understanding of these issues. The OSI, in consultation with Departments and with the Social Inclusion Consultative Group, will be concentrating on these issues to ensure that greater understanding and awareness is developed amongst those who have policy responsibility in these areas.

It is also clear from this first report that certain cross-cutting issues may benefit from a more co-ordinated approach. There are a number of complex administrative arrangements and strategic responses described, sometimes focusing on the same group of people. The Office for Social Inclusion views this annual report as an important initial step in identifying and describing the many actions being undertaken. However, we also recognise that there are weaknesses and it will be part of our future work to use the information presented to identify shortcomings and strive to strengthen inter-agency linkages.

In addition, it is recognised that some of the language used may be somewhat bureaucratic. Again, this is an area where the OSI hopes to promote the development of better understanding and better communications. The OSI has a key role in ensuring that “there is widespread knowledge and related information on what NAPS is set up to do, both within and outside the public sector”. This report will assist greatly in this regard.

It is important to emphasise that this report is concerned only with Government actions mainly at national level: local authorities, local agencies, the Social Partners and the community and voluntary sector are also involved in a wide range of valuable and worthwhile social inclusion activities, some with public assistance. All of these activities, both public and private, present learning, development and partnership opportunities to us all.

OSI acknowledges and values the input of all Departments, in particular, those staff engaged in Social Inclusion Units across the Civil Service, and their willingness to engage with us in driving this process forward. It equally acknowledges and values the input of the Social Inclusion Consultative Group and their contribution to the process.

3.2 Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism

To prevent the risks of exclusion

Sport Capital Programme

The Sport Capital Programme operated by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism provides funding on an annual basis to voluntary and community organisations to assist with the provision of sporting facilities aimed at increasing levels of participation and improving standards of performance. In the period 1999 to 2004 almost €331 million has been allocated to 4,271 projects throughout the country.

Access 2001-2004

The Arts and Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS 2001 – 2004) provides funding for Arts and Culture projects throughout the country. In August 2001, 44 projects were selected for funding amounting to €45.71 million.

As general access to arts and culture facilities improves and participation in arts and culture activities increases, it is expected that there will be a positive impact on socially disadvantaged individuals and groups.

3.3 Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

To Prevent the Risks of Exclusion

Drugs and Alcohol Misuse

Alcohol/Drug Misuse is a special initiative under Sustaining Progress.

The National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 was launched 3 years ago and is due for a mid-term evaluation before the end of 2004. It contains 100 individual actions, under the four pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment and research, to be implemented by a range of Departments and Agencies. Since it was launched, considerable progress has been made in implementing the actions and, with the exception of a small number, work is progressing on the remainder.

Of particular note is the progress being made as regards increasing the number of methadone treatment places. The number of places at the end of April 2004, the latest date for which confirmed figures are available, was 6,920 exceeding the target of 6,500 set in the Strategy. The equivalent figure for April 2003 was 6,606, while at the end of 2000 it was 5,032.

Community Development Programme

The Community Development Programme aims to reduce poverty and social exclusion through targeting support at disadvantaged and socially excluded communities, by providing them with support which will improve their capacity to benefit from economic and social development.

Through the Programme, funding is provided to locally based projects and in general covers the core costs associated with running a community development resource centre.

With effect from September 2003, a further 15 community development projects, located predominantly in RAPID and CLÁR areas, were allocated funding, bringing the total number of projects supported under the Programme to 175.

To help the most vulnerable

CLÁR

CLÁR is a regeneration programme targeted at areas of specific population decline. This programme co-ordinates existing sources of public and private finance and provides additional stimulus funding for the provision of small scale economic and social infrastructure. This helps rural communities overcome local difficulties and achieve access to a range of essential services such as water supply, sewerage disposal, road access, broadband communication and other community and economic infrastructure. This programme has demonstrated that small amounts of public funding specifically targeted can impact in disadvantaged rural areas experiencing low or declining populations.

RAPID The RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development) Programme is a focused initiative by Government to target the most concentrated areas of urban disadvantage in the country. It requires Government Departments and State Agencies to bring about better co-ordination and closer integration in the delivery of services. There are 2 Strands of the RAPID Programme - Strand I targets 25 urban areas while Strand II targets 20 provincial towns around the country.

Funding totalling €5 million has been allocated to RAPID areas to support the development of playgrounds and for enhancement works in local authority estates. In addition, over €2 million top-up funding was allocated to sports clubs in RAPID areas, that were successful under the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, Sports Capital Programme 2004. A dedicated fund of €4.5 million in 2004 has also been introduced to progress additional small-scale proposals. Government Departments will continue to work towards progressing the larger scale proposals from RAPID plans.

Local Development Social Inclusion Programme

The Local Development Social Inclusion Programme aims to counter disadvantage and promote equality and social and economic inclusion through the implementation of strategic plans that target the most excluded individuals including vulnerable children.

The Programme is managed by Area Development Management (ADM) on behalf of the Department and is delivered at local level by 38 Partnerships, 33 Community Groups and 4 Territorial Employment Pacts. Each of these groups prepares a strategic plan setting out objectives, actions and targets across three sub-measures - *Services for the Unemployed*, *Community Development* and *Community Based Youth Initiatives*, designed to address poverty and social inclusion in their areas.

In 2003, 31,777 people were supported under the Services to the Unemployed measure and 9,351 people participated in education and training programmes. The Community Development measure of the Programme, supported 1,654 community-based projects and 184 small-scale infrastructural projects. Over the course of the

year, the Community Based Youth Initiatives sub-measure assisted a further 40,521 young people and 13,806 adults.

The PEACE Programme

The border counties of Ireland have been affected by the Northern Ireland conflict which has contributed to poverty and social exclusion in these areas. The EU-funded Peace and Reconciliation Programmes continue to support many disadvantaged communities through the development of community infrastructure, education and training initiatives and support for vulnerable groups, as well as building peace and reconciliation.

3.4 Department of Education and Science

Tackling Educational Disadvantage is a special initiative under Sustaining Progress

NAP/Inclusion Targets:

- Halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006;
- Reduce the proportion of adults aged 16-64 with restricted literacy levels to 10-20 per cent by 2007; and
- Reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 85 per cent by 2003 and 90 per cent by 2006.

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

Literacy data

Baseline data and outcome measures have been lacking but several actions have been initiated to strengthen reporting in the area of literacy. These

involve the establishment of a number of systems for monitoring literacy and numeracy levels among children and adults, particularly those disadvantaged, with the aim of having these systems in place by 2006.

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) carried out a survey in 2003 to establish baseline literacy data for 1st, 3rd and 6th classes in disadvantaged primary schools. The survey was based on a fully representative sample of disadvantaged primary schools in Ireland. The report of the survey was published in October 2004.

Schools and Information & Communication Technology (ICT)

The Department of Education and Science is currently formulating a Policy Framework to progress the position as regards ICT in schools for the period to the end of 2007, with priority being given to supporting developments in disadvantaged schools and making provision for children with special needs. In a joint approach, the telecommunications sector and the Government have jointly committed €18 million towards the rollout of broadband to all 4,100 primary and secondary schools.

Access to educational awards

A new national framework of qualifications, spanning from basic education/literacy to doctorate level, was launched by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland in October 2003. In mid-2004, the framework has reached a stage where it has set out the major awards for each level and how these will operate and function in relation to each other in the medium term. Arrangements have been finalised for the implementation of the framework within higher education in 2004/5 and planning is underway for implementation in further education and training.

Adults and literacy

Funding for adult literacy programmes continues to increase with a consequent rise in the number of participants. The National Development Plan set a target of having 113,000 participants on such programmes for the period 2000-2006 and it achieved a participation rate of 100,000 by the end of 2003.

Early school leaving and school attendance/ support

At the time of going to print wide-ranging review of all educational disadvantaged programmes was being finalised by the Department of Education and Science.

The National Educational Welfare Board, mainly through its Educational Welfare Officers, provides advice and support to parents, guardians and schools, and ensures that each child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives a certain minimum education. Rollout of its services is continuing with priority being accorded to disadvantaged communities. Five regional teams have now been established with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and staff have been deployed in areas of greatest disadvantage and in areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme. Thirteen towns with significant school going populations also now have an Educational Welfare Officer allocated to them. The Board issued an information leaflet to 330,000 families and 4,100 schools in early March 2004. In addition, the Board launched a new Lo-call telephone number to inform parents and guardians about their legal role and responsibilities under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

To help the most vulnerable

Special needs education

The Minister for Education and Science established the first National Council for Special Education on 24 December 2003. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act was enacted in July 2004.

An additional 350 teaching posts for *special needs* pupils and a new system for the allocation of resources for special needs in primary schools have been approved.

Travellers

Work commenced in autumn 2003 on developing a five-year Traveller Education Strategy. The report on the Strategy is expected to be completed in early 2005. An external expert has been appointed to lead the process with a joint working group drawn from the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education.

3.5 Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Long-term Unemployed, Vulnerable Workers and those who have been made redundant are the subject of a special initiative under Sustaining Progress

NAP/Inclusion Targets:

- To eliminate long term unemployment as soon as circumstances permit but in any event not later than 2007;
- To reduce the level of unemployment experienced by vulnerable groups towards the national average by 2007;

- To increase employment rate of women to an average of more than 60 per cent in 2010, as envisaged in the National Employment Action Plan; and
- To achieve the objectives set out in the National Employment Action Plan to increase employment rates;
- The National Minimum Wage is to be adjusted to €7 per hour with effect from 1 February 2004.

To facilitate participation in employment

Prevention and Activation Process

The aim of the Prevention and Activation Process is to reduce unemployment and prevent the drift into long-term unemployment by assisting unemployed people to return to employment by actively engaging with them. Over the course of 2003 the Process was rolled out on a phased regional basis to all persons who are over six months on the live register and have not been selected for inclusion in the process previously. Details are to be found in Part II, Section 1.

Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs)

Despite the considerable reduction in unemployment, including long term unemployed (LTU), there is a wide range of active labour market and training programmes, operated across a number of Government Departments, aimed at facilitating access by unemployed and inactive persons to the labour market.

At present there are over 67,000 persons on such programmes, which is close to one place for every unemployed person.

FÁS Schemes

The Programmes operated by FÁS under the aegis of this Department are Community Employment

(CE), Job Initiative (JI), Social Economy (SE) Programme and FÁS Training programmes which between them account for over 37,000 places. Of these around 25,000 places are provided through CE (20,000), JI (2,200) and SE (2,300). On an on-going basis within FÁS, priority is given to the provision of active labour market programmes in the Government's designated areas of disadvantage (RAPID and CLÁR). The total funding allocation for the three employment schemes in 2004 is fixed at €351 million. The number of places being funded in 2004 is similar to the number of participants at year-end 2003.

Certain aspects of the focus and the terms of participation on CE, JI and SE are under continuing examination including further consultation with the Social Partners. The outcome of this process will inform any future adjustments in the structure and the terms and conditions of participation on these programmes.

High Support Process (HSP)

In January 2003 FÁS introduced HSP for jobseekers who were suffering personal barriers to employment. It was piloted in Dublin, Cork, Letterkenny, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick, Dundalk, Sligo and Waterford with a budget of €1.2 million. Under the programme participants are assigned to FÁS Employment Services Officers and/or Local Employment Service Mediators to help them identify and resolve their employability difficulties. A multi agency group arrange for the delivery of, and access to, the relevant services required by the individual.

39 Job Initiative participants as well as 297 "Not Progression Ready" clients availed of the additional support in 2003. The High Support Process was made available nationwide in 2004 and it has been projected that 320 "Non

Progression Ready” clients and 230 JI participants will have availed of the process by the end of that year.

National Training Fund

Training and the upskilling of the labour force are necessary to ensure that people can avail of employment opportunities and better paid and better quality jobs. The National Training Fund is resourced by a levy on employers of 0.7 per cent of reckonable earnings in respect of employees in Class A and Class H employments. This represents approximately 75 per cent of all insured employees. Funds of €250 million were received during 2003. When the (provisional) surplus of €67.5 million brought forward from 2002 is added to that figure, the total funds available for the purposes of the Fund during 2003 amounted to €317.5 million. In 2003, the National Training Fund supported schemes operated by FÁS, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Shannon Free Airport Development Company (SFADCo), Skillnets Ltd., FORFÁS, the Institution of Engineers of Ireland, and the Higher Education Authority. Planned expenditure from the Fund in 2004 is estimated at €293 million, and projected surplus in the fund to be carried forward to 2005 is estimated to be €66 million.

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

National Minimum Wage

Under the National Minimum Wage Act, the level of the minimum wage was increased to €7.00 per hour from 1 February 2004.

To help the most vulnerable

People with Disabilities – Workway Project

This initiative was conceived under the previous Social Partnership agreement *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* to bring together

employers, people with disabilities, trade unions and other groups representing the interests of people with disabilities in networks established under the initiative to improve their employment opportunities. It is the first such known partnership initiative in Europe to seek to address the high levels of unemployment among people with disabilities in the private sector. Phase I, mainly concerned with awareness raising and information collation, concluded in Spring 2004 and a review was carried out thereafter (the Report is expected to be finalised in Autumn). Phase II involves the development of a template to address the deficits identified at pre-employment stage, the piloting of joint IBEC/ICTU Guidelines and the development of a one-stop information and employment website (due for completion end Mar 2005).

Travellers – EQUAL Programme

FÁS is one of the partners with Pavee Point (a partnership of Irish Travellers and settled people working together to improve the lives of Irish Travellers through working towards social justice, solidarity, socio-economic development and human rights) on an Equal Project that is exploring the job creation potential of the Traveller Economy. This is a new project and is being piloted at Pavee Point (Dublin), Galway and Clondalkin. The programme, which has been running since 2002 and is due to be completed in 2005, involves working with Traveller men who want to develop or formalise new businesses. Each programme has 10 participants.

Ex-prisoners and youths at risk

FÁS and the Probation and Welfare Service collaborate on a number of projects called Justice Workshops for which the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform through the Probation & Welfare Service provide substantial funding and where FÁS pay the Trainee Allowances. These

Workshops, which are managed and administered by Management Committees in association with the Probation and Welfare Service, were established for youths at risk, offenders and ex-offenders. All 41 FÁS Community Training Centres (CTCs) are open to accepting ex-prisoners and youths at risk who are referred on by the Probation and Welfare Service.

3.6 Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Housing and Accommodation is a special initiative under Sustaining Progress.

NAP/Inclusion Targets:

- To ensure that housing supply is brought more into line with demand and that the housing requirements set out in the NDP (500,000 new units between 2000-2010) are achieved in a planned and coherent way.
- To deliver 41,500 local authority housing starts (including acquisitions) between 2000 and 2006.
- To deliver an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures which meets the needs of different types of households.
- By end 2004, sufficient and appropriate emergency accommodation to be available to rough sleepers, in conjunction with appropriate outreach services to enable them to access it. This target is to apply to each local authority and health board area. At the end of 2003, progress in meeting the target will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised mechanisms put in place to achieve it.

- By end 2007, adequate heating systems will be available in all local authority rented dwellings provided for older people.

- All Travellers' families identified in the local authority five-year Traveller accommodation programme process, as being in need of accommodation will be appropriately accommodated by end 2004.

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

Housing Supply

Some 228,928 housing units were completed between January 2000 and the end of 2003. Local authorities have been asked to provide the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (D/EH&LG) with details of housing land availability at the end of June 2004 and it is expected that the survey results will be published in the Department's Housing Statistics Bulletin (September Quarter 2004).

Recognising the important role that the private rented sector plays in providing affordable accommodation, the Government is committed to modernising and developing the private rented sector. In line with this commitment, the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 which provides for major reform of landlord/tenant law was enacted in July 2004. Elements of the Act which came into operation from September 2004 include improved security of tenure, new tenancy termination procedures and the establishment of a Private Residential Tenancies Board (see Part II for full details).

Housing Starts

Total local authority starts achieved to end of 2003 was 20,622 (or 50.3 per cent of target). Local authorities completed or acquired almost 5,000

units in 2003 and a similar level of output is expected in 2004. Output from local authorities in the past three years has been over one third higher than in the preceding three years.

Social and Affordable Housing

Strong social and affordable housing programmes are being maintained to meet the needs of those not in a position to provide for their housing needs from their own resources. The funding being provided in 2004 will allow for the needs of some 13,000 households to be met, compared to almost 8,500 in 1998.

A commitment was given in the housing and accommodation special initiative under Sustaining Progress to review the effectiveness of these programmes, which are designed to assist low income groups, including those with social housing needs and special housing needs, such as elderly, disabled and homeless people and Travellers. In line with this commitment, the D/EH&LG and the Housing Forum (a vehicle for affording the social partners an opportunity to contribute to policy development) have agreed a work programme for reviewing social and affordable housing provision. The National Economic and Social Council is currently undertaking a comprehensive study of housing and land.

Multi-annual action plans for social and affordable housing have been introduced to ensure that the available resources and the certainty stemming from the Government's 5 year multi-annual capital envelopes, announced in Budget 2004 are fully exploited. Furthermore, the action plans, to be implemented by local authorities in the period 2004-2008, will require that the planning framework for social and affordable housing reflects a fully integrated and holistic approach to delivery of housing to ensure that optimum value for money and effectiveness is achieved.

To prevent the risks of exclusion

Homelessness

The target on provision of services to rough sleepers is for end 2004 and applies to each local authority and health board area. At the end of 2003, progress in meeting the target was to be reviewed and, if necessary, revised mechanisms put in place to achieve it.

A wide range of accommodation and services have been provided for homeless people since the introduction of the Homeless Strategy. Particular attention has been paid to rough sleepers.

Outreach services have been established in Dublin, Cork and Limerick to make contact with rough sleepers. A wet hostel for street drinkers has opened in Dublin and one has also opened in Limerick. The second Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2004-2006 entitled *Making it Home* was launched on 28 July 2004. The Plan was prepared by The Homeless Agency on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities in conjunction with health boards and other relevant statutory and voluntary bodies. Arrangements are underway at central level for a review of the Government's Homeless Strategy, together with associated action plans. Tenders will be sought by end September, the consultants appointed and review commenced by early December 2004.

To help the most vulnerable

Older People

NAP/Inclusion Target:

- By end 2007, adequate heating systems will be available in all local authority rented dwellings provided for older people.

To progress the achievement of the 2007 target and to accelerate the provision of central heating facilities the D/EH&LG introduced a central heating programme in July 2004 for local authority

rented dwellings. Total funding for the programme in 2004 is €15 million, of which the D/EH&LG provide €12 million and the local authorities a further €3 million.

Travellers

NAP/Inclusion Target:

- All Travellers' families identified in the local authority five-year Traveller accommodation programme process, as being in need of accommodation will be appropriately accommodated by end 2004.

Progress has been made in delivering additional accommodation for Travellers. A total of 1,369 additional families are in accommodation since the five-year programmes commenced. This has resulted in a reduction in the number of families on unauthorised sites by 419 families. The numbers of families on unauthorised sites has been reduced to 788 from 1207.

Embedding Social Inclusion in Local Government

The Combat Poverty Agency, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the OSI, established the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network in late 2000. To support the implementation of NAPS at local level, including the embedding of social inclusion in local government.

The overall aim of the Network is to promote and support the development of a strong anti-poverty focus within a reformed system of local government. It is managed by the Combat Poverty Agency, with the assistance of an Advisory Committee and a Steering Group.

3.7 Department of Finance

NAP/Inclusion Target:

- To the extent that there is any scope for personal tax reductions, progress will continue to be targeted towards removing those on the minimum wage from the tax net and moving towards the target where 80 per cent of all earners pay tax at not more than the standard rate.

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

Taxation Policy

A number of initiatives have been taken or progressed in relation to taxation policy which had the effect of benefiting those on low incomes. The Government commitment to achieve a position where all those on the national minimum wage are removed from the tax net has led to the removal over the past seven years of some 668,700 income earners (35 per cent of all income earners) from the tax net. This compares with a figure of 380,000 (25 per cent of income earners) before the 1998 Budget.

In Budget 2004 the entry point to the taxation system was maintained at 90 per cent of the minimum wage annualised while the rate of the minimum wage was itself increased to €7.00 per hour from 1 February 2004. When the minimum wage was introduced in April 2000, less than 64 per cent of the minimum wage annualised was free of tax.

Budget 2004 also increased the Age Exemption limits for income tax for the third year in a row. In three years, the limits have increased by almost 44 per cent whereas inflation for the same period is expected to increase by slightly less than 11 per cent.

Under this system, those aged 65 or over are exempt from tax up to specified limits – for 2004 the limits are €15,500 in the case of a single or widowed person and €31,000 in the case of a married couple where one is or both are aged 65 or over. Over the last 7 budgets, 81,300 elderly people have been taken out of the tax net.

Poverty Proofing of the Budget

Poverty proofing of policies has been the principal instrument for mainstreaming social inclusion at central Government level since late 1998. Poverty proofing of the annual Budget is the overall responsibility of the Department of Finance. This process involves the Department reviewing the impact of the Budget package using the National Anti-Poverty Strategy poverty proofing guidelines. Performance of the poverty proofing exercise for Budget 2004 concluded that, for persons defined as consistently poor who are within the tax net, the Budget income tax measures would contribute to progress towards the overall NAPS target to reduce poverty among that section of the population.

3.8 Department of Health and Children

NAP/Inclusion Targets:

- Reduce the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by at least 10 per cent for circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries and poisoning by 2007; and
- Reduce the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by 10 per cent from the 2001 level, by 2007.

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

Initiatives to implement anti-poverty work in the health services

Work to support health service staff in implementing the actions to achieve the key NAPS health targets is being taken forward by the NAPS and Health Project Planning Team. This work aims to raise awareness of NAPS targets and social inclusion issues in the wider health service, lay the foundation for a learning network and mainstream actions to address further NAPS health target achievement in the context of all major policy implementation. The first phase of the work which relates to information gathering and agenda setting is nearing completion.

Monitoring of premature mortality target

The Department of Health and Children requested the Institute of Public Health to analyse CSO mortality and population data for 2002 (the latest available). These data show considerable gaps between the highest and lowest socio-economic groups for death rates from circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries and poisoning. This information will assist in future decision making.

Implementation of Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

The issue of HIA is being progressed in the context of the re-organisation of the Department of Health and Children and the work of the interim Health Service Executive. In the meantime the Department of Health and Children will be having bilateral meetings with a number of Government Departments in relation to HIA before the end of 2004. This work will build on an introductory policy seminar held for senior managers and the launch of the HIA methodology guidelines and a screening tool for HIA, which took place in July 2003. The Institute of Public Health, which

provides technical support on HIA, has also advertised for additional staff for this area.

Implementation of the Primary Care Strategy

The Primary Care Strategy sets out a vision for the development of an integrated, high-quality, multidisciplinary and user friendly primary care service to meet people's health and social care needs. The ten pilot implementation projects are making substantial progress with the development of the multi-disciplinary primary care teams. A number of the locations are designated areas under the RAPID and CLÁR Programmes as areas of deprivation. Further projects are located in areas of high deprivation and high eligibility for General Medical Services. The health services are currently examining how the existing primary/community care resources could best be reorganised, so as to give effect to the application of the teamworking concept on a wider basis (than the 10 implementation projects). Funding was allocated in 2003 to initiatives in support of widening the interdisciplinary model of primary care.

Implementation of Cardiovascular Health Strategy

Since the launch of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy in July 1999, €54 million has been invested in its implementation. The key national structures to support the implementation process and provide expert advice are the Heart Health Task Force and the Advisory Forum on Cardiovascular Health. The "Heartwatch" programme is currently being evaluated and a report is due in late 2004. The evaluation will take account of the socio-economic status of patients. Among the issues to be addressed are equity of access within the population targeted and barriers to patients participating in Heartwatch.

On 29th March 2004 most enclosed places of work, including licensed premises, became smoke-free. The primary purpose of this measure is to protect the health of workers and the public from exposure to toxic environmental tobacco smoke. The response to date across all sectors is very positive with compliance at a very high level.

A National Smoking Cessation Action Plan has been developed which includes the introduction of Nicotine Replacement Therapy for patients with a Medical Card and a hard-hitting media campaign '*Every Cigarette is Doing You Damage*'. The campaign is supported by a National Quitline.

The National Taskforce on Obesity is developing a national strategy to tackle obesity and overweight. This strategy will focus on lower socio-economic groups. "Every step counts, small changes make the difference," a national public awareness campaign targeting obesity and overweight was launched on 2 September 2004.

During Ireland's Presidency of the EU, cardiovascular health was the major health theme and the Minister hosted two major conferences.

Cancer

The Report on The Development of Radiation Oncology Services in Ireland was published in October 2003. The Government has accepted the recommendation that a major programme is now required to rapidly develop clinical radiation oncology treatment services to modern standards. The Minister for Health and Children recently announced the approval of over 130 additional staff and full-year revenue funding of €15 million to open the new Radiation Oncology Department in University College Hospital Galway and to expand capacity at Cork University Hospital. There are currently eight linear accelerators nationally and these developments will provide an additional five.

The Report recommends that there should be two treatment centers located in the Eastern region. The Chief Medical Officer has been asked to advise on the optimum location of radiation treatment facilities in Dublin. He will do this with the assistance of national and international experts. It is expected that the selection process will be completed by the end of 2004.

Low birthweight target

Data on low birthweight by socio-economic group is collected through the National Peri-natal Reporting System, managed on behalf of the Department of Health and Children by the ESRI. Some difficulties have been experienced with the socio-economic disaggregation (e.g. due to large number of unknowns and issues related to whether mother's or father's socio-economic positions should be used). These difficulties are being examined and an analysis will be completed by the end of 2004. The Institute of Public Health is also finalising a review of the effectiveness of interventions to improve birth weight in lower socio-economic groups which will be completed by the end of 2004.

Community Development approach to reducing health inequalities

In May 2003 the Department of Health and Children and the Combat Poverty Agency jointly launched the Agency's Building Healthy Communities programme which has a specific focus on community development approaches to reducing health inequalities. In 2003 the Department provided €15,000 to each of two community development projects under this programme and the Department is funding three projects in 2004.

Mental Health

An Expert Group on Mental Health Policy was established in August 2003 to prepare a national

policy framework for the further modernisation of the mental health services. The Group is expected to complete its work in 2005.

To prevent the risks of exclusion

Youth Homelessness

Under the Youth Homelessness Strategy, 141.5 new whole-time equivalent posts (including Management Staff, Project Workers, Social Workers, Family Support Workers, Aftercare Workers and Public Health Nurses) have been filled across the 10 Health Board regions up to end 2003.

To help the most vulnerable

Women

The extension of the current National Breast Screening Programme to counties Carlow, Kilkenny and Wexford and the national roll-out of the programme to the Western and Southern regions was announced last year. Screening commenced in Wexford in March of this year. The establishment of a Design Team to progress the implementation of the BreastCheck programme in Cork and Galway was approved recently. The Design Team will work up detailed plans for the construction of both BreastCheck clinical units. Capital funding of approximately €20 million has been earmarked as part of the Capital Investment programme 2004-2008 to progress the national roll-out.

Health services for older people

Additional funding of almost €10.7 million was provided for Services for Older People in 2004, of which approximately €3.75 million went to the Home Help Service. The National Implementation Group to manage the introduction of the recommendations contained in the Elder Abuse Report is in operation. The Review of the Nursing Home Subvention Scheme has commenced.

Funding was provided in 2004 to develop models of good practice in the care of older people in the community and some Health Boards have developed pilot projects.

Travellers

The Department of Health and Children, in consultation with the Traveller Health Advisory Committee, has undertaken and/or completed a range of actions specified in the Strategy including: the appointment of regional Traveller Health Co-Ordinators; the provision of cultural awareness training to health board staff; the introduction of Primary Health Care for Travellers projects; and the development of Regional Action Plans. These latter have been completed and priorities identified for 2004.

Ethnic Minorities

A Regional Health Strategy for Ethnic Minorities for the Eastern Regional Health Authority area was launched on 23 September 2004.

3.9 Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

NAP/Inclusion Target:

- To increase employment rate of women to an average of more than 60 per cent by 2010, as envisaged in the National Employment Action Plan, 2001.

Facilitating Participation in employment (equality of treatment)

Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004

The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004, which amended the Maternity Protection Act 1994, strengthens the existing maternity leave provisions, and commenced on 18 October 2004.

Adoptive Leave Bill 2004

The Adoptive Leave Bill 2004 which implements the relevant review recommendations on maternity into adoptive leave legislation and strengthens and enhances the existing adoptive leave provisions, is expected to be enacted by end 2004.

Childcare

The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP)

The Mid-Term Review of the NDP/CSF and the Regional Operational Programmes recognised the importance of this programme and increased the funding from €436.7 million to €449.3 million.

The total funding committed to end of July 2004, of €263 million will lead to the creation of 29,639 new childcare places and support for a further 27,418 places, thus exceeding the target number of new childcare places, of 28,403 by the end of 2007. At the end of December 2003, 18,320 places (8,109 full time and 10,211 part-time) of these new places have been completed. A further 19,058 existing childcare places are receiving ongoing support.

To the end of July 2004, €45 million has been committed to funding childcare services operating in RAPID areas and €23 million has been committed to funding childcare services in CLÁR areas, supporting urban and rural regeneration in areas of disadvantage.

A significant part of the remaining funding will be required to roll over staffing grant supports being made available to childcare facilities, which cater for disadvantaged families and for ongoing supports to the City/County Childcare Committees and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations.

In December 2003, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform launched an initiative for childminders to be delivered by the City/County Childcare Committees. This initiative is being provided through a Quality Awareness Programme of short lectures for childminders on aspects of quality childminding and a small capital grants scheme of up to €630 for the purchase of quality enhancing equipment. In the first six months of the scheme, over 1,200 childminders availed of the lecture series.

In June 2004, the Department published *Developing Childcare in Ireland*, a comprehensive review of the progress to the end of 2003.

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

Transposing EU directives in relation to race, employment and gender

The Equality Act 2004 implements three EU Directives, the overall effect of which is to require Member States to prohibit direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and harassment on grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in relation to employment, self-employment or occupational and vocational training. Victimisation is also prohibited. They also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin in social protection including social security and healthcare, social advantages, education and access to and supply of goods and services, including housing.

To help the most vulnerable

NDP Equality for Women Measure

Proposals for implementation of Phase II of the Equality for Women Measure have recently been approved by the Minister. The primary focus of Phase II will be on women experiencing economic

disadvantage. Of the almost €11 million earmarked for Phase II of the Measure, €7 million has been set aside to fund the development of projects located in RAPID areas. There will also be a focus on mainstreaming the learning from Phase I. Funding will be made available to third level institutions to assist women to develop and pursue careers in science and technology.

People with Disabilities – National Disability Strategy

On 21 September 2004, the Government launched a National Disability Strategy to underpin the participation of people with disabilities in society. The strategy comprises four elements –

- Disability Bill 2004
- Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004
- Six Outline Sectoral Plans, and
- A commitment to a multi-annual Investment Programme for disability support services.

The Strategy builds on existing policy and legislation including the Employment Equality Act 1998; the Equal Status Act 2000; the Equality Act 2004; the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004; and the policy of mainstreaming service provision for people with disabilities within the State agencies that provide the service to citizens generally.

Asylum Seekers – Processing Asylum Claims

Over recent years, significant resources have been allocated by the Government to the asylum determination process. This high level of investment continues to have very positive results both in terms of speed of processing and numbers of applications awaiting a final decision.

Processing continued to move strongly in the asylum processing agencies namely the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) with 8,641 cases finalised by the ORAC and 5,031 decisions taken by the RAT. In addition, at the end of December 2003, there were 2,896 cases on hand in both agencies over six months old compared with 6,500 cases over six months old at end September 2001.

In relation to processing times, prioritised applications, which represent over 50 per cent of the present caseload, receive a first instance decision in ORAC within six weeks of application and are also dealt with speedily by the RAT.

Section 4 of this report provides details of a conference held during the Irish presidency of the EU on the subject of reconciling mobility and social inclusion. The conference considered the challenges presented by mobility of persons in the EU including the need to provide adequate support and protection to migrants in general to reduce their risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Prisoners and ex-prisoners – Positive Sentence Management

The Co-ordination Group on Offender Integration has been influential in progressing a number of initiatives especially in the area of post-release accommodation for prisoners and streamlining the process followed by ex-prisoners to obtain welfare benefits. The most notable of these positive changes are as follows:

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has agreed that:

- prisoners will be entitled to apply to be placed on local authority social housing lists nine

months before completing their sentences or likely release dates;

- local authorities will be required to address prisoners' housing needs in their reviews of their housing strategies; and
- subject to estate management considerations, remand and short sentence prisoners will be able to retain their local authority tenancies whilst in custody.

Under new regulations, introduced by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, which came into operation from 31 January 2004, short sentence and remand prisoners can continue to receive rent supplement for a maximum of 13 weeks. This change will help to preserve private rented accommodation for such prisoners and avoid them becoming homeless whilst in custody. The new regulations also provide for time in custody to be counted towards the six month qualification period for access to rent supplement.

Probation and Welfare Service – Family Conferencing provisions of the Children Act 2001

The Family Conferencing provisions of the Children Act 2001 were placed on a statutory basis on 29 July 2004. The Family Conference is convened by the Probation and Welfare Service. The convening of the Conference is directed by the court where the child accepts responsibility for his/her criminal behaviour and where it appears to the court that the preparation of an action plan would be desirable in an individual case. If the action plan is complied with, the individual will avoid conviction. The Family Conference will involve a Probation Officer, the offender, the offender's family, the victim and relevant others such as the local Gardaí.

3.10 Department of Social and Family Affairs

NAP/Inclusion Targets:

- To achieve the rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare payments by 2007. During the period of the Plan (2003-2005) increases in the rates will be made in order to achieve this target;
- Social Welfare pensions to be improved to reach a target level of €200 by 2007;
- Progress to be made towards the implementation of improvements in Widow(er)s pensions and increasing the level of the qualified adult allowance for pensioner spouses to the level of the old age (non-contributory) pension;
- Child Benefit and Child Dependant Allowances to be set at 33-35 per cent of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate by 2007. The final phase of the planned multi-annual increases in Child Benefit rates to be completed in 2004 and 2005; and
- The Department of Social and Family Affairs is to review the contribution being made by the Department's income support system to people reconciling work and family life, the review to be completed not later than 2005.

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

Social Welfare Payment Rates

An increase of €10.00 a week was provided in Budget 2004 for all weekly social welfare full rate payments including those on the lowest rates. A total of approximately 942,700 recipients and

126,200 qualified adults benefited from the increased rates of payment. The lowest social welfare payment is now €134.80 per week. Widow/er's Contributory Pensioners and recipients of Deserted Wife's Benefit, aged 66 and over received a total increase of €11.50 a week, increasing the level of these payments up to the level of the Old Age Contributory Pension. This increase completes the objective of increasing the level of these payments up to the level of the Old Age Contributory Pension. The rate of Contributory Pensions represents approximately 31 per cent of average industrial earnings.

Pensioner Qualified Adult Allowances

Qualified Adult Allowance (QAA) rates for those over 66 years of age now stand at between 66 per cent and 77 per cent of maximum personal rates, up from about 60 per cent and 67 per cent in 2000. Budget 2004 provided for an increase of €7.70 (6.3 per cent) in the QAA rates of Old Age (Contributory) Pension and Retirement Pension, ensuring that the levels of these payments were maintained relative to the personal rates of payment. In addition, Invalidity Pension QAA rates, where the qualified adult is aged 66 or over, were increased by €16.10 (14.2 per cent per week). This special increase brings the rate of this payment up to the level of other contributory pensioner QAA rates and makes progress in real terms towards the achievement of the commitment on the pensioner QAA rate.

Child Benefit

Child Benefit increased to €131.60 per month for each of the first two children and to €165.30 per month for the third and each subsequent child. These increases mark the beginning of the final phase of Child Benefit investment package

initiated in Budget 2001 which, on completion in 2005, will see Government investment in the scheme rise by an additional €1.27 billion. Following Budget 2004, the equivalence level of basic child income support is 35 per cent of the minimum social welfare rates, meaning that this NAP/Inclusion target has now been met.

Back to Education and Back to Work Allowances

The Back To Work Allowance and Back To Education Allowance were further amended in 2003 to ensure their continued focus on the more vulnerable groups in society. Following further review, the qualifying period for Back To Work Enterprise Allowance was reduced from 5 years to 3 years for persons on unemployment benefit/assistance, with effect from March 2004.

Special Projects Fund

The initiatives undertaken by the Department of Social and Family Affairs through the Special Projects Fund were developed further in 2004. The Fund supports many initiatives including intensive training, counselling and job hunting/placement programmes arranged for groups of unemployed people and lone parents.

Reconciling Work and Family Life

The Department is in the process of examining how it can more effectively assist people in reconciling work and family life. An important input to this project is the 2003 OECD report *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life, Austria, Ireland and Japan, Volume 2*. The Department is also preparing a strategy to co-ordinate policy in relation to families and family life, which will examine the issue in a broader, cross-cutting way. This strategy is due for completion by end of 2004, with publication in early 2005.

To prevent the risks of exclusion

Indebtedness

The Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS) is a free and independent, information and advice service, with a budget of €11.4 million, funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. MABS operates via 52 service providers located in 65 offices throughout the country. MABS National Development Limited, set up in September 2004, will support, promote and develop the MABS services. The new company has set six strategic priorities and has employed a National Development team to carry them out:

- To set a national standard for best practice in the delivery of money advice;
- Ensure operational efficiency;
- Develop community education on debt prevention, budgeting and financial management;
- Identify and inform policy makers on social policy issues that impact on indebtedness;
- Promote and market MABS services; and
- Develop strategic partnerships to further the strategic aims of MABS.

Preserving Family Solidarity

The Minister for Social and Family Affairs hosted a series of nationwide public consultation fora on the family in the latter half of 2003. A thematic report, entitled 'Families and Family Life in Ireland – Challenges for the Future' on the proceedings of the nationwide consultative fora, was launched by the Minister on 25 February 2004. Reports on each of the consultative fora are also available. Full consideration will be taken of the findings of the process in the development of the Family Strategy

on families and family life, currently being prepared to mark the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Family

To help the most vulnerable

Children

Ending Child Poverty is a Special Initiative under Sustaining Progress.

The Office for Social Inclusion has lead responsibility for co-ordinating this initiative. It is working 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.

A number of policy issues and objectives, which must be progressed in order to meet this objective, have been identified. It has been agreed to commission the National Economic and Social Council to examine child income support arrangements including the effectiveness of Child Dependant Allowance and Family Income Supplement. Terms of reference for this Study have been finalised, following consultation with the Social Partners.

Work on the Ending Child Poverty initiative will be closely aligned to other Special Initiatives relating to Care, Educational Disadvantage and Long term Unemployed and Vulnerable Workers and the Strategy being prepared on families and family life, to ensure that the child poverty dimension of each is fully addressed. Work is underway on mapping linkages between Departments and Agencies with responsibility for children. This work will contribute to the identification of gaps and overlaps in policy development in relation to children and in service delivery.

3.11 Department of the Taoiseach

Including Everyone in the Information Society is a Special Initiative under Sustaining Progress.

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

The Customer Charter initiative, launched by the Taoiseach in December 2002, requires Departments and Offices to formalise their commitments to service provision and delivery by describing the level of service a customer can expect from a Government Department or Office in a published Charter. This initiative on service standards, by assisting the development of formal expressions of entitlements across a range of public services, recognises that citizenship rights go beyond civil and political rights and obligations to include social, economic and cultural rights and obligations.

As a support to Departments and Offices in preparing their Charters, the Government approved a detailed set of Guidelines in September 2003. The Guidelines provide a framework for Departments and Offices in preparing and reporting on their charters. Charters are based around a four-step cycle of consultation, commitment, evaluation and reporting. The Guidelines recommend that, in their consultation phase, Departments and Offices should consult with all Customer Groups, including:

“Representatives of groups experiencing, or vulnerable to, poverty and social exclusion as identified by the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and to those covered by equality legislation – gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller Community.”

19 Customer Charters were published by October 2004 and the remainder will be published before the end of 2004. Departments and Officers will report on the implementation of the service standards included in their Charters in their 2004 Annual Reports.

To prevent the risks of exclusion

National e-Inclusion Implementation Strategy

A revised national e-Inclusion Implementation Strategy has been developed based on the findings and recommendations of a comprehensive review of national e-Inclusion policy that was undertaken by the Department of the Taoiseach in consultation with the relevant Departments, agencies, organisations and bodies.

This revised strategy recommends action in five priority areas: Information and Communication Technology (ICT) access, learning and skills; building the ICT capacity of the Community and Voluntary sector; measuring Inclusive Information Society development; awareness raising; and mainstreaming Information Society issues.

Information & Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy

This priority will be progressed within the context of Lifelong Learning and the commitment under the e-Europe 2005 Action Plan to produce a national Lifelong Learning Strategy by 2006.

In advance of this, the Department of the Taoiseach has initiated examination of the involvement of local government in fostering appropriate partnerships between the business community, the education/training sector and community development groups to respond to local ICT training and literacy needs.

Building the ICT Capacity of the Community & Voluntary Sector

In April 2004, the Mobhaile Community and Voluntary Services Project was launched and an analysis of the ICT needs and the ICT capacity of the Community and Voluntary Sector was initiated by NUI Maynooth.

The project, which is being piloted in South Dublin, Mayo, Meath, Offaly, North Tipperary, South Tipperary and Westmeath, will help to build the ICT capacity of the Community & Voluntary sector by establishing an online presence and providing them with the ability to communicate with members, interested parties and citizens by means of websites, hosted intranets, secure e-mail and SMS gateways.

The results of the NUI analysis will feed into the rollout of the Mobhaile C&V Services Pilot Projects. It will build on the work already undertaken to ensure that a bottom up approach to building the capacity of the Sector is implemented. This analysis will evaluate how technology may be used to maximise the potential of these organisations to benefits their constituents and the wider society.

In November 2003, the CSO commenced publishing statistics on how ICTs are being used in Ireland today; in the home and in business.

Access to Broadband Technology (Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources)

The €25 million Group Broadband Scheme, operated by the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, is co-funded by the National Development Plan 2000-2006. The Scheme, to be implemented over three years, will address broadband needs in small, rural or more remote communities by empowering smaller

communities to implement their own broadband plans in partnership with broadband service providers.

The first call for proposals was made in March 2004 with additional calls to be made every six months. The Scheme is open to all smaller and rural communities of less than 1,500 people. The Government is to provide 55 per cent capital funding – the maximum allowable under EU rules – with half of the funding payable at the commercial launch of broadband services to local businesses and residents. The balance of funding will be allocated when the scheme reaches the minimum subscriber targets for the projects.

3.12 Department of Transport

Facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services for all

Public Transport Accessibility

The major development in accessible transport policy in recent years has been the decision that from the year 2000 onwards, all major refurbishment projects at bus and rail stations, together with the construction of new stations and the purchase of trains or buses will take account of the needs of people with mobility and sensory impairments. Under this policy all new buses purchased for the urban services of Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus are now low floor and wheelchair accessible. Similarly in the rail sector all new rail carriages are specified to full accessibility standards. In addition all appropriate staff in the state owned bus and rail companies now undergo disability awareness training. Luas has been designed and is operating as a fully accessible service.

Over the period of August 2003 to July 2004 this work has continued apace and the situation as at end July 2004 was as follows:

Bus services

- The accessible bus fleet of *Bus Átha Cliath* has expanded to some 486 low floor buses (which represented some 45 per cent of the fleet) and some 50 routes have been converted to full accessibility. In addition, all the company's premises that provide customer facilities are now fully accessible.
- The regular Bus Éireann urban bus fleets in Waterford, Galway, Limerick and Cork are entirely low floor. In addition, Bus Éireann has some low floor wheelchair accessible buses in operation on a number of rural routes and on some commuter routes in the Greater Dublin Area previously served by non-accessible coaches.
- Accessibility improvements have also been made at a number of bus stations and a major programme of work is ongoing in this regard.

Rail services

- The current Dublin and suburban rail services are wheelchair accessible over most of the network.
- All Dublin-Belfast Enterprise trains are fully accessible.
- The Luas tramcars are fully accessible and have audio/visual facilities similar to the new DART (electric)/Arrow (diesel) suburban rail cars.

Significant progress has been made to date in upgrading railway stations to improve access for mobility and sensory impaired people and further work is ongoing.

To help the most vulnerable

Rural Transport Initiative (RTI)

The Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) has been operating since 2002 to provide funding, on a pilot basis, for rural community organisations and community partnerships to address the particular transport needs of their area through the provision of local transport services. Area Development Management Ltd. (ADM) is managing the RTI on behalf of the Department of Transport.

Thirty-four rural transport groups are being funded under the RTI as of end July 2004, some 2,500 transport services were being provided on approximately 380 new rural routes and some 20,000 people were using the RTI transport services every month.

While €4.4 million was originally earmarked for the RTI in the National Development Plan, €6 million was provided by the Department of Transport for the initiative in the two year period ended December 2003 and further funding of €3 million is being provided for it in 2004. In addition, the Free Travel Scheme operated by the Department of Social and Family Affairs was extended to the RTI in July 2003.

The RTI was originally due to conclude at the end of 2003 but was extended to end 2004 to provide more time to generate further practical experience in the provision of rural transport services. Following the recommendations in a comprehensive appraisal of the initiative, the Minister for Transport has recently announced the extension of the RTI to 2006.

Introduction

The Member State holding the EU Presidency has responsibility for directing the affairs of the Council of Ministers and its various committees, and for working on behalf of the Council with the European Parliament and the Commission. It is also responsible for moving forward the policy agenda and future work of the EU. Ireland chose as its Presidency theme in the social and employment area *“More and better jobs and greater social cohesion in an enlarged Union”*.

The first part of the theme was taken from the goal set by the European Council in Lisbon in 2000 for making the European Union by 2010 *“the most competitive and dynamic knowledge - based economy in the world, capable of economic growth and with **more and better jobs and greater social cohesion**”*. The theme also reflected the fact that Enlargement of the EU would take place during the Irish Presidency and that the Lisbon Goal would now apply to these new Member States.

Informal Council Meeting – Making Work Pay

One of the first events of the Presidency was the informal meeting in January of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs in Galway. The theme for the meeting was *“Making Work Pay exploring the interaction between social protection and work”*. Ministers discussed the importance of the interaction between benefit systems and employment objectives, considering three specific aspects: prevention and activation measures; reconciling work and family life; and prolonging working life.

European Council Meeting

The issue of *Making Work Pay* was further considered by European Heads of State and Government at the Spring European Council meeting in March 2004 where Member States agreed on the need for further efforts in order to meet the employment goals set at the Lisbon

European Council in 2000, and reiterated the strong correlation between unemployment and poverty and social exclusion. The Spring European Council also agreed that strategies which make a decisive impact on poverty and social exclusion should be reinforced and that protecting the most vulnerable members of society forms an essential aspect of the Lisbon Agenda.

Conferences

The Presidency, with the support of the EU Commission, hosted a number of Conferences designed to facilitate exchanges between representatives of all the Member States of knowledge, experience and research findings on key challenges which are of relevance to poverty and social exclusion. They also examined, in particular, how further such exchanges could be developed at EU level. Key experts on the Conference themes presented papers on various aspects, which led off the discussions which took place in workshops and via panel discussions. A brief overview of the outcomes of the main conferences follows. Further details, including copies of conference conclusions and reports, can be found on the website of the Irish EU presidency, www.eu2004.ie, and on the main EU website www.europa.eu.int.

Conferences hosted by the Department of Social and Family Affairs

Conference: *Reconciling mobility and social inclusion - the role of economic and social policy*

Venue: *Bundoran, Co. Donegal*

Date: *1 and 2 April 2004*

The conference considered the challenges presented by mobility of persons in the EU including the need to provide adequate support and protection to migrants to reduce their risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion. The

importance of a holistic approach to these challenges was stressed at the Conference, given the multi-faceted nature of the problems. This would include the following:

- (a) Development of clear and comprehensive strategies at national level to promote the employment and social inclusion of immigrants, involving immigration, employment and social policy;
- (b) Public to be kept fully informed of the realities and benefits of immigration, with priority also being given to effective provision of information and advice;
- (c) Institutional arrangements at national level should include partnerships between the Ministries with responsibility for immigration, employment and social affairs, and the active involvement of social partners, civil society and, in particular, NGOs from the immigrant communities; and
- (d) Co-operation with countries of origin should be developed, which could be pioneered in relation to people who move between EU countries; the fact that EU citizens who migrate to other EU countries also experience similar risks in relation to employment and social exclusion should be fully taken into account.

The Presidency concluded that these strategic processes could be encouraged and promoted at EU level by facilitating exchanges of knowledge, experience, expertise and good practice. This could be accomplished through the work of the Employment and Social Protection Committees, particularly in the context of the preparation of future action plans on employment and social inclusion.

Conference: *Families, Change and Social Policy in Europe*

Venue: *Dublin Castle*

Date: *13 and 14 May 2004*

This Conference marked, at EU level, the 10th Anniversary of the UN International Year of the Family by joining the worldwide focus on changes to families and family life, insofar as they have an impact on European Social Policy. The Conference identified the challenges resulting from the competing demands of work and family, in addition to identifying the families at risk of social exclusion. The ways discussed for meeting these challenges included more family friendly work practices, development of the right mix of income support and care services and special targeted measures to assist families vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion. Meeting the challenges posed by the profound changes affecting families requires, at national level, a strategic, integrated approach involving employment, social protection and possibly other policy areas, such as education, health, and housing. Such efforts at national level could be greatly assisted by further deepening the analysis of the interactions between family and social policy across the European Union.

Conference: *3rd Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty from EU Countries*

Venue: *Brussels*

Date: *28 and 29 May 2004*

Following on from conferences held during the Belgian and Greek EU presidencies, the Irish Presidency hosted the third meeting of People Experiencing Poverty from EU countries. The conference sought to develop further ways of

promoting the participation at all levels of people experiencing poverty and the structural networks to facilitate this. A particular objective was to promote their involvement in the development of the National Action plans for social inclusion.

The conference found that effective participation by people experiencing poverty, towards achieving greater social cohesion, is taking place. The priority now is to further widen and deepen the process. Participation, to be effective, needs to be well organised and well resourced. The voices and concerns of all the diverse groups who experience poverty need to be heard and there is a need for particular responses in terms of policy, programmes and resources to achieve effective outcomes in their case. Groups identified at the Conference as needing special support included immigrants and ethnic minorities, victims of trafficking, particularly children, those living in sub-standard accommodation, the homeless, people living with disabilities and lone parents.

Exchanges on facilitating and promoting employment participation were considered to be very fruitful both at national and EU levels. Regular exchanges with people experiencing poverty may also make a significant contribution in other policy areas such as the provision of health care, education and skills training, and on measures to tackle addiction to alcohol and drugs, homelessness and indebtedness. A major source of poverty for many is discrimination. People experiencing poverty are well placed to identify sources of discrimination and ways to end it. Their participation in measures to combat discrimination should be promoted and encouraged.

Conference hosted by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Conference: *Investment in Human Resources*

Venue: *Dublin Castle*

Date: *21 June 2004*

The background to this conference was the acknowledgement of the importance, to the attainment of the Lisbon goals, of human resource development. It was agreed at the conference that more and better investment in human resources, through higher levels of education and training, contributes to higher employment levels, increased productivity and lower unemployment. It was recognised that such increased investment can have a very positive effect in terms of promoting social integration and inclusion.

Conferences hosted by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Conference: *EU Strategy on Drugs - the Way Forward*

Venue: *Dublin Castle*

Date: *10 and 11 May 2004*

The conference laid the foundations for the development of a new EU Drugs Strategy from 2005 to 2012 and the subsequent development of new EU Action Plans on Drugs to give effect to the Strategy. The main aim of the Conference was to enhance co-operation at EU level and beyond in the development of a new Strategy. The Conference conclusions and recommendations, on the main elements of the new EU Drugs Strategy, were endorsed by all 25 Member States.

Conference: *Violence Against Women – from violation to vindication of human rights.*

Venue: *Dublin Castle*

Date: *24 and 25 May 2004*

The conference focused on the various forms of Violence Against Women – domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, prostitution and trafficking – from a Human Rights perspective. It also included discussion on pornography and on legal measures to address all forms of violence against women.

The conference examined how the Human Rights infrastructure in Ireland/EU/globally provides a framework within which member states could strengthen their work in tackling the growing crisis of violence against women.

In particular the Conference looked at how an EU Instrument in relation to violence against women (just as have been passed in relation to Equality, Employment, the Environment etc) might support the struggle to have stronger legal mechanisms and instruments for tackling violence against women at EU member state level.

The Findings/Recommendations from the Conference are set out below:

1. The conference calls on the Irish Government to take a lead, but for all EU Member State Governments, to produce without delay a proposal for a legal base on violence against women, so that an EU wide binding Directive on tackling all forms of violence against women may be drafted and implemented with urgency.
2. The conference calls for adequate supports for victims of violence against women and the implementation of minimum standards of supports in each member state which ensure victim safety and sanctioning of perpetrator.
3. In the light of the conference acknowledgement that prostitution is an abuse of women's human rights, the conference calls for the extension of the Swedish model of legislation, which criminalises the purchase of sex, to Ireland and across the EU.
4. The conference welcomed the presence of prostitution, pornography and trafficking on the Presidency Conference agenda in Dublin and calls for all future EU Presidency conferences on violence against women to include these themes.
5. The conference calls for 'violence against women' to be seen as and treated as a violation of women's human rights. It further calls on all Member States of the EU to implement protections for women by the implementation of existing EU and UN instruments (including 1949 UN Convention on Trafficking, UN Protocol on Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women, Council of Europe reports, Framework Agreement on Victims etc) and to monitor such implementation so as to show the accountability of all Member States and the EU as a bloc, in the protection and vindication of the rights of women to live lives free from all forms of violence.

Conference: *Tipping the Scales – Making Work/Life Balance Happen*

Venue: *Letterkenny, Co Donegal*

Date: *6 February 2004*

This was the end conference for an EU co-funded project on family-friendly and work-life balance policies. The project was led by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in collaboration with the North Western Health Board. This conference played a key role in highlighting current practice regarding work-life balance and home help care work in a peripheral region of the EU. It emphasised the challenges in advancing work-life balance practices and the implications of these challenges for gender equality in the region. Furthermore, the 'Tipping the Scales' project forged links with another EU funded project called 'The Work/Life Balance Network' which is funded through the EQUAL Programme. Relations and networks with this project will extend beyond the lifetime of the 'Tipping the Scales' project.

Conference: *Closing the Gap – Planned and Systematic Approaches to Policy Development*

Venue: *Limerick*

Date: *27 and 28 May 2004*

This conference focused on international experience across three selected themes: Equality and Diversity in the Workplace, Bodies for the Promotion of Equal Treatment and Promoting and Accommodating Diversity in the Provision of Public Services. By drawing on a broad range of experience the conference has helped to raise awareness and support efforts to combat discrimination, including in relation to gender equality.

Conference: *European Crime Prevention Network – Youth and Crime*

Venue: *Kilkenny*

Date: *13 May 2004*

The European Crime Prevention Network was created to facilitate co-operation, information exchange and research on crime prevention at Union, national and local level, with a particular emphasis on juvenile, urban and drug-related crime. In this context this meeting continued to provide the facility whereby details of successful crime prevention initiatives undertaken by Member States are made available to other Member States. The ongoing contact between delegates also proves useful in maintaining links with those individuals with experience and expertise in the relevant areas.

Presidency events hosted by the Department of Education and Science

The theme of the Education Presidency was "**Building an Inclusive and Competitive Europe**". This theme was chosen because achieving the Lisbon goals of making Europe the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world by 2010 will require a major contribution from education and training as key factors of economic growth, innovation, increased employment and social cohesion. The theme reflects the inter-connection between the economic and social aspects of education.

There was a focus on social inclusion in several of the conferences organised by the Department of Education and Science during the Irish Presidency.

■ *Launch of the European Year of Education through Sport (29/30 January)*

Theme: The promotion of the application of the values conveyed through sport in

developing knowledge and skills and the role of sport in education systems in promoting social cohesion.

■ *OECD Ministers Conference (18/19 March)*

Theme: Improving the quality of education, teacher education policies and education and social cohesion.

The meeting of Education Ministers began with a Forum on Education and Social Cohesion. The Forum showed how the broader objectives of education linked with social networks support individual learning, and how the economic role of education is inextricably connected to its wider social benefits, including social cohesion.

■ *Special Needs Conference and Meeting of EU Agency (24 – 27 March)*

Theme: Special Needs Education in the European Union

A seminar on 27 March focused on provision for persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders in the Republic of Ireland.

■ *Informal Ministerial Council on Guidance and Counselling (28/29 April)*

Theme: Guidance and counselling policies; especially in the context of Lifelong Learning and promoting access to lifelong guidance.

The Ministers agreed that guidance has a central role to play in enabling young people and adults to access appropriate information and continue their learning, and to develop and apply the self appraisal and career self management skills which are essential in today's world, where movement between careers and sectors is commonplace. Guidance policies are therefore central to social inclusion, social equity, gender equality and

active citizenship by encouraging and supporting individuals' participation in education and training and their choice of realistic and meaningful careers.

■ *Meeting of EU Indicators Working Group (17/18 June)*

Theme: Development of measurement tools in assessing progress towards achieving the Lisbon objectives.

The main focus of this meeting of EU experts was the development of indicators for social equity/inclusion in education at EU level.

Conferences hosted by the Department of Health and Children

During the Presidency cardiovascular health was the major health theme and two major conferences were hosted:

■ *CARDS (Cardiology Audit and Registration Data Standards):* an important initiative to improve the quality of care for patients with coronary heart disease throughout the EU. The agreement that was reached is an essential step towards improving the quality of care for cardiac patients through the adoption of a consistent approach to collecting information in every EU country.

■ *Promoting Heart Health – a European Consensus.* The conclusions of the conference call on the Member States and the Commission to promote cardiovascular health within the context of national public health strategies and in the framework of the EU Public Health Action Programme. The conclusions will provide a basis for further progress to improve the health of all the citizens of the European Union.

APPENDICES TO PART 1

APPENDIX 1

Milestones in Development of NAPS

Date	Milestone
1995	World Summit for Social Development – Copenhagen
1997	National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) – response to Copenhagen Summit
1999	Social Partnership Agreement <i>Programme for Prosperity and Fairness</i> – recommends revision and extension of the NAPS
2000	Lisbon European Council – EU Member States pledge “to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty”
2001	First National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion 2001-2003 (NAP/Inclusion) submitted to EU under <i>Open Method of Co-ordination</i>
2002	Revised NAPS <i>Building an Inclusive Society</i> 2002-2007
2003 April	Social Partnership Agreement <i>Sustaining Progress</i>
2003 July	Second National Action Plan against poverty and social exclusion 2003-2005 (NAP/Inclusion) submitted to EU – incorporates revised NAPS strategy, and further policy commitments contained in <i>Sustaining Progress</i>

APPENDIX 2

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development: This committee, chaired by the Taoiseach and composed of the 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 its work in this area by the Senior Officials and Management Groups referred to as follows.

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 NAPS strategy generally.

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, and specifically with the special initiatives under the partnership agreement, Sustaining Progress.

Minister for Social and Family Affairs and Department's Management Advisory Committee: The OSI regularly reports on developments to the Minister, who has specific responsibility for the OSI and for reporting on its activities to the Oireachtas (See also below). The Director similarly reports to the Management Advisory Committee of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, 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

Plan to the Joint Oireachtas Committees on Social and Family Affairs, and on European Affairs.

Technical Advisory Group: Work is ongoing on the development of a Data Strategy to underpin the NAPS. The Office for Social Inclusion is assisted in this regard by a Technical Advisory Group comprising representatives of key Government Departments, the Central Statistics Office, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Economic and Social Research Institute and the Equality Authority.

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 will participate on all NDP Monitoring Committees and work with the Combat Poverty Agency, in providing technical assistance.

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 Units: These are established in the key Government Departments and co-ordinate their Department's contribution to the process in liaison with the OSI.

Agencies working for inclusion:

Combat Poverty Agency (CPA): The CPA 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 works closely with the Agency, particularly in relation to poverty research, promoting regional and local government involvement in the process, EU social inclusion projects and public consultation. A number of projects are ongoing between the OSI and CPA, for example, the development and support of a Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network, the Building Healthy Communities programme and actions under the National Development Plan.

Other statutory agencies whose remit involves a social inclusion dimension and with which the OSI works closely include: the National Children's Office, responsible for monitoring and evaluating implementation of the National Children's Strategy; the Equality Authority; and the Family Support Agency.

APPENDIX 3

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED

ALMP	Active Labour Market Programme
ACCESS	The Arts and Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme
ADM	Area Development Management Ltd
AHEAD	Association of Higher Education Access and Disability
AHI	Affordable Housing Initiative
AIT	Area Implementation Team
BMW	Border, Midland and Western
BTEI	Back to Education Initiative
CARDS	Cardiology Audit and Registration Data Standards
CCCs	City/County Childcare Committees
CDBs	County/City Development Boards
CE	Community Employment
CEJI	Community Employment Job Initiative
CIF	Construction Industry Federation
CLÁR	Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais
COGOI	Co-ordination Group on Offender Integration
CSF	Community Support Framework
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CTCs	Community Training Centres
Cuiditheoirí	Primary Curriculum Support Service
C&V	Community and Voluntary
EAP	Employment Action Plan
EES	European Employment Strategy
EHRDOP	Employment and Human Resources Development Operation Programme
EOCP	The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
ERC	The Educational Research Centre
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ERHA	Eastern Regional Health Authority
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
ESSPROS	European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics
EU	European Union
EU 15	Member States of the EU prior to accession of 10 new member states on 1 May 2004
EWM	Equality for Women Measure

EYPD	European Year of People with Disabilities
FÁS	Forás Áiseanna Saothair
GP	General Practice
HeBE	Health Boards Executive
HIA	Health Impact Assessment
HIQA	Health Information and Quality Authority
HOST	Homeless Offenders Strategy Team
HSP	High Support Process
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICT	Information & Communication Technology
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IDA	Industrial Development Agency
IPH	Institute of Public Health
JI	Job Initiative
Know Racism	National Anti-Racism Awareness Programme
LDTF	Local Drugs Task Forces
LES	Local Employment Service
LLL	Lifelong Learning
LTU	Long Term Unemployed
MABS	Money Advice & Budgeting Service
MGAS	Management Group Assistant Secretaries
NAAC	National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee
NALA	The National Adult Literacy Agency
NALC	National Adult Learning Council
NAP/Inclusion	The second National Action Plan to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCCC	National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NDP	National Development Plan
NDP/CSF	National Development Plan/Community Support Framework
NEAP	National Employment Action Plan

NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NESF	National Economic & Social Forum
NHIS	National Health Information Strategy
NIDD	National Intellectual Disability Database
NTPF	National Treatment Purchase Fund
NVCOs	National Voluntary Childcare Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Co-ordination
ORAC	Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner
OSI	Office for Social Inclusion
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PPS	Purchasing Power Standards
PRSA_s	Personal Retirement Savings Accounts
PRTB	Private Residential Tenancies Board
PSM	Positive Sentence Management
PWS	Probation and Welfare Service
QAA	Qualified Adult Allowance
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning Investment and Development Programme
RAT	Refugee Appeals Tribunal
RLS	Refugee Legal Service
RTI	Rural Transport Initiative
SENO_s	Special Educational Needs Organisers
SEP	Social Economy Programme
SFADCo	Shannon Free Airport Development Company
SICG	Social Inclusion Consultative Group
SMR_s	Standardised Mortality Ratios
SPC	Social Protection Committee
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
YAP	Youth Advocate Programmes
YHS	Youth Homelessness Strategy

APPENDIX 4

STAFF OF OFFICE FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION (OSI)

Effective implementation of the NAPS and NAP/inclusion requires co-ordination of its various elements. The revised NAPS provided for this to be entrusted to an Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) based in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and reporting to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. The Office effectively became operational in January 2003, taking over from the NAPS Unit which had previously exercised the co-ordinating role. The work of the Office is overseen by the Management Group of Assistant Secretaries.

Staff of the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)

Gerry Mangan, Director

Orlaigh Quinn, Principal Officer

Cathy Barron, Assistant Principal Officer

Eamonn Moran, Assistant Principal Officer

Peter Duffy, Higher Executive Officer

Lynda Finneran, Administrative Officer*

Ciaran Diamond, Administrative Officer Ψ

Pat McDonnell, Administrative Officer*

Colin Byrne, Administrative Officer Ψ

Lorcan O'Malley, Higher Executive Officer

Ann Murphy, Clerical Officer

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Store Street,
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Email: osi@welfare.ie

Fax: (+) 353 (0) 1 704 3032

Website: www.socialinclusion.ie

* Left the Office in November 2004.

Ψ Joined the Office in November 2004

APPENDIX 5

DEPARTMENTAL SOCIAL INCLUSION LIAISON OFFICERS

Departmental Social Inclusion Liaison Officers fulfil an important communication and co-ordination role within Departments, for social inclusion issues and act as a first point of contact for the OSI.

Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism:	Nora Heron and Gary McGuinn
Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs:	Denise Grogan
Department of Education and Science:	Jim O'Donovan
Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government:	Colette Davis
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment:	Brendan O'Leary
Department of Finance:	John Fitzpatrick
Department of Health and Children:	Anna-May Harkin
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform:	Paula Connolly
Department of the Taoiseach:	Andrew Nugent
Department of Transport:	Noel Singleton

APPENDIX 6

MEMBERSHIP OF TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP (TAG)

Work is ongoing on the development of a Data Strategy to underpin the NAPS. The Office for Social Inclusion is assisted in this regard by a Technical Advisory Group comprising representatives of key Government Departments, the Central Statistics Office, the Combat Poverty Agency, the Economic and Social Research Institute and the Equality Authority.

Membership

Orlaigh Quinn Chairperson	Office for Social Inclusion
Gerry Mangan	Office for Social Inclusion
Laurence Bond	The Equality Authority
Evan Breen	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Pdraig Dalton	Central Statistics Office
Anna-May Harkin	Department of Health and Children
Andrew Nugent	Department of the Taoiseach
Paul Morrin	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Brian Nolan	Economic and Social Research Institute
John O'Callaghan	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Jim O'Donovan	Department of Education and Science
Mary O'Donoghue	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Jim Walsh	Combat Poverty Agency

APPENDIX 7

MEMBERSHIP OF SOCIAL INCLUSION CONSULTATIVE GROUP (SICG)

This group constitutes an important vehicle for involving the social partners in the NAP/inclusion process. It is co-chaired by the Departments of the Taoiseach and Social and Family Affairs and comprises representatives of the relevant Government Departments and Agencies, the Social Partners and community and voluntary sector. The Group meets at least twice a year to offer its advice and observations on the process.

Membership

Mary Doyle Co-chair	Department of the Taoiseach
Gerry Mangan Co-chair	Office for Social Inclusion
Orlaigh Quinn	Office for Social Inclusion
David Brennan	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Michael Cunniffe	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Charlie Hardy	Department of Health and Children
Eileen Kehoe	Department of the Taoiseach
Seamus McLoughlin	Department of Education and Science
Paula Connolly	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Mary O'Donoghue	Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Dermot Quigley	Department of Finance
Michael Scanlan	Department of Finance
Seamus Boland	Irish Rural Link
Laurence Bond	Equality Authority
Rosheen Callender	SIPTU
Paula Carey	ICTU
Niall Crowley	The Equality Authority
Ciaran Dolan	ICMSA
Jackie Harrison	IBEC
Helen Johnston	Combat Poverty Agency
Joan O'Flynn	Combat Poverty Agency
Con Lucey	IFA
Michael O'Halloran	Irish Senior Citizens Parliament
David Stratton	Age Action Ireland
Professor Chris Whelan	The Economic and Social Research Institute

APPENDIX 8 - MEMBERSHIP OF MANAGEMENT GROUP OF ASSISTANT SECRETARIES (MGASOSI)

This group includes high level representatives of the key Departments involved in combating poverty and social exclusion. It monitors implementation of the NAPS and NAP/inclusion and also has a key role in co-ordinating the work of the various Departments in implementing and developing them.

Membership

Gerry Mangan Chairperson	Office for Social Inclusion
Orlaigh Quinn	Office for Social Inclusion
Deirdre Carroll	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Des Dowling	Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Mary Doyle	Department of the Taoiseach
Sean Gorman	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Charlie Hardy	Department of Health and Children
Sylda Langford	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Paddy McDonagh	Department of Education and Science
Michael Scanlan	Department of Finance

APPENDIX 9

MEMBERSHIP OF SENIOR OFFICIALS GROUP ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

This group is chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach. As part of its wider remit, it deals with policy developments relating to meeting the objectives of the strategies, and specifically with the special initiatives under the partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*.

Membership

Mary Doyle Chairperson	Department of the Taoiseach
Gerry Mangan	Office for Social Inclusion
Orlaigh Quinn	Office for Social Inclusion
Deirdre Carroll	Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Des Dowling	Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Sean Gorman	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Charlie Hardy	Department of Health and Children
Eileen Kehoe	Department of the Taoiseach
Sylda Langford	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Paddy McDonagh	Department of Education and Science
Mary O'Donoghue	Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Gerry O'Hanlon	Central Statistics Office
Dermot Quigley	Department of Finance
Michael Scanlan	Department of Finance
Frances Spillane	National Children's Office

APPENDIX 10 - MEMBERSHIP OF CABINET COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL INCLUSION, DRUGS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Taoiseach and including Ministers from relevant Departments, meets on a monthly basis. It provides an integrated basis for the Government's activities in the social exclusion area in general, ensuring that the strategic priorities are being pursued and that effective co-ordination takes place.

Membership

Bertie Ahern TD Chairperson	Taoiseach
Mary Harney TD	Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children
Eamon Ó Cuiv TD	Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs
Mary Hanafin TD	Minister for Education and Science
Micheál Martin TD	Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Dick Roche TD	Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
Brian Cowen TD	Minister for Finance
Michael McDowell TD	Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Séamus Brennan TD	Minister for Social and Family Affairs
Michael Ahern TD	Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, with special responsibility for Labour Affairs
Noel Ahern TD	Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, with special responsibility for Housing and Urban Renewal, at the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, with special responsibility for Drugs Strategy and Community Affairs
Frank Fahey TD	Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, with special responsibility for Equality issues including Disability issues
Brian Lenihan TD	Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and at the Department of Education and Science, with special responsibility for Children



Part II



Office for Social Inclusion

An Oifig um Chuimsiú Sóisialta

PART II

INTRODUCTION

This part of this report provides a detailed account of implementation of the NAP/Inclusion over the relevant policy areas, together with the full assessment of Ireland's National Action Plan by the EU, taken from its Joint Inclusion Report¹. The material is presented in the format agreed by Member States for the National Action Plans:

- To facilitate participation in employment;
- To facilitate access to resources, rights, goods and services for all;
- To prevent the risks of exclusion;
- To help the most vulnerable.

Material provided by individual Departments has been broken down across these four common objectives.

This part of the report is an elaboration of the information presented in Part I, Section 3. While some material is repeated for reasons of completeness, other material is new or an expansion of that presented previously. The text below is repeated from Part I, for those who will read only this part of the report.

All actions that were progressed or initiated by Government Departments to combat poverty and social exclusion during the period covered by the Annual Report are detailed. Many of these actions commenced prior to the timeframe of this report and are still ongoing. In addition, certain actions are included which are not directly referred to in the NAP/Inclusion. However, in order to present a complete picture of all Government actions and policies which impact on social inclusion, the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) believes that it is appropriate that they be included. Where there are specific policy targets in the NAP/Inclusion, these are highlighted at the beginning of each section.

A wide range of activities and strategies are set out in the following sections. These indicate the range and breadth of programmes aimed at tackling social exclusion. In certain instances however it is clear that, data is incomplete or unavailable to report on the outcome of various initiatives. This is an issue that the OSI will be addressing as part of the development of a Data Strategy. Certain aspects are descriptive in nature and less focused on outcomes. Measuring benefits and outcomes can be difficult, due to the nature of the intervention, the many factors which impact on poverty and social inclusion, and the fact that the impact may not be experienced in the short term. A good example of this can be seen in the equality framework, which does not easily lend itself to measures, relating for example to, costs and benefits. Effectiveness here is not measured simply in terms of monetary value but on grounds of fairness and equity. In this case, the subjective nature of the policy makes evaluation more difficult, and is one that is usually developed using qualitative type measures. However, there are other areas where measurement can be more explicitly focused, particularly in terms of questioning whether certain expenditures and programmes are sufficiently targeted at defined social problems, specific vulnerable groups or areas of disadvantage. There is a need to improve skills and reporting in this area to ensure that the development of future policy and future decisions is based on informed and valid information. Poverty proofing of policies is one way of developing a better understanding of these issues. The OSI will be concentrating on these issues, in consultation with the Government Departments and the Social Inclusion Consultative Group, to ensure that greater understanding and awareness is developed amongst those who have policy responsibility in these areas.

¹ http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-prot/soc-incl/joint_rep_en.htm

It is also clear from this first report that certain cross-cutting issues may benefit from a more co-ordinated approach. There are a number of complex administrative arrangements and strategic responses described, sometimes focusing on the same group of people. The OSI views this annual report as an important initial step in identifying and describing the many actions being undertaken. However, we also recognise that there are weaknesses and it will be part of our future work to use the information presented to identify shortcomings and strive to strengthen inter-agency linkages.

In addition, it is recognised that some of the language used may be somewhat bureaucratic. Again, this is an area where the OSI hopes to promote the development of better understanding and better communications. The OSI has a key role in ensuring that “there is widespread knowledge and related information on what NAPS is set up to do, both within and outside the public sector”. This report will assist greatly in this regard.

It is important to emphasise that this report is concerned only with Government actions mainly at national level: local authorities, local agencies, Social Partners and the Community and Voluntary sector are also involved in a wide range of valuable and worthwhile social inclusion activities, some with public assistance. All of these activities, both public and private, present learning, development and partnership opportunities to us all. The OSI will continue to promote the learning developed by all those who have experience and solutions to offer.

Finally, the OSI acknowledges and values the input of all Departments, in particular, those staff engaged in Social Inclusion Units across the Civil Service and their willingness to engage in driving this process forward. The OSI equally acknowledges the input from the Social Inclusion Consultative Group (SICG) and their many contributions to the process.

SECTION 1

TO FACILITATE PARTICIPATION IN EMPLOYMENT

Long-term unemployed, vulnerable workers and those who have been made redundant are the subject of a special initiative under Sustaining Progress.

1.1 National Action Plan 2003 – 2005 targets

There are four main employment targets:

- **To eliminate long term unemployment as soon as circumstances permit but in any event not later than 2007;**
- **To reduce the level of unemployment experienced by vulnerable groups towards the national average by 2007;**
- **To increase the employment rate of women to an average of more than 60 per cent in 2010, as envisaged in the National Employment Action Plan; and**
- **To achieve the objectives set out in the National Employment Action Plan to increase employment rates.**

Reporting on actions in relation to the targets on (i) participation levels (employment rate) of women; and (ii) reduction of unemployment level

among vulnerable groups can be found in Section 4 on Vulnerable Groups.

1.2 - Employment policy

For people who are able to work, paid employment offers the best means of combating poverty and social exclusion. Ireland's National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) 2003-2005 provides the strategic objectives for the year ahead and into the future, in the context of the European Employment Strategy (EES), which outlines 3 overarching objectives and 10 specific Guidelines.

The overarching objectives outlined in the EES are:

- Full employment
- Quality and Productivity of Work
- Social Cohesion and Inclusion

The main policy objectives are to maintain unemployment at its current low levels and, if possible, reduce it further by the creation of more and better jobs; to remove obstacles to part-time and full time employment, especially in the case of women, and to improve employability.

1.3 Recent employment trends

TABLE 1 Actual and target EU and Irish employment rates,

Employment Rate	EU Actual 2003	Ireland Actual 2003	EU Target 2005	EU Target 2010
OVERALL	64.3%	66.4%	67%	70%
Female	55.6%	56.7%	57%	60%
Older	40.1%	48.0%	n/a	50%

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey – CSO and Eurostat

Note: The employment rate is the number of employed persons as a proportion of the total population aged 15 to 64.

The most marked development in Ireland over the past decade has been the increase in employment. As can be seen in the Table above, Ireland's performance has exceeded the EU average with regard to the EU Employment Indicators. While Ireland experienced an economic slowdown in the period 2000 to 2003, employment continued to grow, at an average of 2.2 per cent per year. Overall, there was an increase of 6.8 per cent in employment in this period.

The increase in employment has led to a reduction in unemployment levels to an average of 4.6 per cent in 2003, and in long-term unemployment to an average of 1.4 per cent in the same period. The growth in the employment rates of women is also a notable success, particularly as women have a higher risk of poverty. Participation rates for women increased by 11.5 per cent between 1998 and 2003.

Ireland is committed to a policy of active ageing. The rate of increased participation for older workers has increased steadily to over 49 per cent, an increase of 1 per cent in the year.

1.4 Employment Action Plan - Prevention and Activation Process

The aim of the Prevention and Activation Process is to reduce unemployment and prevent the drift into long-term unemployment by actively engaging with unemployed people in assisting their return to employment. Under the Process the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) refers all persons reaching certain thresholds of unemployment for interview by FÁS (the public employment service). The referral threshold for those aged 25-54 was reduced from 9 months to 6 months in March 2003. By the end of October 2003, the DSFA had referred 36,627

clients to FÁS (from January 2003). Of those referred, 55 per cent had left the live register by the end of November 2003.

Of those referred 10,399 (28 per cent) did not attend for interview and of these 75 per cent (7,811) had signed off the live register by end November 2003. Of the 23,757 clients interviewed by FÁS, 13,179 (55 per cent) had left the live register by end November, of which 7,067 (30 per cent) are recorded as having left to enter employment or education. A further 6,399 (17 per cent) of those interviewed had left the live register without notification of destination. The remaining interviewees had either been referred to a programme place but were still on the live register, were receiving ongoing support or were awaiting further actions.

The Process is now being rolled out on a phased basis to all persons who are over six months on the live register and have not been selected for inclusion in the process previously. The process commenced in Dublin in May 2003, followed by the West, the North West and the Midlands in October 2003. The South West and Mid West started engaging with roll-out clients in November and were followed by the North East and South East in December 2003. It is estimated that some 40,000 persons will have benefited from this process by the end of 2005. In 2003, 4,177 were referred, 30 per cent of whom have left the live register. It is expected that approximately 20,000 will be referred in 2004 and a balance of 16,000 (approx) will be referred in 2005. These referrals (persons over 6 months but less than 9 months on the live register) are in addition to the normal weekly flows (clients over 9 months on the live register) of EAP clients sent to FÁS as part of the preventative strategy.

The number of referrals from DSFA to FÁS from January 2004 to end May 2004, viewed at the end of June 2004, was 25,124 (an increase of 65 per cent on same period in 2003). (Monthly EAP reports are available on the Department's website - www.entemp.ie)

An evaluation of the Process is currently being arranged and is due for completion in Spring 2005.

1.5 Active Labour Market Programmes

Despite the considerable reduction in unemployment, including long term unemployment, there is a wide range of active labour market and training programmes, operating across a number of Government Departments, aimed at facilitating access by unemployed and inactive persons to the labour market.

At present there are over 67,000 persons on such programmes, which is close to one place for every unemployed person.

(i) FÁS Schemes

The Programmes operated by FÁS under the aegis of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (D/ET&E) are Community Employment (CE), Job Initiative (JI), Social Economy Programme (SEP) and FÁS Training programmes which between them account for over 37,000 places. Of these around 25,000 places are provided through CE (20,000), JI (2,200) and SE (2,300). On an on-going basis within FÁS, priority is given to the provision of active labour market programmes in the Government's designated areas of disadvantage (RAPID and CLÁR). The total funding allocation for the three employment schemes in 2004 is fixed at €351 million. The number of places being funded in 2004 is similar to the number of participants at year-end 2003.

The 2003 year-end participation rate on CE was 19,848. Participation rates on CE for 2004 will be maintained at this level. The 2003 year-end participation rate on the JI programme was 2,200. The average participation rate on JI in 2004 will have been in the region of 2,100.

FÁS has been given some flexibility in the management of its financial allocation for employment schemes in order to maximise progression to the labour market while at the same time facilitating the support of community services.

(ii) Social Economy Programme

Programme target – To create 2,500 employment opportunities by the end of 2003.

This programme was introduced in September 2000 to support the development of social economy enterprises that help the regeneration of local disadvantaged areas and provide employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged persons. At the end of December 2003 a total of 334 Social Economy Enterprises were operational, employing 2,370 employees. This indicates that very good progress had been made in reaching the set target.

In 2003 the expenditure for this Programme was €36.025 million. The allocation for 2004 is over €40 million. The 2004 budget was sufficient to fund the pre-existing projects for 2004 and no new enterprises were being accepted for funding under the Programme.

Future of Active Labour Market Programmes

Certain aspects of the focus and the terms of participation on CE/JI and SE are under continuing examination. A review of the Social Economy Programme was undertaken and was considered by FÁS and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. A consultation

paper has recently issued to the Social Partners regarding the future of Active Labour Market Programmes and the Social Economy Programme. The outcome of this process will inform any future adjustments in the structure and the terms and conditions of participation on these programmes.

1.6 The Local Employment Service

The Local Employment Service (LES) is one strand of the dual stranded National Employment Service, the other being the FÁS employment service.

The LES aims to increase the labour market participation levels and job progression rates among women and marginalised and excluded groups. From January to December 2003, a total of 6,892 persons registered with the LES nationally. The Service continued to register unemployed and other job seekers to assist those most disadvantaged in the labour market to obtain employment by the provision of a specialist high support and locally responsive service. The LES referred interested persons to job vacancies, training, education and employment programmes. In 2004, the LES has continued along the same lines as in previous years.

A review of the LES was completed and the recommendations are at present being considered.

1.7 Pathways

The Pathways Programme (2 week training course) has been developed by FÁS to meet the needs of NEAP clients where it is found that one-to-one guidance training or employment options are not yet appropriate for the client, where the client is totally unsure of their career direction and where a group guidance programme would be appropriate.

The aim of the programme is to identify the most appropriate development pathway for each participant to obtain and maintain employment.

The programme is designed to be a highly positive and motivating experience. It adopts a cognitive-behavioural approach, focussing on change the attitudes and actions of participants towards employment. The programme is targeted at clients over six months on the Live Register, who are referred under the NEAP. Priority is given to long-term unemployed clients referred as part of the intensification programme which was rolled out nationally in 2003.

The first Pathways pilot programme took place in Sligo in July 2003 and it was also piloted in four locations in Dublin. Over 220 clients attended pilot programmes in 2003. The programme was further rolled out in 2004 with almost 500 clients attending over 30 separate programmes in the first six months of the year. An evaluation of the Programme has been commissioned and will be completed by the end of 2004.

1.8 High Support Process

In January 2003, FÁS introduced a new High Support Process (HSP) for jobseekers who are suffering personal barriers to employment. A budget of €1.2 million was assigned for the piloting of the HSP in Dublin, Cork, Letterkenny, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick, Dundalk, Sligo and Waterford. Under the programme, supports are provided for participants, including long-term participants on the Job Initiative Programme, job seekers referred to FÁS under the EAP and those defined as “Not Progression Ready” under the preventive strategy.

Participants availing of the HSP are assigned to FÁS Employment Services Officers and/or Local

Employment Service Mediators under a caseload management system, to help them identify the nature of their employability barrier. Support is provided on a one to one, or group basis, as may be appropriate. With the agreement of the participant, the identified employability barriers will be presented to a multi agency case conferencing group, which will arrange for the delivery of and access to the relevant services that will be necessary to address such barriers. A total budget €2,200(maximum) per person is available when sourcing the relevant intervention. 39 Job Initiative participants as well as 297 “Not Progression Ready” clients availed of the additional support in 2003.

The HSP was made available nationwide in 2004 and continues to operate as in 2003. A budget of approx €1.2 million has been allocated. It is projected that, by the end of 2004, 320 “Non Progression Ready” clients and 230 Job Initiative participants will have availed of the process in that year.

An evaluation of the HSP commenced in mid 2004, with a view to making recommendations on how the process can be better utilised.

1.9 Back to Work/Back to Education Allowance Schemes

The range of employment support services administered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs are monitored to ensure their relevance to current labour market and economic conditions. The Back To Work Allowance and Back To Education Allowance were further amended in 2003 to ensure their continued focus on the more vulnerable groups in society. Following further review, the qualifying period for Back To Work

Enterprise Allowance was reduced from 5 years to 3 years for persons on unemployment benefit/assistance, with effect from March 2004.

By December 2003 there were 17,069 participants on the Back To Work Allowance scheme, 9,872 on the self-employed strand and 7,197 on the employee strand. There were 7,648 participants on the Back To Education Allowance scheme in the 2003/2004 academic year.

The qualifying period for the Back To Education Allowance, Third Level Option, was increased from 6 months to 15 months. The qualifying period for the Second level Option was not changed to ensure that this strand of the scheme retains its focus on the more disadvantaged groups in society who do not have a second level education qualification and who are at risk of becoming dependent on social welfare payments on a long-term basis. This change is effective from September 2004. An Expenditure Review of the Back To Education Allowance is expected to be finalised in December 2004.

1.10 Special Projects Fund

Those who have been out of the labour market, particularly lone parents and people with disabilities, availed of pre-employment and personal development training through the Special Projects fund which is administered locally by Regional staff of the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The Special Projects Fund was set up to provide for training and supports for the harder to reach groups who are most distant from the labour market. The budget for Special Projects for 2004 was increased to €2.45 million.

Outcomes from these projects cannot be measured over a short period of time but there is positive and informative data coming on stream in

relation to the intense case management nature of the interventions, and the potential for impacting on social inclusion and enhancing employability. The Special Projects initiative demonstrates the positive results of a partnership approach between the Department, the voluntary and community and private sectors, as well as other interested parties at a local level, in identifying and addressing local needs in terms of training and development. The newly enhanced role of the Department's Facilitators continues to focus on the training, development and other needs of customers and their families on a case management basis during 2004.

1.11 Training and development

A key objective of the Employment Action Plan is to "ensure that those on low pay have the opportunity to progress to better paid and more skilled employment". The provision of training is an essential part of achieving this aim.

(i) National Training Fund

The National Training Fund is resourced by a levy on employers of 0.7 per cent of reckonable earnings in respect of employees in Class A and Class H employments. This represents approximately 75 per cent of all insured employees.

The total funds available for the purposes of the Fund during 2003 amounted to €317.5 million. In 2003, the National Training Fund supported schemes operated by FÁS, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Shannon Free Airport Development Company (SFADCo), Skillnets Ltd., FORFÁS, the Institution of Engineers of Ireland, and the Higher Education Authority.

Planned expenditure from the Fund in 2004 is estimated at €293 million, and projected surplus

in the fund to be carried forward to 2005 is estimated to be €66 million.

(ii) Training Networks Programme

Skillnets Ltd is an independent company, with a tri-partite board, which operates the Training Networks Programme, and is primarily funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, through the National Training Fund.

The scheme is targeted at people in employment and Skillnets funding is available to all business sectors, irrespective of company size. A fund of €16.4 million has been allocated to Skillnets for the period 2002-2005.

To date the total commitment by the Skillnets board to funding networks under this programme is €12.8 million. 58 network projects have been developed. In the period 2003-2005 it is estimated that 2,700 companies and 18,000 employees will have adopted the networks approach to training. During the earlier period - 1999-2002 - 3,800 companies and 12,800 employees have availed of the Programme.

(iii) Apprenticeships

The FÁS Board re-established the National Apprenticeship Advisory Committee (NAAC) at their meeting of the 8th March 2001 as the sole committee with responsibility for advising them on all matters pertaining to apprenticeship. The Committee is made up of representatives of the social partners in industry, the educational sector and relevant Government departments.

FÁS under the auspices of the NAAC conducted a review of all the apprenticeship programmes during 2003. Trade specific Subject Matter Expert

Groups, comprising social partner, educational and FÁS representatives, presented their technical amendments and overarching recommendations to the NAAC for consideration. The final Subject Matter Expert Group presentations were made to the NAAC on the 18th December 2003.

The outcome of the review will be a more effective, efficient and expansive apprenticeship system that will meet the expected future needs of Irish Industry.

(iv) Lifelong Learning

The need to continuously adapt and upgrade knowledge, skills and competencies is the way forward. Lifelong Learning (LLL) is about creating more and better opportunities, which will be accessible by all citizens. Cultural and attitudinal change are necessary to make lifelong learning a reality. Part of that attitudinal change is viewing learning not as a cost but as an essential investment, which has tangible economic, personal and societal returns.

The Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, together with the White Paper on Adult Education form, the strategic framework for the progression of lifelong learning.

The National Adult Learning Council (NALC) has been designated as the body to co-ordinate, review and report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Taskforce Report. Pending the establishment of the NALC on a statutory basis and the allocation of financial and staffing resources to it, the Inter-Departmental/NALC Steering Group is overseeing progress in relation to the implementation of the Report's recommendations. Progress is being made across a range of the Lifelong Learning Report's recommendations within the existing resource allocation of the two key Departments

(Enterprise, Trade & Employment and Education and Science) and the agencies which operate under their remit. A progress report will be available in October. Increasing access to further training and up-skilling of those in employment is linked to the question of 'learning leave' entitlement which still needs to be addressed.

(v) Competency Development Programme

This initiative seeks to empower and equip individuals who are employed in the most vulnerable sectors of the economy with the knowledge and skills necessary to operate in a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive economic environment. Programmes are identified based on local and national needs, in consultation with industry organisations and the enterprise development agencies. A budget of €2.5 million has been provided for 2004. Currently, training programmes are being targeted at low skilled, low qualification operatives, with pilot initiatives (e.g. Employee Competitiveness Programme) introduced in a number of sectors (Clothing, Engineering, Textiles and Retail) in the North-West region.

1.12 Childcare for Employees/Trainees

(i) Employment Participation and Childcare

At a time of economic buoyancy the need to increase labour force participation is particularly important. The number of women in employment has grown from 483,000 in 1995 to 771,000 in 2004, an increase of approximately 60 per cent. The increase in female participation in the workforce has given rise to significant challenges in the provision of care, especially childcare. This affects the parents, the carers, and those receiving the care.

The availability of high quality and affordable childcare greatly influences employment participation rates especially of lone parents and may also influence birth rates. The importance of childcare in the drive against poverty and social exclusion is highlighted by, not only the number, but, also the different types of references to it in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

(ii) Implementation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000 - 2006

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (D/JE&LR) has overall responsibility for the formulation of national policy on childcare and the implementation of childcare services in order to meet the childcare needs of parents. The EOCP aims to maintain and increase the supply of childcare facilities and places, improve the quality of childcare services and introduce a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of childcare services.

Funding for the EOCP is channelled through the two Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan / Community Support Framework 2000-2006 (NDP/CSF), as elements of the Social Inclusion and Childcare Priority Sub-Programme. Both Operational Programmes refer to the lack of childcare as a significant contributor to exclusion from available education, training and employment opportunities. They note that this impacts most severely on women, in particular disadvantaged women and single parent families.

The EOCP operates under three sub-measures to meet its aims:

- *Capital Grant Schemes*; provides grant support towards building, renovation, upgrading or equipping of childcare facilities in order to increase the supply of childcare places;

- *Staffing Grant Scheme*; provides support towards staffing costs for community based childcare in disadvantaged areas; and
- *Quality Improvement Measure*; aims to enhance quality awareness and improve quality of all childcare facilities through the development of childcare training, networks and other initiatives.

The benefits of the EOCP in supporting employment, education and training are clearly seen from the Annual Survey of Grant Beneficiaries. The 2003 Survey shows that, among 37,730 parents whose child/children were attending childcare services almost 90 per cent of the fathers and 70 per cent of the mothers are actively engaged in employment, education and training, the primary aim of the Programme.

Funding

A total of €263 million out of a total Programme budget of €449.3 million has been committed and it is estimated that this will create 29,639 new childcare places and support a further 27,418 existing places.

To the end of December 2003, 18,320 of these new places (8,109 full time and 10,211 part-time) have been completed. A further 19,058 existing childcare places are receiving ongoing support under the EOCP. A significant part of the remaining funding will be required to roll over staffing grant supports being made available to childcare facilities which cater for very disadvantaged families and for ongoing supports to the City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs).

The indicators for the EOCP have been reviewed following a recommendation from the Mid-term Review of the NDP. These will provide for more detailed information on the impact of this programme on social inclusion.

Of the €263 million allocated under the EOCP, €219.8 million relates to capital funding for community based/not for profit and private childcare facilities and staffing funding for community based /not for profit groups. €43.2 million has been allocated to Quality Improvement measures.

The revised funding allocation to each Sub-measure following the Mid-term Reviews are as follows:

- Of the €154.5 million funding available for Capital Development, €119.0 million has been allocated to the end of June 2004.
- Of the €193.5 million of funding available for staffing grant assistance, €100.8 million has been allocated to the end of June 2004.
- Of the €83.3 million funding available for quality enhancement, €43.2 million has been allocated to the end of June 2004.

To the end of July 2004, €45 million has been committed to funding childcare services operating in RAPID areas. A further €23 million has been committed to funding childcare services in CLÁR areas.

The Mid-Term Review of the National Development Plan and the Regional Operational Programmes brought an increase in funding provision for childcare in Ireland from the European Social Fund (ESF) in both regions and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) region.

This brought the total Programme budget to €449.3 million (from €436.7 million).

(iii) Progress towards an improvement in the provision of childcare

During the period of the Annual Report, the following areas, have been highlighted by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform as areas in which progress has been made towards an improvement in the provision of childcare.

- The thirty-three City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) received funding of over €6.7 million for the implementation of the 2004 Action Plans which are linked to their five-year strategies. The CCCs aim to foster the development of childcare to meet the needs of their city/county. Actions for 2004 include: preparation of information; networking; capacity building for providers; social inclusion measures; equality and diversity measures; accredited training and other quality enhancing measures.
- The CCCs receive separate funding for the childminding initiative which provides training, information and networking for childminders and a Quality Awareness Programme of short lectures for childminders. The Development Grant Scheme provides grants of up to €630 (subject to a maximum of 90 per cent of total expenditure) to childminders to cover quality enhancement costs. In the first six months of the scheme, over 1,200 childminders availed of the lecture series.
- Seven National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs) supported under the EOCP, were allocated funding of €2.56 million for their 2004 actions linked to their three year strategies. Actions for 2004 include: quality

assurance, promotion and development of best practice, preparation of information, networking, professional development and training, and the promotion of quality awareness among the EOCP Beneficiaries, and the Childcare Sector.

- The D/JE&LR encourages a high level of collaboration among CCCs, among NVCOs, and between CCCs and NVCOs, to promote an integrated approach to the delivery of childcare.
- The D/JE&LR chairs the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (NCCC), which oversees the development of an integrated childcare infrastructure throughout the country and whose membership comprises representatives of the statutory and non-statutory sectors including the Social Partners and the NVCOs.
- In June 2004, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform published “Developing Childcare in Ireland - A Review of Progress to the end of 2003 on the Implementation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006”. The report also outlines childcare provision in Ireland prior to the EOCP 2000-2006. The appendices to the report include a list of grant approvals under the Programme to the end of December 2003. The Department will publish a short update of the report on a half yearly basis and a further comprehensive review in 2006.

(iv) FÁS trainees and childcare payments

FÁS introduced a pilot childcare allowance scheme in 2001 to assist parents who are the primary minder of their children to avail of the necessary training that would allow them enter or return to the workplace. The payment is made to the

childminder on behalf of the parent. Payment is €63.50 per child per week and the scheme is costing approx €5 million per annum.

In 2003, FÁS commissioned two reports on the effectiveness of this intervention. These findings are currently being considered in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

1.13 Gender pay gap

A Consultative Group Report to Government on Male/Female Wage Differentials has been published and distributed to interested parties. Commissioned research into the gender pay gap for graduates, arising from the Report's recommendations, is now underway. It is expected that this research will be completed by end 2004.

1.14 Work-life balance

(i) Parental Leave

Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Parental Leave Act 1998

In line with the agreed recommendations in the Report of the Working Group on the Review and Improvement of the Maternity Protection Legislation, the General Scheme of a Bill to amend the Parental Leave Act 1998 was approved by the Government on 8 September 2004, with a view to implementation at the earliest possible date. The main provisions of the General Scheme are as follows:

- The extension of the parental leave entitlement to persons in loco parentis to an eligible child;
- The increase in the maximum age limit of an eligible child from 5 years to 8 years;

- The period of parental leave not to end later than the day on which a child with a disability attains the age of 16 years
- Employees provided with an additional alternative entitlement to take parental leave in separate blocks, each block consisting of a minimum of 6 continuous weeks; and
- An employee permitted to request the suspension of parental leave for a period of sickness following which the parental leave recommences.

(ii) Maternity Leave

Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004

The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 amends the Maternity Protection Act 1994 to give effect to the outstanding recommendations of the *Working Group on the Review and Improvement of the Maternity Protection Legislation*. The recommendations to increase the period of maternity leave were implemented in March, 2001, very shortly after the Working Group completed its deliberations. The Act, which was signed into law on 19 July 2004, provides for a number of improvements, for example:

- A new provision reducing the compulsory pre-confinement period of maternity leave from 4 weeks to 2 weeks;
- Provision for expectant mothers to attend one set of ante-natal classes without loss of pay (except the last 3 classes in a set). Provision for a once-off right to fathers to paid time off to attend the two ante-natal classes immediately prior to the birth;
- Provision for breastfeeding mothers who have given birth within the previous 6 months with an entitlement, without loss of pay, to either

an adjustment of working hours or where breastfeeding facilities are provided by the employer, breastfeeding breaks;

- Provision for termination of additional maternity leave (subject to the agreement of the employer) in the event of illness;
- Provision for an employee to postpone the period of maternity leave/additional maternity leave (subject to the agreement of the employer) in the event of the hospitalisation of the child; and
- Provision that an employee's absence from work on additional maternity leave will count for all employment rights associated with the employment (except remuneration and superannuation benefits) such as seniority and annual leave.

Regulations under the Act will provide for detailed arrangements in relation to the new entitlements to:

- time off from work, without loss of pay, for the purpose of attending ante-natal classes;
- breaks from work/a reduction of working hours, without loss of pay, for the purpose of breastfeeding; and
- postpone the period of maternity or additional maternity leave (subject to the employer's agreement) in the event of hospitalisation of the child.

The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 commenced on 18 October, 2004.

(iii) Adoptive Leave

Adoptive Leave Bill 2004

On 27 May, 2003 the Government agreed to improve the existing adoptive leave provisions in line with the new maternity leave provisions contained in the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Bill 2003 (now Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004).

The amendment of the Adoptive Leave Act 1995 comes on foot of the Government's decision to implement in full the recommendations of the *Report of the Working Group on the Review and Improvement of the Maternity Protection Legislation*, published in February 2001, and to apply appropriate recommendations to adoptive leave. The recommendation to increase the periods of maternity leave was implemented very shortly after the Working Group completed its deliberations and identical increases were simultaneously applied to the adoptive leave entitlement. On 14 October 2003, the Government approved a proposal to increase the adoptive leave period by 2 weeks to 16 weeks, which has been incorporated into the new Bill. The increase in adoptive leave is linked to the reduction of the compulsory pre-confinement period of maternity leave as provided for in the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 and effectively means that, once the legislation is enacted, both natural and adopting mothers will be able to avail of 16 weeks leave from the time a child is born or placed into their care. The Bill was published on 2 April, 2004 and completed all Seanad stages on 15 June, 2004. It is expected to progress through the Dáil in the Autumn session with a view to enactment as soon as possible. The increased adoptive leave entitlement was implemented by Order, which was made on 22 October 2004 and becomes effective on 19 November 2004, in advance of the enactment of the Bill, so that the

increased leave will be available to adopting parents around the same time that natural mothers benefit from the reduction in compulsory pre-confinement maternity leave.

The *main* provisions of the Adoptive Leave Bill 2004 are as follows:

- provision for an increase in the adoptive leave period by 2 weeks to 16 weeks;
- provision for adopting parent(s) to attend required preparation classes and pre-adoption meetings with social workers/health board officials during work hours without loss of pay;
- provision for termination of additional adoptive leave in the event of illness, subject to the agreement of the employer;
- provision to split the period of adoptive leave/additional adoptive leave in the event of the hospitalisation of the child, subject to the agreement of the employer; and
- provision that an employee's absence from work on additional adoptive leave will count for all employment rights (except remuneration, superannuation benefits) associated with the employment.

1.15 Review of Grounds under Employment Equality Act 1998

Work is in progress on reviewing the grounds under the Employment Equality Act 1998. The Law Department, University College Cork, was commissioned to carry out a review of equality legislation in other jurisdictions, which provides for a prohibition of discrimination on grounds of socio-economic status and/or social origin, trade union membership, criminal conviction/

ex-prisoner/ex-offender. The purpose of this review is to assess the practical implications of extending Irish employment equality legislation to any or all of these grounds. The Department initiated the review process in 2001 with a Discussion Paper and Round Table Conference. The UCC Research Report was published on 4 September 2004 and the views of the attendees of the Round Table conference were sought.

1.16 Equality Studies Unit

The Equality Studies Unit (ESU) of the Equality Authority is funded by the Employment and Human Resources Development Operation Programme (EHRDOP) of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 (NDP). The brief of the ESU is to examine labour market inequalities and their implications for labour market policy in respect of four groups of people: older workers; people with disabilities; refugees; and, members of the Traveller Community. The ESU has published a number of reports which:

- identify existing data deficits and advise on how they might be addressed so that access to and participation in the labour market can be tracked and analysed;

- improve understanding of the specific labour market needs of groups exposed to social exclusion and discrimination and promoting a capacity to accommodate these differing needs;
- research the labour market experience of these groups and draw on the findings to improve access and participation; and,
- enhance the monitoring of outcomes for these groups through inputs to the responsible committees and other fora.

The ESU also works to promote and support the development of equality practice within the measures of the EHRDOP in particular in relation to the Wider Equal Opportunity Principle relating to the four groups mentioned above. This includes a programme of studies of equality practice in specific measures, dissemination of research findings and the development of practical resource materials for providers and others.

SECTION 2 - FACILITATING ACCESS TO RESOURCES, RIGHTS, GOODS AND SERVICES FOR ALL

2.1 - National Action Plan 2003 - 2005 targets

Income Adequacy:

- To achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare payments by 2007. During the period of the Plan (2003-2005) increases in the rates will be made in order to achieve this target;
- Social welfare pensions to be improved to reach a target level of €200 by 2007;
- Progress to be made towards implementation of improvements in Widow(er)'s pensions and increasing the level of the qualified adult allowance for pensioner spouses to the level of the old age (non-contributory) pension;
- Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances to be set at 33 - 35 per cent of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate by 2007. The final phase of the planned multi-annual increases in Child Benefit rates to be completed in 2004 and 2005; and
- The Department of Social and Family Affairs is to review the contribution being made by the Department's income support system to people reconciling work and family life, the review to be completed not later than 2005.

Housing and accommodation:

- To ensure that housing supply is brought more into line with demand and that the housing requirements set out in the NDP (500,000 new units between 2000 and 2010) are achieved in a planned and coherent way;
- To deliver 41,500 local authority housing starts (including acquisitions) between 2000 and 2006; and

- To deliver an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures which meets the needs of different types of households.

Health:

- Reduce the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by at least 10 per cent for circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries and poisoning by 2007; and
- Reduce the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by 10 per cent from the 2001 level, by 2007.

Education:

- Halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006;
- Reduce the proportion of adults aged 16-64 with restricted literacy levels to 10-20 per cent by 2007; and
- Reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 85 per cent by 2003 and 90 per cent by 2006.

Reporting on these targets is dealt with in the relevant sections below.

2.2 *Sustaining Progress Special Initiatives*

A number of the areas covered by this section are the subject of Special Initiatives under Sustaining Progress. Where this is the case, the existence of the Initiative is flagged at the appropriate point in the section.

2.3 Access to Quality Services

Key determinants of social inclusion are the further development of public services, which are quality, performance and results driven and take full account of the increasingly diverse nature of our society. The process of adapting administrative and social services to the needs of people experiencing social exclusion and of ensuring that front-line staff are sensitive to those needs will continue over the period of the plan. In this regard, all Government Departments and Offices are committed to preparing Charters of Service Standards to be in place by end 2004.

The Customer Charter initiative, launched by the Taoiseach in December 2002, requires Departments and Offices to formalise their commitments to service provision and delivery by describing the level of service a customer can expect from a Government Department or Office in a published Charter.

As a support to Departments and Offices in preparing their Charters, the Government approved a detailed set of Guidelines in September 2003. The Guidelines provide a framework for Departments and Offices in preparing and reporting on their charters. Charters are based around a four-step cycle of consultation, commitment, evaluation and reporting. The Guidelines recommend that, in their consultation phase, Departments and Offices should consult with all Customer Groups, including

“Representatives of groups experiencing, or vulnerable to, poverty and social exclusion as identified by the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and to those covered by equality legislation – gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller Community.”

19 Customer Charters have been published to date (October 2004) and the remainder will be published before the end of 2004. Departments and Offices will report on the implementation of the service standards included in their Charters in their 2004 Annual Reports.

(i) Public Services Broker

Phase 1 of the Public Services Broker, which is currently being developed by *Reach*, an agency of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, will be launched in 2004. It will allow Government Departments and Agencies to offer their services online in a secure reliable manner. *Reach* is working with a range of Departments and agencies to enable services to be accessed online via the Broker. Later phases will extend the range of channels and services offered through the Broker. A pilot project is also being developed for the provision of integrated public services organised around the needs of the customer rather than the requirements of the delivery organisations. It aims to deliver a seamless quality public service to customers and communities through a choice of access channels: walk in (contact centres), phone and online. The cross-agency services planned for delivery from the contact centres are car tax and vehicle registration, child benefit, unemployment and employment services, medical cards etc. The outcome of this Project will help inform the delivery of public services in an inclusive manner.

(ii) Access to Social Welfare Information Services

The Department of Social and Family Affairs has undertaken an initiative to ensure that all leaflets, application forms and standard letters issued to its customers contain plain English. This is in response to requests, from many of its customers at various Customer Panels throughout the

country to make its forms and leaflets more customer-friendly and to use plain language. The Department has funded the employment, by the National Adult Literacy Agency, of an extra worker to assess the documentation and ensure they contain plain English and are literacy friendly before going to print.

(iii) Access to State Employment Services

Equality Proofing is a manifestation of one of the core values outlined in the FÁS Strategic Plan 2002-2005. An equality proofing pilot was carried out by the Equality Authority. The report will be presented to the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform in Autumn 2004, and internally within FÁS, where there will be an agreed approach to mainstreaming its recommendations.

(iv) Access to Justice

The Courts Service

Access to information, an understanding of court processes and inclusion in court proceedings need to be provided in an atmosphere of equality. Lack of literacy skills, for example, can cause alienation from society and lead to problems interacting in it. The Courts Service has co-operated with the National Adult Literacy Agency to raise awareness of the issues facing people with literacy difficulties who find themselves involved with the legal system.

In accordance with the commitment contained in the Courts Service Customer Service Action Plan, the Service launched a Central Customer Forum in July 2004. A representative cross-section of stakeholders was invited to attend the inaugural meeting of the Forum. Those attending included a representative of Victim Support, (the voluntary agency), the National Domestic Violence Intervention Agency and the Probation and

Welfare Service. The Courts Service will now move to establish focused user groups to assist it to ascertain and meet the needs of users of its various services. These user groups will pay particular attention to the needs of users who are not represented by a professional organisation or who have been the victim of crime.

The Courts Service has established a protocol for consultation with court users in relation to court buildings and court facilities. A Standard Courthouse Brief is being prepared and will allow for variations to suit particular local circumstances. All future building projects will include a list of accommodation requirements and any other special features which may be needed for particular groups, such as audio-visual facilities, wheelchair access, special facilities for family law cases, an information desk, victim support rooms, access for disabled, etc. The views and requirements of court users shall be accommodated as far as possible within the overall capital cost limit for the project.

Criminal Legal Aid

Criminal legal aid is provided under the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme. Under the Criminal Justice (Legal Aid) Act, 1962 and the Regulations made under it, free legal aid may be granted, in certain circumstances, for the defence of persons (including non-nationals) of insufficient means in criminal proceedings. The grant of legal aid entitles the applicant to the services of a solicitor and, in certain circumstances, counsel, in the preparation and conduct of his/her defence or appeal.

Under the Act, the courts are responsible for the granting of legal aid. An application for legal aid is made to the court and an applicant must establish to the satisfaction of the court that his/her means

are insufficient to enable him/her to pay for legal aid (the accused may be required to complete a statement of his/her means for this purpose). When granting legal aid the court must also be satisfied that by reason of the “gravity of the charge” or “exceptional circumstances” it is essential in the interests of justice that the applicant should have legal aid.

Legal advice is provided to persons detained in a Garda station under the Garda Station Legal Advice Scheme. The Scheme, which operates on a 24-hour basis, provides that where:

- a person is detained in a Garda station for the purpose of the investigation of an offence under the provisions of the Offences against the State Act, 1939 as amended by the Offences against the State (Amendment) Act, 1998 or the Criminal Justice Act, 1984 or the Criminal Justice (Drug Trafficking) Act, 1996, and
- that person has a legal entitlement to consult with a solicitor, and
- that person’s means are insufficient to enable him/her to pay for consultations, then such consultations with solicitors will be paid for by the State.

Under the Garda Station Legal Advice Scheme, persons who are in receipt of social welfare benefit/assistance or persons whose earnings are less than €20,316 p.a. are eligible to receive assistance.

Civil Legal Aid

The Civil Legal Aid Act, 1995, which provides for the establishment of the Legal Aid Board, allows for the provision of legal aid and legal advice in civil cases to persons who satisfy the financial eligibility and merits tests laid down in the Act and

Regulations. Legal aid is available for representation for proceedings in the District, Circuit, High and Supreme Courts and also for proceedings before the European Court of Justice. Legal aid is not available for the conduct of proceedings before an administrative tribunal, except for appeals against the refusal of refugee status. Legal advice and assistance can be provided, however, to persons involved in proceedings before any tribunal.

The function of the Legal Aid Board is to make the services of solicitors and, where necessary, barristers available to qualifying persons. Legal aid and advice are provided, in the main, through law centres by solicitors in the full-time employment of the Board. The Board has a nationwide spread of law centres, with 30 full-time and 12 part-time centres around the country. The services of Barristers are provided in accordance with the terms of an agreement between the General Council of the Bar of Ireland and the Board.

The Board engages solicitors in private practice to provide a complementary legal service to that provided from law centres for certain family law matters in the District Court, namely, domestic violence, maintenance and custody/access. This assists the Board in seeking to provide a service to applicants within a reasonable period of time.

The Board operates a dedicated service, known as the Refugee Legal Service (RLS), to provide legal advice and assistance to asylum seekers at all stages of the asylum process, including representation before the Refugee Appeals Tribunal. The Board continues to run a specialised Refugee Documentation Centre, which provides an independent and professional research and library service for all of the main bodies involved in the asylum process.

(v) Access to Health Services

One of the objectives of the National Health Strategy is a commitment to introduce new legislation to provide for clear statutory provisions on eligibility and entitlement for health and personal social services. A review has been carried out of existing legislation in this regard. The outcome of this review will inform the approach to be taken in the drafting of a new legislative framework clarifying eligibility and entitlements to health and personal social services.

However, having regard to the urgency of implementing the health sector reform programme, legislation giving statutory effect to the proposals of the Prospectus and Brennan reports has taken priority at present. The Department of Health and Children will, meanwhile, continue to work on moving forward the preparation of the legislation relating to eligibility for health and personal services. The Government is fully committed to the extension of medical card coverage as set out in the National Health Strategy. This will focus on people on low incomes and will give priority to families with children. The timing of the introduction of the extension will be decided having regard to the prevailing budgetary position.

The medical card scheme was the subject of a comprehensive review by the CEOs of the health boards and the Health Strategy endorses the recommendations contained in the resulting report. Arising from the review, the CEOs, under the auspices of the Health Boards Executive (HeBE) established a Project Team to make recommendations regarding implementation of the key findings. The report of this group is nearing completion and, when ready, will be submitted to the HeBE for sign-off prior to proceeding with implementation of the

recommendations. The report will comprise the following elements:

- A clear and comprehensive set of guidelines on the implementation of legislation for all health board staff involved in the medical card scheme;
- A management and control strategy for the medical card register;
- A standardised set of administration processes for staff involved in the administration of the medical card scheme;
- A guidance document on the structure of an appeals service, the key principles of an appeals service and the process by which each board should deal with appeals;
- A review of the current application form, design of a new application form and a pilot of the revised form;
- A system for measuring customer satisfaction with the medical card scheme;
- A specification for a standardised medical card IT system;
- A training strategy for all staff involved in the GMS scheme; and
- A training course on the principle of good decision making.

The foregoing represents Phase 1 of a process of modernisation of the medical card scheme. Phase 2 of the project, which has just commenced, will extensively modernise the administrative and operational arrangements of the Medical Card and other related schemes e.g. Drugs Payments, Long Term Illness and Health Amendment Act, 1996 (Hepatitis C), making them more customer

friendly, administratively streamlined, fair, accountable and I.T. enabled.

(vi) Access to Financial Services

Financial inclusion is a key component of social inclusion. Individuals and communities affected by poverty and deprivation often do not have access to the most basic financial products and services. Financial inclusion strategies can provide a major contribution to improving individual and household income, employability, health and well being. The Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority (Financial Services Regulator) was established on 1 May 2003. The Financial Services Regulator is responsible for the regulation of all financial services firms in Ireland. Market research commissioned by the Regulator (released May 2004) reveals that:

- 75 per cent of consumers find written information on financial products too complicated and difficult to understand;
- 63 per cent of consumers do not shop around because they do not fully understand what they should look for in a financial product or service;
- 80 per cent of consumers find it hard to get truly independent information on financial products and services; and
- 92 per cent of consumers said they would read more information on financial products if it was written in plain English.

This research clearly shows the need for independent information in plain English to help consumers make decisions in their best interests. The Authority is striving to supply such information through a new Information Centre in Dublin city centre, a consumer help-line and a

website at www.itsyourmoney.ie. All services provided by the Authority are free of charge.

The Regulator is also working to improve consumer protection codes. The Regulator believes that product costs, risks and benefits should be explained clearly and not hidden in small print or tied up in confusing jargon and terminology. The Regulator intends to produce new advertising rules and guidelines for financial services providers which, coupled with its own information campaign, should enable consumers to make informed decisions and choices about financial products and providers.

In its Strategic Plan 2004 - 2006, the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority is committed to developing an Action Plan on access to financial services, in co-operation with other agencies and Government Departments.

2.4 Equality infrastructure

(i) Gender mainstreaming

Gender Mainstreaming was established as the global strategy for promoting gender equality through the *Platform for Action* at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995. The need to ensure that attention to gender perspectives is an integral part of interventions in all areas of societal development was made clear in that document.

Ireland, together with all Member States of the United Nations countries, agreed to the *Platform for Action* in 1995. Prior to this a gender perspective informed education and training policies and also local development. Subsequent to the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action a gender perspective was brought to bear in our health and international aid policies. With the

adoption of the National Development Plan 2000-2006, the gender mainstreaming commitment was translated into further areas of national policy in Ireland including areas of regional policy and infrastructure such as housing and transport.

To progress gender mainstreaming the NDP included the following commitments:

- requiring that equal opportunities be part of the criteria for selecting projects to be funded by the NDP;
- requiring indicators to be provided for each gender 'where the nature of the assistance permits';
- promoting a balance of women and men on Monitoring Committees;
- including a representative for equal opportunities, from a relevant Government Department or statutory body, on all Monitoring Committees;
- establishing a unit within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to monitor gender mainstreaming in the NDP, and to advise on the development of appropriate indicators to measure this;
- establishing an Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Co-ordinating Committee to oversee progress in equal opportunities issues in NDP spending.

(ii) NDP/CSF Gender Equality Unit

The NDP Gender Equality Unit, based in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and co-financed by the European Social Fund, supports policy makers in Government Departments and Agencies to implement gender mainstreaming in the policies and programmes

funded by the NDP/CSF. The work of the Unit includes training, development of gender disaggregated statistics and indicators, and research into gender equality issues. The Unit also advises on the impact of the NDP/CSF on disadvantaged women, where relevant, and liaises with the OSI and the Combat Poverty Agency in this regard.

The Unit has recently published several statistical reports: "Women And Men in Ireland as Entrepreneurs and Business Managers; women and men in Ireland"; and "Geographic Gender Equality". The Unit also published "Developing and Implementing a Gender Equality Policy: a guide for community and voluntary groups" and a series of "Gender Equality Relevance Sheets" for NDP Measure Managers and Implementing Bodies. In April 2004, the Unit organised a UK/Ireland conference entitled "Gender Mainstreaming: Partnership in Practice", which focused on cross-sectoral partnership approaches to gender mainstreaming.

A number of additional areas of work, are also being implemented over the 2003-2005 period. These are as follows:

- *Work with Community and Voluntary groups:* A programme of work to support community & voluntary groups in the implementation of gender mainstreaming is currently being implemented. Supports include:
 - a conference on partnership working to promote gender mainstreaming;
 - training on effective lobbying and women in decision making;
 - a handbook on developing and implementing a gender equality policy;

- a fact-sheet on men, boys and gender equality; and
 - a series of videos on women promoting gender equality.
- *Gender budgeting*: Two pilot gender budgeting initiatives were carried out in 2004, in a Local Area Partnership and County Development Board respectively;
 - *Statistics*: Statistical reports on women and men in enterprise and gender equality across the Irish regions were published and widely circulated in 2004, along with a booklet outlining statistics on Women and Men in Ireland. A report on attitudes to women's role on the farm is also being produced and is due to be completed in August 2004;
 - *Gender Impact Assessment*: The Unit aims to improve gender impact assessment of policies and programmes in the NDP/CSF as part of the results of the Mid-Term Evaluation, with a view to obtaining stronger commitments and targets to address gender inequalities; and
 - *Network of equal opportunities officers*: The Unit, in conjunction with Chwarae Teg in Wales, is funding the development of a network of those working on gender equality and other equality issues, in relation to the Structural Funds in the UK and Ireland. This will promote and exchange best practice on gender mainstreaming.

(iii) Gender Mainstreaming in Education

In relation to educational attainment, the main gender issues are early school leaving among boys and subject choice among girls.

The Department of Education and Science is to develop a monitoring system, baseline data, indicators and targets in this area.

Under the Equal Opportunities Promotion and Monitoring measure of the NDP/CSF, the Gender Equality Unit was established in the Department of Education and Science in June 2001. The Unit is developing its strategy, which includes creating awareness of gender equality among all the stakeholders in the education system. The Unit also produces and circulates videos and publications on gender equity as well as commissioning research.

At the time of going to print the Unit was finalising a gender mainstreaming review of the education measures in the NDP/CSF Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme.

The report of the external evaluation of *Exploring Masculinities* was published in April 2004 – *Exploring Masculinities* is an optional Social Personal and Health Education module for boys in single-sex schools that may be offered during the Transition Year or senior cycle of post-primary schooling.

Girls and subject choice

A committee has been established to advise on strategies and initiatives which might be undertaken to increase the take up by females of the physical sciences for the Leaving Certificate and of Science, Engineering and Technology courses at third level. The committee is expected to submit its final report by December 2004.

Boys and early school leaving

The latest official figures produced by the Department of Education and Science for retention of boys to senior cycle are those based

on the 1994 cohort to enter second level schools - 72.5 per cent. In terms of educational attainment however, a survey carried out by the Central Statistics Office in 2003 found that 14.7 per cent of males between 18 and 24 years of age had only a lower second level attainment or below.

A committee has also been established to advise on strategies and initiatives that might be undertaken to increase the take up by men of primary school teaching, which was at just 17.5 per cent in 2003. The committee is expected to submit its final report by December 2004.

(iv) NDP/CSF Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Co-ordinating Committee

The NDP/CSF Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Co-ordinating Committee has a brief to support the effective implementation of NDP commitments on gender equality, social inclusion and equal opportunities. The Committee meets twice a year, in the spring and the autumn, in advance of the Operational Programme Monitoring Committees and submits a report to the overall NDP/CSF Steering Committee

(v) Mainstreaming of Equality (and Evidence-based) Policy-making

Pilot projects on equality proofing are ongoing in selected areas of FÁS. Other ongoing work includes: preparation of a manual on equality proofing for community groups; an Equal Status Review in the North Western Health Board; and an Integrated Approach to Proofing in the areas of the Back to Education Allowance and the National Action Plan Against Racism. This latter project was carried out by the Equality Authority in partnership with the OSI and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. A report of the activities of the Working Group on Equality Proofing will be published by end 2004.

(vi) Task Force on the Travelling Community

The Second Progress Report of the Committee to Monitor and Co-ordinate the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community will be published by end 2004 and will comprise two reports. The first report will focus on the outcomes on the key initiatives since the First Progress Report in 2000. The second report will itemise progress in relation to individual recommendations of the original report.

(vii) Transposing EU directives in relation to race, employment and gender Equal Treatment

The Equality Act 2004, enacted in July 2004, amends the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. It implements three EU Directives, the Race Directive (2000/43/EC), the Framework Employment Directive (2000/78/EC) and the Gender Equal Treatment in Employment Directive (2002/73/EC). The overall effect of the three Directives is to require Member States to prohibit direct discrimination, indirect discrimination and harassment on grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in relation to employment, self-employment or occupational and vocational training. Victimisation is also prohibited. The directives also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin in social protection including social security and healthcare, social advantages, education and access to and supply of goods and services, including housing.

(viii) Proposal for EU equal treatment Directive on areas outside the workplace

In October 2004 Member States reached agreement on a 2003 proposal for a Council

Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between women and men in the access to and supply of goods and services. Under the Directive differences of treatment between men and women may only be permitted if they are justified by a legitimate aim, such as the protection of victims of sex-related violence, reasons of privacy and decency or the organisation of single-sex sporting activities. The Directive will also apply to insurance and related financial activities. However, a number of exceptions are provided for here, e.g., Member States may permit differences in individuals' premiums and benefits where the use of sex is a determining factor in the assessment of risk. Differences must be based on updated actuarial and statistical data. Member States will have three years to transpose the Directive into national law.

(ix) Promoting tolerance and understanding between the settled and Traveller communities

New approaches to promoting tolerance and understanding with the emphasis on the improvement of relations between the settled and Traveller communities are being considered. Due to the complex nature of this issue, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform will arrange a seminar to explore the issues with inputs from Traveller organisations and relevant Government Departments, before deciding on a way forward.

2.5 Income Support

In Budget 2003 and Budget 2004, available resources were particularly focused on the lower paid and the elderly. The ESRI commented in *Budget 2004: impact on Income Distribution and Relative Income Poverty* that:

“Measured against a wage-indexed budget, we find that Budget 2004 favoured low income groups, particularly those in the bottom half of the income distribution. These saw gains of between 2 and 3.5 per cent, over and above a wage-indexed budget. By contrast the net impact of the budget on the incomes of the top 40 per cent was close to zero, compared with a wage-indexed budget. Overall the tax and welfare measures contained in Budget 2004 could be expected to lead to a small reduction in the level of relative income poverty.”

(i) Social Welfare Payment Rates

The Government is committed to increasing social welfare levels in real terms in the period to 2007. Increases are being made in order to achieve the targets of €150 per week, in 2002 terms, by 2007, for the lowest rates of social welfare payments, with the appropriate child equivalence levels and €200 per week for pensions.

An increase of €10 a week was provided in Budget 2004 for all weekly social welfare full rate payments. This represented a significant increase in real terms. A total of approximately 942,700 recipients and their 126,200 qualified adults benefited from the increased rates of payment. In addition to the €10 increase for Widow/ers' Contributory Pensioners and recipients of Deserted Wife's Benefit, aged 66 and over, recipients of these payments received an additional €1.50 a week. This special increase completes the objective, announced in Budget 2001, of increasing the level of these payments up to the level of the Old Age Contributory Pension. The rate of Contributory Pensions represents approximately 31 per cent of average industrial earnings.

(ii) Pensioner Qualified Adult Allowances

A number of special increases were granted in recent Budgets. Qualified Adult Allowance (QAA) rates for those over 66 years of age now stand at between 66 per cent and 77 per cent of maximum personal rates, up from about 60 per cent and 67 per cent in 2000. Budget 2004 provided for an increase of €7.70 (6.3 per cent) in the QAA rates of Old Age (Contributory) Pension and Retirement Pension, ensuring that the levels of these payments were maintained relative to the personal rates of payment. In addition, Invalidity Pension QAA rates, where the qualified adult is aged 66 or over, were increased by €16.10 (14.2 per cent). This special increase brings the rate of this payment up to the level of other contributory pensioner QAA rates and makes progress towards the achievement of the commitment on the pensioner QAA rate. Further special increases in pursuit of this objective will be considered in the context of future budgets.

(iii) Child Benefit

Child Benefit increased to €131.60 per month for each of the first two children and to €165.30 per month for the third and each subsequent child. These increases mark the beginning of the final phase of Child Benefit investment package initiated in Budget 2001 which on completion in 2005 will see Government investment in the scheme rise by an additional €1.27 billion. Following Budget 2004, the equivalence level of basic child income support is 35 per cent of the minimum social welfare rates, meaning that this target in the NAPS has now been met.

(iv) Taxation Policy for Pensioners and People on Low Incomes

The *Agreed Programme for Government* contains a commitment to deliver “further real improvements

to pensioners and people on low incomes”. In addition, a key aim of taxation policy as set out in the Programme is to achieve a position where all those on the national minimum wage are removed from the tax net. Overall, over the last seven budgets, 668,700 income earners (35 per cent of all income earners) have been removed from the tax net. This compares with a figure of 380,000 (25 per cent of income earners) before the 1998 Budget.

(v) Reconciling Work and Family Life

The Department of Social and Family Affairs is examining the contribution made by its income support system to people reconciling work and family life. An important input to this work will be the 2003 OECD report “*Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life, Austria, Ireland and Japan, Volume 2*”. On a broader level, the Department is preparing a strategy to co-ordinate policy in relation to families and family life. This study is due for completion by end of 2004 and will be published early 2005.

(vi) Personal Retirement Savings Accounts

The Pensions Act, 2002, provided for the introduction of Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs), in early 2003, with the key aim of increasing supplementary pensions cover to 70 per cent of those in employment who are 30 years of age and older. Coverage for this group increased from 57.4 per cent in 2002 to 59.1 per cent in 2004. A key element of the legislation underpinning PRSAs requires employers who do not provide an occupational pension scheme to provide access to a Standard PRSA for employees and this took effect in September 2003. At the end of June 2004, 32,920 PRSA accounts had been opened.

Uptake of PRSAs, and supplementary pensions coverage in general, is being monitored closely by

the Pensions Board and through surveys undertaken by the CSO. A review of the position is required by legislation in 2006 and the success, or otherwise, in meeting Government targets will be assessed at that stage.

(vii) Minimum Wage

Budget 2004 increased the entry point to taxation to 90 per cent of the increased minimum wage annualised, which applies from 1 February 2004 (€7.00 per hour). This means that, for a single PAYE person, the first €12,800 per annum, or €246 per week, of earnings will be tax free. The minimum wage was introduced in April 2000. In that year, less than 64 per cent of the minimum wage annualised was free of tax. In 2002, 90 per cent of wage was made exempt from tax and this position has been maintained for 2003 and 2004, despite two increases in the value of the wage since its introduction.

(viii) Age Exemption Limits for Income Tax

Budget 2004 also increased the Age Exemption limits for the third year in a row. In three years, the limits have increased by almost 44 per cent whereas inflation for the same period is expected to increase by slightly less than 11 per cent. Under the Age Exemption limits system, those aged 65 or over are exempt from tax up to specified limits - for 2004 the limits are €15,500 in the case of a single or widowed person and €31,000 in the case of a married couple where one is or both are aged 65 or over.

Over the last 7 budgets, 81,300 elderly people have been taken out of the tax net. Tax exemption limits for over 65s have more than doubled since 1997 and Budget 2004 increased these limits to €15,500 single and €31,000 married.

2.6 Housing and Accommodation

Housing and Accommodation is a special initiative under Sustaining Progress.

Quantitative targets have been set under the NAP/Inclusion in respect of housing supply in general, local authority dwellings in particular and an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures (see list of targets at beginning of Section).

(i) Housing Supply

Current Status of Target - 228,928 house completions from January 2000 to end 2003.

Progress on the overall completions target is measured through data in relation to ESB domestic electricity connections, house guarantee registrations and numbers of planning permissions granted by Local Authorities. Other measures to achieve this target include increasing the supply of serviced land through targeted initiatives and the commitment of Exchequer funding and securing more efficient use of serviced lands through higher residential densities.

According to the most recent Housing Land Availability Survey conducted at the end of June 2003, there is currently over 5 years supply of serviced residential land nationally and over 8 years supply in Dublin, with the potential to deliver 369,000 units. Local authorities have been asked to provide the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (D/EH&LG) with details of housing land availability for 2004-2010 and it is expected that the survey results will be published in the Department's Housing Statistics Bulletin (September Quarter 2004).

(ii) Housing Starts

Current Status of Target - Total local authority starts achieved to end of 2003 was 20,622 (or 50.3 per cent of target).

Local authorities completed or acquired almost 5,000 units in 2003. Output from local authorities in the last three years has reached levels not seen since the mid 1980s.

Statistics in relation to this target are drawn from returns to the D/EH&LG by local authorities, where they detail current and proposed projects; Multi-Annual Action Plans 2000-2003; and the Triennial Assessment of Housing Needs survey.

(iii) Social and Affordable Housing

Strong social and affordable housing programmes are being maintained to meet the needs of those not in a position to provide for their housing needs from their own resources. Funding in 2004 will allow for the needs of some 13,000 households to be met, compared to almost 8,500 in 1998.

Consolidating the gains made in recent years, the total housing provision in 2004 of €1.884 billion, Exchequer and Non-Exchequer, is over four times that provided in 1997 and represents an increase of 5.4 per cent on the 2003 provision.

A key commitment within the Sustaining Progress Special Initiative in relation to the provision of social and affordable accommodation is to review the effectiveness of programmes designed to assist low income groups, including those with social and special housing needs. Other related issues within the special initiative include: ensuring greater progress in the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme; action on homelessness; the voluntary housing programme; and estate management policies in local authorities.

The D/EH&LG and the Housing Forum (a vehicle for affording the social partners an opportunity to contribute to policy development) have agreed a work programme for reviewing social and affordable housing provision. NESC are currently undertaking a comprehensive study of housing and land.

At the request of the Department, draft multi-annual action plans have been developed at county/city level by local authorities to cover the period 2004-2008 and submitted to the D/EH&LG for agreement. Having regard to the introduction of five year capital envelopes, the main objective in developing these action plans, is the need to ensure that the investment available for these programmes achieves the desired effect in the long term, by tackling real need and breaking cycles of disadvantage and dependency. Thus, the action plans identify the areas of need and set out how the local authority proposes to address such needs over the period. The Department is currently assessing the plans with a view to agreeing them later in the year.

The needs of over 46,600 households were met under social and affordable housing measures between 2000 and 2003, detailed as follows:

Voluntary and Co-operative Sector	5,181
Shared Ownership	5,485
Affordable Housing	2,764
Mortgage Allowance	642
Part V – Planning and Development Acts, 2000-2002	209
Local Authority Housing	32,336

On foot of significant increases in the capital funding made available for the voluntary housing programme this sector has achieved record levels of output in recent years. Last year some 1,617 units were provided by the sector compared to just 579 in 1999. Capital funding for the programme during that period increased from €47 million in 1999 to €211 million last year.

Additionally, in order to improve access to the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes, the income limits for eligibility were increased from €32,000 to €36,800 for a single income household and from €80,000 to €92,000 for a two income household, using the formula of 2.5 times the main income and once the second income. The maximum loan limit was also increased from €130,000 to €165,000. These changes were introduced in July 2004 and apply to all local authority loans for house purchase.

(iv) Affordable Housing Initiative (AHI)

Further State and local authority lands were released in July 2004 for the construction of affordable housing under the *Sustaining Progress* Affordable Housing Initiative. These additional sites bring the estimated potential housing yield to 8,891 units (including an estimated 2,100 Part V affordable housing units for 2004-2006 period). All projects will be advanced as a priority and, where possible, planning and other procedures are being paralleled to facilitate early construction and final delivery of units. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is also engaged with a number of other Departments and State Agencies with a view to securing further land to reach the agreed target figure of 10,000 units under the Initiative.

(v) Residential Tenancies Act 2004

The Residential Tenancies Act 2004 provides for major reform of landlord/tenant law. A large portion of the Act came into operation on 1 September 2004, including:

- improved security of tenure through a system of 4-year tenancy cycles;
- new tenancy termination procedures, including longer notice periods linked to length of tenancy;
- establishment of a statutory Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB);
- a new system of tenancy registration with the PRTB;
- voluntary renunciation of the right to long-occupation equity leases;
- higher penalties for offences relating to standards and registration of private rented accommodation; and
- extension of local authority powers to address anti-social behaviour.

Provisions in the Act for a new dispute resolution service through the PRTB instead of the courts, involving mediation or adjudication and tenancy tribunal hearings, will come into operation later this year, as will other provisions connected with the dispute resolution process. These include provisions setting out clearly the statutory tenancy obligations of landlords and tenants and providing that landlords will not be entitled to seek a rent greater than the market rate and that rent reviews (whether up or down) may not occur more than once a year unless warranted by substantial change in the accommodation. The Act will be fully in force before the end of 2004.

The role of the PRTB, in addition to providing a State-subsidised dispute-resolution service for private sector tenants and registered landlords and operating the new tenancy-registration system, will include a range of monitoring, research, information and policy-advice functions in relation to the private rented sector. The new Act is the core element of the Government's overall programme to promote reform and development of the private rented sector based particularly on the report of the Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector.

2.7 Embedding Social Inclusion in Local Government

(i) Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network

To support the implementation of NAPS at local level, including the embedding of social inclusion in local government, the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA), in conjunction with the D/EH&LG and the OSI, established the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network in late 2000.

The overall aim of the Network is to promote and support the development of a strong anti-poverty focus within a reformed system of local government. It is managed by the CPA, with the assistance of an Advisory Committee and a Steering Group. The OSI is represented on both of these.

The objectives of the Network are to:

- provide a forum in which local authorities can share experience and consider how to make the maximum contribution to policies to tackle poverty and social inclusion;
- support and assist local authorities to incorporate a strong anti-poverty focus within their work;

- enable local authorities to share information about developing new and innovative projects and initiatives; and
- exchange different local experiences and best practice.

The total budget for this initiative is €1.474 million over a four year period. Since 2000, the Network has supported a range of activities including Network meetings, grants, information provision, training and research.

An evaluation of the Network is currently being finalised. The D/EH&LG, the OSI and the CPA are involved in discussions regarding the future progression of the social inclusion agenda at local authority level.

In addition, the CPA, supported three local authorities to develop a local anti-poverty strategy in 2003. The three local authorities were Donegal, Westmeath and Cork City.

(ii) County and City Development Boards

The social inclusion role of the County and City Development Boards and the Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Co-ordinating Groups of the Boards continues to develop particularly through their involvement in implementing the Joint Ministerial Initiative on Improving Local and Community Development Structures and Programmes. This has seen the CDBs / SIM Co-ordinating Groups having a key role in;

- the endorsement of local/community development plans leading to greater cohesion among agencies;
- developing and monitoring the implementation of proposals from local/community development groups aimed at greater cohesion in service provision; and

- the development and implementation of 'Integrated and Targeted Plans' (as set out in relevant guidelines from the D/EH&LG). These plans will be designed to identify a specific local socially excluded target group, outline why they are a county/city priority, indicate relevant measures to be carried out, and state how the plan will secure integration in service provision between agencies.

(iii) Pilot Social Inclusion Units

Pilot Social Inclusion Units were established in seven local authorities for a three-year period (2002-2004). A Social Inclusion Unit was in operation in Dublin City Council prior to the commencement of the pilot units, but has also received funding under the pilot scheme. The D/EH&LG provided total funding of €3.1 million for the establishment and operation of the units for the three year duration of the pilot scheme. In June 2004, independent consultants were engaged to undertake a review and evaluation of the pilot programme. A report is due to be presented to the D/EH&LG in October 2004.

2.8 Health

(i) National Health Strategy

The National Health Strategy *Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You* is the framework within which developments in the health services will take place over the next seven to ten years. The key targets to reduce health inequalities are as follows:

- Reduce the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by at least 10 per cent for circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries and poisoning by 2007.

- Reduce the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by 10 per cent from the 2001 level, by 2007.

Special policy initiatives are being undertaken which will assist in reducing inequalities in health status and premature mortality amongst the lower socio-economic groups with particular reference to circulatory diseases, cancers, and injuries and poisoning. These include:

- Implementation of Health Impact Assessment;
- Implementation of the Primary Care Strategy;
- Implementation of Cardiovascular Health Strategy; and
- Cancer Strategy and Programmes.

In addition work is underway to support health service staff in the implementation of key NAPS health targets.

(ii) Initiatives to implement anti-poverty work in the health services

Work to support health service staff in implementing the actions to achieve the key NAPS health targets is being taken forward by the NAPS and Health Project Planning Team with representatives of the Department of Health and Children (D/H&C), the Health Boards, the Health Board Executive (HeBE), the Institute of Public Health (IPH), the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) and the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA). This work aims to:

- Raise awareness of NAPS targets and social inclusion issues in the wider health service;
- Lay the foundation for a learning network to ensure, *inter alia*, that social inclusion issues

are better addressed in health service staff training; and

- Mainstream actions to address further NAPS health target achievement in the context of all major policy implementation.

The first phase of the work which relates to information gathering and agenda setting is nearing completion. It comprises:

- Scoping of current anti-poverty work in health boards;
- Strategic issues including needs of health board staff for support and training for anti-poverty work; and
- Baseline survey of awareness of anti-poverty work among health board staff.

In consultation with the NAPS and Health Project Planning Team a promotional brochure on NAPS and the health services has been developed. This resource will be used as an initial awareness raising and agenda setting exercise, spelling out very clearly what NAPS is, the relevance of NAPS to the health services and current NAPS health targets and proposed developments. The brochure will be published shortly under the auspices of the organisations involved in the Project Team.

The OSI and D/H&C have been jointly developing Poverty Proofing Guidelines for the health services. Draft Guidelines have been produced which will be piloted within the Department.

(iii) Implementation of Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

The issue of HIA is being progressed in the context of the re-organisation of the D/H&C and the work of the interim Health Service Executive. In the meantime the D/H&C has written to a number of

Government Departments to arrange initial bilateral meetings with them in relation to HIA before the end of 2004. This work will build on an introductory policy seminar held for senior managers and the launch of the HIA methodology guidelines and a screening tool for HIA which took place in July 2003. The Institute of Public Health which provides technical support on HIA has also advertised for additional staff for this area.

(iv) Implementation of the Primary Care Strategy

The Primary Care Strategy sets out a vision for the development of primary care, building on the existing strengths of the system to develop an integrated, high-quality, multidisciplinary and user-friendly primary care service to meet people's health and social care needs.

National Primary Care Steering Group

The National Primary Care Steering Group was established in June 2002 to give national leadership and guidance in relation to several key elements of the implementation plan for the Primary Care Strategy. Sub-groups established to date are addressing:

- Community Involvement and Health;
- Human Resources, Education and Training;
- Quality; and
- Services.

The output of the Steering Group to date includes submissions to the Health Service Reform process and to the Interdepartmental Group on Medical Education and Training, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of the Primary Care Strategy and the preparation of a Framework for Quality Assurance in Primary Care.

Primary Care Implementation projects

The ten pilot implementation projects are making substantial progress with the development of the multi-disciplinary primary care teams. The process of team development and consolidation will be ongoing for some time. In several cases a number of the additional staff members, required to enable the teams to deliver the full range of planned services, have been appointed.

Projects are currently at different stages of development, with a number already providing new or enhanced primary care services to their target populations. Areas which are the focus of early efforts to provide new or enhanced services include physiotherapy, which has traditionally been provided as a hospital out-patient service, shared care arrangements with the general hospitals, and the development of social work services to focus on general family support needs.

The locations, approved for the first phase of primary care teams, ranging from the centre-city urban to the rural communities of the west of Ireland, were chosen to reflect the variety of circumstances around the country in which primary care services must be delivered and to explore, in a practical way, how primary care teams will operate. A principle objective of this initial group of implementation projects is to ensure that the experience gained provides valuable learning which can inform the wider implementation which is to follow.

Each location has its own intrinsic challenges and each primary care team is adapting to the needs of the area and community it serves. A number of the locations are designated areas under the RAPID and CLÁR Programmes as areas of deprivation. Further projects are located in areas of high deprivation and high eligibility for General Medical Services.

(v) Reform of Existing Resources

The health services are currently examining how the existing primary/community care resources could best be reorganised, so as to give effect to the application of the teamworking concept on a wider basis (than the 10 implementation projects) and to mapping out the geographical areas to be served by primary care teams and teams in the future. The health services have also been asked to undertake a high-level needs assessment for primary care, which will help to inform this task and also national planning to meet resource requirements. Funding was allocated in 2003 to initiatives in support of widening the interdisciplinary model of primary care.

(vi) Research

A research programme associated with the Primary Care Strategy is being supported by the Department of Health and Children. This program includes three Primary Care Research Fellowships one of which is focusing on the issues of developing and evaluating community involvement in Primary Care.

(vii) Health Action Zones

The D/H&C has funded the Southern Health Board for a three-year period to establish two Health Action Zone projects in the Knocknaheeny/Churchfield and Mayfield/The Glen areas of Cork city. The Health Action Zone concept involves focusing on particular areas of disadvantage and tailoring a range of health services to the needs of those areas to address health inequalities and modernise services through local innovation in partnership with local communities. The two health action zones in Cork city were approved in April 2002.

(viii) Building Healthy Communities

In May 2003 the D/H&C and the CPA jointly launched the Agency's Building Healthy Communities programme which has a specific focus on community development approaches to reducing health inequalities. In 2003 the Department provided €15,000 to each of two community development projects under this programme and the Department is funding three projects in 2004.

Nexus Research have been engaged to undertake an evaluation of the Programme's first phase, and their interim report has noted some positive outcomes from the work to date. The most important of these are about:

- The establishment of a range of mechanisms and procedures to facilitate working relationships involving community-based groups, health and other service providers. Some of these are already pointing the way to good practice in relation to future planning – a notable example being work in the North-West directed by the Lifford/Clonleigh Resource Centre;
- The successful completion of accredited community-based courses;
- Greater participation in activities by more disadvantaged people; and increased voluntary involvement in a range of consultative mechanisms;
- Increase in the extent to which health issues have featured on various programme and project agendas – including CDBs, area-based Partnerships, Community Projects and RAPID Structures;

- More productive working relationships between community groups and service providers; and
- More effective networking amongst a range of stakeholders locally, regionally and nationally.

(ix) Implementation of Cardiovascular Health Strategy

Since the launch of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy in July 1999, €54 million has been invested in its implementation. This has provided for the appointment of almost 800 new staff including:

- 139 health promotion officers;
- 113 primary care and pre-hospital care personnel;
- 328 hospital-based professionals;
- 17 additional consultant cardiologists;
- 109 additional cardiac rehabilitation; and
- 81 additional staff employed in the area of information systems, audit and research.

Immediate benefits are evident including:

- stronger inter-sectoral partnerships in the area of health promotion;
- reduction in emergency call to treatment times;
- regional self-sufficiency for non-invasive diagnostic procedures;
- increased availability of new services such as chest pain clinics and cardiac rehabilitation;

- almost 200 per cent increase in certain cardiology procedures resulting in a 24 per cent reduction in the waiting list for cardiology procedures; and
- a 47 per cent increase in the frequency of prescriptions for cardiovascular disease for people covered by the General Medical Services (Payments) Board reflecting the increase in the numbers now being detected and treated with conditions such as chronic heart failure.

The key national structures to support the implementation process and provide expert advice are the Heart Health Task Force and the Advisory Forum on Cardiovascular Health.

The *Heartwatch* programme is currently being evaluated and a report is due later in 2004. The evaluation will take account of the socio-economic status of patients. Among the issues to be addressed are equity of access within the population targeted and barriers to patients participating in *Heartwatch*.

(x) Smoking

On 29 March 2004 most enclosed places of work, including licensed premises, became smoke-free. The primary purpose of this measure is to protect the health of workers and the public from exposure to toxic environmental tobacco smoke. The Health and Safety Authority has carried out 4,114 inspections (as of 29 September 2004) in enclosed workplaces since the introduction of the

new measures and there has been an average of 91 per cent compliance. The response to date across all sectors is very positive with compliance at a very high level.

A National Smoking Cessation Action Plan has been developed. Nicotine Replacement Therapy was introduced for patients with a Medical Card. A hard hitting media campaign '*Every Cigarette is Doing You Damage*' has been in place, with evaluation showing that 80 per cent of those surveyed recognised it. The campaign is supported by a National Quitline.

(xi) Obesity

The National Taskforce on Obesity is developing a national strategy to tackle obesity and overweight. This strategy will focus on lower socio-economic groups.

"Every step counts, small changes make the difference", a national public awareness campaign targeting obesity and overweight was launched on 2 September.

(xii) Monitoring of premature mortality target

In relation to the monitoring of the key health target on premature mortality, the D/H&C requested the IPH to analyse CSO mortality and population data for 2002 (the latest available). These data show considerable gaps between the highest and lowest socio-economic groups for death rates from circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries and poisoning².

² The analysis carried out differs slightly in two ways from the analysis in the Institute of Public Health's 2001 report *Inequalities in Mortality 1989-1998: A Report on All Ireland Mortality Data*:

- As the NAPs Indicator refers to premature mortality, under 15s are included in the analysis of 2002 data. This age group was not included in the mortality report for 1989-1999.
- Different statistical measures were used and therefore the results should be interpreted separately.

The standardised mortality ratios (SMRs) were calculated from the population and mortality data provided by the CSO. These ratios compare the actual number of events in one socio-economic group (SEG D i.e. semi-skilled, unskilled and labourers) to the expected number of events based on the mortality rates of a reference population (SEG A i.e. higher and lower professionals). The final value is a ratio of observed to expected number of deaths.

In the method, age specific death rates in both SEGs are calculated. The expected deaths in each age group in SEG D are calculated by multiplying the population in SEG D by the death rate in SEG A. The number of expected deaths in each age group in SEG D is summed to get total expected deaths for this SEG. The SMR is then the observed number of deaths divided by the expected number of deaths expressed as a percentage.

Using standardised mortality ratios (SMRs) for those aged under 65 years, the differences between the highest and lowest socio-economic group (i.e. semi-skilled, unskilled and labourers) were calculated using the highest socio-economic group (i.e. higher and lower professionals) as the reference group (SMR = 100). Calculations were done for the entire population as well as for males and females separately. The Institute recommends the use of SMRs only for males, as when females are included the true differences are masked due to the inadequacies of coding of the socio-economic status of females. The statistics presented below concentrate on the results for males.

Examining the actual over the expected deaths for circulatory diseases in men in the lowest socio-economic group, the data show that twice as many deaths were observed in the lowest socio-economic (SMR = 202) group than would have been observed if that group had the same death rate as that of the highest socio-economic group.

For cancers, 43 per cent more deaths were observed in men in the lowest socio-economic group (SMR = 143) compared to the highest. For external causes of injuries and poisoning over three times as many deaths were observed in men in the lowest socio-economic group when compared to the highest.

(xiii) Cancer

Achievement of Targets in National Cancer Strategy 1996

The key goal of the National Cancer Strategy 1996 was to achieve a 15 per cent decrease in mortality from cancer in the under-65 year age group in the 10 year period from 1994. The Deloitte Evaluation of the 1996 National Cancer Strategy demonstrated that this figure was achieved in 2001, 3 years ahead of target.

Implementation of Radiation Oncology Report

The Report on the Development of Radiation Oncology Services in Ireland was published in October 2003. The Government has accepted the recommendation that a major programme is now required to rapidly develop clinical radiation oncology treatment services to modern standards. The first phase of such a new programme will be the development of a clinical network of large centres in Dublin, Cork and Galway which will permit a rapid increase in patient access to appropriate radiation therapy and will form the 'backbone' of the future service expansion.

Over 130 additional staff and full-year revenue funding of €15 million was approved to open the new Radiation Oncology Department in University College Hospital Galway and to expand capacity at Cork University Hospital. There are currently eight linear accelerators nationally and these developments will provide an additional five.

Five further Consultant Radiation Oncologists are being recruited to add to the existing 10 nationally. This will result in a significant increase in the numbers of patients receiving radiation oncology in the short term.

The Report recommends that there should be two treatment centres located in the Eastern region, one serving the southern part of the region and adjacent catchment areas and one serving the northern part of the region and adjacent catchment areas. The Chief Medical Officer has been asked to advise on the optimum location of radiation treatment facilities in Dublin. He will be assisted in the selection process by international experts as well as experts from within the Eastern Regional Health Authority and the Department. It is expected that the selection process will be completed by the end of 2004.

A National Radiation Oncology Co-ordinating Group has been established with a remit which encompasses measures to facilitate improved access to existing and planned services, including transport and accommodation. The Group is currently developing proposals in this area in consultation with health boards. Capital funding of €1.5 million has been made available to develop national telemedicine related to radiotherapy.

(xiv) National Health Information Strategy

The National Health Information Strategy (NHIS) was launched in July 2004. This report will form an integral part of the Health Service Reform Programme and its implementation is key to the support of an evidence based population health approach. This is coupled with increased spending on information systems and the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).

(xv) Low birth-weight target

In relation to the monitoring of the key health target on low birth-weight, data on low birth-weight by socio-economic group is collected through the National Peri-natal Reporting System managed on behalf of the D/H&C by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). Some difficulties have been experienced with the socio-economic disaggregation (e.g. due to large number of unknowns and issues related to whether mother's or father's socio-economic positions should be used). These difficulties are being examined and an analysis will be completed by the end of 2004.

On foot of a commission from the Department, the IPH in collaboration with the National Peri-natal Reporting Scheme has been working to

identify trends in low birth-weight across socio-economic groups to establish a baseline for monitoring progress.

For 1999, the latest year for which national data are available, the IPH analysis of the Peri-natal data shows that the percentage of low birth-weight in the highest socio-economic group was 2.89 per cent compared to 6.0 per cent in the lowest socio-economic group. While national data are not yet available to report on progress in more recent years, more up-to-date figures are available for the ERHA area. Taking the average for the 3 year period 1999-2002, the standardised low birth-weight ratio in the ERHA area was 198.6 in the lowest socio-economic group compared to 100 in the highest socio-economic group (reference group).

The Department also commissioned the IPH to do a literature review of the effectiveness of public health interventions in relation to low birth-weight. The outcome of this research, which will be completed by the end of 2004, will inform future work in this area.

(xvi) National Treatment Purchase Fund/ Waiting Times/ Public/Private Mix in Acute Hospitals

Responsibility for the collation and publishing of waiting list and waiting time data has been transferred to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) which was set up on a statutory basis with effect from 1 May 2004. The NTPF has been successful in locating additional capacity and arranging treatments for approximately 18,000 patients by the end of August 2004.

The NTPF has reported that waiting times have fallen significantly with 37 per cent of patients now waiting between 3 and 6 months and 43 per cent waiting between 6 and 12 months for surgery. Therefore, 80 per cent of patients now wait less than one year for surgical treatment. This represents a major reduction in the length of time patients have to wait.

The NTPF has the available capacity to treat patients and will continue to focus on reducing waiting times even further. The Fund's target is to treat over 12,000 patients in 2004 and it has the capacity to treat a minimum of 1,000 patients per month in Ireland and in the United Kingdom. If referrals can be maintained at this level the NTPF expects that waiting times for surgical operations should be reduced further and be brought in line with the Health Strategy targets of 3-6 months.

It is now the case that, in most instances, adults waiting more than six months for an operation and children waiting more than three months will be facilitated by the Fund.

The National Health Strategy, '*Quality and Fairness: A Health System for You*' expressed concern at the ratio of public versus private elective activity in public hospitals. The Department of Health and Children is reviewing the bed designation process, which controls the number of private beds in public hospitals. The Department is also reviewing the mix at individual health board level.

(xvii) Mental Health

An Expert Group on Mental Health Policy, was established in August 2003, to prepare a national policy framework for the further modernisation of the mental health services, updating the 1984 policy document, *Planning for the Future*. It is envisaged that the Expert Group will examine,

inter alia, models of care, the respective roles of medication and complementary therapies, measures to reduce stigma and psychiatric services for specialised groups such as the homeless, prisoners and children/adolescents. The Group is expected to complete its work in 2005.

Improve service provision

In order to improve service provision, which includes preventive services, the Mental Health Commission has been established and has appointed an Inspector of Mental Health Services as well as a team of Assistant Inspectors. The Commission has published its Strategic Plan for 2004-2005.

Considerable progress has been made in many health board areas in implementing the change from institutional to community-based care. In the period 2003-2004 two new acute psychiatric units have opened in St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny and Castlebar General Hospital. In addition to the twenty-one acute units already in place, a number of units are currently at various stages of planning and three more such units at Blanchardstown, Portlaoise and St Vincent's Hospital, Elm Park are expected to open in the near future.

In the period 2003-2004 there has been an increase in the number of community psychiatric residences from 410 to 418, with the number of places being provided increasing from over 3,100 to 3,210.

Currently there are at least two consultant-led multi-disciplinary teams for child and adolescent psychiatry in each health board.

(xviii) Strategic Action Plan for Suicide Reduction

The Strategic Action Plan for Suicide Reduction, which commenced in 2004, involves HeBE in

partnership with the National Suicide Review Group, supported by the D/H&C. The Strategic Action Plan will be action-based from the outset and will build on existing policy. All measures aimed at reducing the number of deaths by suicide will be considered in the preparation of this strategy which will be completed in 2005.

2.9 Education

Tackling Educational Disadvantage – Literacy, Numeracy and Early School Leavers is a Special Initiative under Sustaining Progress

(i) Literacy

Baseline data and outcome measures have been lacking but several actions have been initiated to strengthen reporting in this area. These involve the establishment of a number of systems for monitoring literacy and numeracy levels among children and adults, particularly those who are disadvantaged, with the aim of having these systems in place by 2006. Specific details include:

- It is intended to make the standardised testing of all pupils a requirement at three points during their years of compulsory education, with effect from the 2006-2007 academic year. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have been requested to advise on the key issues relating to implementing this requirement;
- A comprehensive Primary Pupil database is being developed and will begin to be implemented in the 2004-2005 school year;
- National assessments of literacy and numeracy in primary schools (reading in 1st and 5th classes and maths in 4th class) will be completed in 2004 and the reports of the findings will be available in 2005;

- The Educational Research Centre (ERC) carried out a survey in 2003 to establish baseline literacy data for 1st, 3rd and 6th classes in disadvantaged primary schools. The report on the survey was published in October 2004;
- The OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) carried out a survey of proficiency of 15 year-olds in mathematics, literacy and science in 2003. The national and international reports of the survey will be released in December 2004; and
- An International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), which included Ireland, was carried out in 1995. It is intended, resources permitting, to assess literacy attainment among the adult population in the course of 2005.

Child Literacy

A PISA survey carried out in 2000 found that 11 per cent of 15 year-old pupils had serious reading difficulties.

The NAP/Inclusion aim is to halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006.

This target is mainly being addressed by a strategy of implementing targeted initiatives in disadvantaged primary schools aimed at ensuring that pupils with serious literacy difficulties are supported in improving their attainment levels.

The following are the main initiatives in this area:

- Continuing assistance is being given to disadvantaged primary schools in implementing the Department's *Learning Support Guidelines*, including adoption of a whole-school approach to supporting children with literacy difficulties, and development and implementation of a literacy plan by each school.

- The *Reading Recovery* Programme first piloted in the Louth, Monaghan and Cavan area has been extended to a number of schools in the Dublin area. There are currently 85 primary schools (51 in Monaghan, 34 in Dublin) participating in the programme. Following a decision to further expand the *Reading Recovery* Programme in disadvantaged primary schools, three *Reading Recovery* teachers have recently been recruited to train as *Reading Recovery* Tutors. Following completion of their training, the three new tutors will work in centres in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. The new centres in Limerick and Cork, along with the existing centres in Dublin and Monaghan, will give *Reading Recovery* a nationwide profile.
- The *First Steps* programme, offers primary teachers an accurate means of assessing and monitoring children's competencies and progress in reading, writing, spelling and oral language. Training of teachers in selected disadvantaged schools in *First Steps* is ongoing.
- The trainers in the Primary Curriculum Support Service (Cuiditheoir) will continue to offer support to disadvantaged schools in their areas as their first priority.

and in relation to providing access to electronic technological tools:

- The Department of Education and Science (D/E&S) is currently formulating a Policy Framework to progress the position as regards ICT in schools for the period to the end of 2007, with priority being given to supporting developments in disadvantaged schools and making provision for children with special needs.

- In a joint approach, the telecommunications sector and the Government have jointly committed €18 million towards the rollout of broadband to all 4,100 primary and secondary schools.

(i) Adult Literacy

The NAP/Inclusion target is to reduce the proportion of adults aged 16-64 with restricted literacy levels to 10-20 per cent by 2007.

An International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) conducted in 1995 and published in 1997 provided a profile of the literacy skills of adults aged 16-64. It found that about 25 per cent of Irish adults aged between 16-64 were at the lowest level (Level 1). Persons at Level 1 performed, at best, tasks that required the reader to locate a simple piece of information in a text, with no distracting information, and when the structure of the text assists the task. The survey showed early school leavers, older adults and the unemployed as being most at risk of literacy difficulties, with participation in adult education and training being least likely for those with the poorest skills.

Following on the survey and the publication of the White Paper on Adult Education "Learning For Life" in August 2000 which identified adult literacy as the key priority in the field of adult education, the Department has significantly increased provision in order to raise literacy levels among the adult population. Investment in this area in 2004 was increased to €19 million from €13.6 million in 2001 and €1.1 million in 1997.

The adult literacy service is organised by and delivered through the Vocational

Education Committees throughout the country. The service is resourced and managed by the VECs with funding from the Department.

Client numbers rose in the same period from 5,000 to 30,000 per annum. The increase in funding has also enabled the introduction of special programmes targeted at groups with particular literacy needs. Such programmes include family literacy, literacy for people with hearing disabilities and workplace literacy.

Funding for adult literacy programmes continues to increase with a consequent rise in the number of participants. The National Development Plan 2000 - 2006 set a target of having 113,000 participants on such programmes for the period 2000 - 2006 and it achieved a participation rate of 100,000 by the end of 2003. A new TV literacy series is being broadcast in autumn 2004 aimed at adults with a basic education requirement.

A network of 34 community education facilitators has been put in place to promote the development of community education groups. The facilitators have been recruited by the Vocational Education Committees. Their role is to network community education groups, help them to access funds, support quality and promote partnerships with the statutory sector. A National Training and Support Programme Co-ordinator has now been appointed to provide a co-ordinated induction and training support programme for the facilitators in collaboration with VECs.

Workplace literacy and education

It is aimed to implement targeted pilot initiatives on workplace basic education, literacy, numeracy and ICT literacy in those sectors where the need is greatest.

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has trained a number of tutors to provide literacy programmes in the workplace and will continue to promote the availability of the service among employer organisations. Following a successful pilot with five local authorities, a workplace literacy programme has been introduced in all local authority areas for local authority workers.

NALA and FÁS Services to Business are co-operating in developing pilot projects on workplace literacy. FÁS Services to Business in partnership with City of Cork VEC and the Construction Industry Federation are supporting the delivery of a pilot literacy intervention for the construction sector in Cork.

FÁS, through its Competency Development Programme, provides a mechanism by which the quality of the labour force can be enhanced through appropriate training initiatives. In this context, FÁS promotes the concept of an integrated literacy-training model, which enables the acquisition of core skills relevant to the workplace.

(ii) Early School Leaving

The NAP/Inclusion target is to reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 85 per cent by 2003 and 90 per cent by 2006.

The aim is to ensure that a focused and integrated approach is taken to tackling the problem of early school leaving.

The Educational Disadvantage Committee has submitted a report on a *More Integrated and Effective Delivery of School-Based Educational Inclusion Measures*.

A wide ranging review of educational disadvantaged programmes was being finalised by the Department at the time of going to print. The review will address, *inter alia*, the issue of out-of-school initiatives such as Youthreach and how these can be more effectively integrated into the strategy for tackling early school leaving.

The expansion of the School Completion Programme is also being considered in the context of the review of disadvantage programmes. More than 15,000 pupils were targeted under the programme in 2003.

(iii) National Educational Welfare Board

The National Educational Welfare Board is the national agency with responsibility for encouraging and supporting regular school attendance. The primary function of the Board is to ensure that each child in the State attends a recognised school or otherwise receives an appropriate education.

Rollout of services by the National Educational Welfare Board is continuing with priority being accorded to disadvantaged communities. Five regional teams have now been established with bases in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and staff have been deployed in areas of greatest disadvantage and in areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme. Thirteen towns with significant school going populations also now have an Educational Welfare Officer allocated to them.

The Board issued an information leaflet to 330,000 families and 4,100 schools in early March 2004. In addition, the Board launched a new Lo-call telephone number to inform parents and guardians about their legal role and responsibilities under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

The Board has also moved to provide a service to families who decide to have their children educated in places other than in recognised schools. The first assessments of education, provided in places other than recognised schools, have been carried out by three assessors appointed for the purpose.

Preparatory work is continuing in relation to the establishment of a register for 16 and 17 year olds who leave school to enter employment.

The Department is working with the Board to ensure that any opportunities for integrated working between Educational Welfare Officers and staff on other educational disadvantage programmes, whose work involves a school attendance element, are exploited to the full.

During summer 2004, the Board received the first comprehensive attendance data returns from schools, which will assist it in keeping the level of need for the new service in particular areas under review. This is the first time that such data has been collected. A report on an analysis of the returns by the Educational Research Centre has been posted on the Board's web site www.newb.ie

(iv) Alleviating educational disadvantage

The overarching aim is to improve access, transfer and progression for learners with limited access to awards.

In October 2003, the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland launched a new national framework of qualifications, spanning from basic education/literacy to doctorate level. The framework will provide for progression pathways to higher levels of education and training for award holders. The placement in the framework of qualifications of existing and previously-made

awards is underway. In mid-2004, the framework had reached a stage where the major awards for each level and how these will operate and function in relation to each other in the medium term have been set out. Arrangements have been finalised for the implementation of the framework within higher education in 2004/5 and planning is underway for implementation in further education and training.

(v) Initiatives to facilitate return to education

Adult learning opportunities are particularly aimed at those in disadvantaged communities.

A Management Information System is being developed to track the participation of different groups in further education to support targeting of resources and evidence-based decision making. A detailed analysis exercise has been completed for the system.

The Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) provides for an expansion of part-time Youthreach, Post Leaving Certificate and Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme options so that adults can combine a return to learning with work and family responsibilities. Some 9,000 participants were allocated places under the initiative in 2003 and a similar number of part-time placements is being provided for in 2004.

Note: The Department of Education and Science is currently giving consideration to the outcomes of a review of the functions of the National Adult Learning Council (NALC).

(vi) Access to 3rd level education

The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education, established within the Higher Education Authority, has been fully operational since February 2004 and has taken over the

administration of a number of access measures from the Department. These include the Student Assistance Fund, the Fund for Students with Disabilities and the Millennium Partnership Fund for Disadvantage as well as the access element of the Higher Education Authority's targeted initiatives. The Office promotes improved participation in higher education by students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students with a disability and mature "second chance" students. The Office is developing a national plan to achieve equity of access to higher education in Ireland.

Members of the OECD Review Team presented their report on the future of higher education in Ireland during a special session in Dublin Castle in September 2004.

The report addresses, *inter alia*, measures to increase participation in higher education from all socio-economic backgrounds, part-time, mature and overseas students. The critical importance of lifelong learning in society is also emphasised.

Key recommendations on access and participation are:

- That the proposed new Tertiary Education Authority recognise in its funding formula the additional costs of recruiting and retaining students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- That every effort be made to increase part-time student numbers as a proportion of total numbers in tertiary education and to this end distinctions between part-time and full-time students be removed for the purpose of the obligation to pay fees and receive maintenance support and that part-time students should count (on a pro-rata basis to full-time) for the calculation of recurrent grant;

- That the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities and the Council of Institute Directors jointly address the question of issues surrounding retention, in consultation with the Tertiary Education Authority and make a report.

The report is available on the Department's website - www.education.ie

During the period of this annual report the following reports were published:

Department of Education and Science *Supporting Equity in Higher Education* (www.education.ie)
and

Higher Education Authority *Report of the High Level Group on University Equality Policies* (www.heai.ie)

(vii) Gender Mainstreaming in Education

Gender mainstreaming is an important element in the education sector. The establishment of a Gender Equality Unit in the Department is an important step. This issue is treated in more depth earlier in the Equality infrastructure section.

SECTION 3

TO PREVENT THE RISKS OF EXCLUSION

3.1 National Action Plan 2003 - 2005 targets

- **By end 2004, sufficient and appropriate emergency accommodation to be available to rough sleepers in each local authority and health board area in conjunction with appropriate outreach services to enable them to access it. Review of progress at end 2003 on meeting target objective and, if necessary, revised mechanisms put in place to achieve it.**

This target is reported on later in this section under the heading 'Homelessness'.

3.2 Drugs and Alcohol Misuse

Alcohol/Drug Misuse is a special initiative under Sustaining Progress

Drug misuse is being addressed through the National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 which was launched 3 years ago. The Strategy contains 100 individual actions, under the four pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment and research, to be implemented by a range of Departments and Agencies. Considerable progress has been made in implementing the majority of the actions and, with the exception of a small number, work is progressing on the remainder. The implementation of the Strategy is co-ordinated by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. A mid-term review of the Strategy is currently in progress.

In addition, the regular meetings of the Inter-Departmental Group on Drugs help identify key components and possible obstacles in the Strategy. A Critical Implementation Path (CIP) has also been completed which sets out steps which each Department/Agency is taking to ensure that the actions set out for them in the Strategy, are implemented. A Progress Report covering the first

three years of the Strategy is due to be published in early 2005. This will examine the progress being made in achieving the overall key strategic goals set out in the Strategy and will enable priorities for further action to be identified and a re-focusing of the Strategy, if necessary, for the remaining period up to 2008.

Progress to date:

- The Customs and Excise launched a coastal watch programme in January 2003 and have implemented a number of measures to enhance drugs detection capability at points of entry;
- The Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Programme has been a compulsory subject on the curriculum of primary and post primary schools since September 2003;
- Considerable progress is also being made as regards increasing the number of methadone treatment places. There are now just under 7,000 misusers on methadone. This compares with a figure of 5,000 receiving this treatment at the end of 2000;
- The Department of Health and Children launched the first phase of a National Awareness Campaign in May 2003. The second phase was rolled out in October 2003 and was aimed at parents;
- Guidelines for the treatment of under 18 year olds have been finalised by the D/Health & Children. This will set out a flexible and adaptable approach within which services can be delivered to children and adolescents with serious substance misuse problems;
- Over 1,120 recovering drug misusers are now on the Special FÁS Community Employment Scheme;

- The Irish Prison Service has made considerable progress in relation to appointments as recommended in the Report on Prison-Based Drug Treatment Services, produced in July 2000. These include a Co-ordinator of Pharmacy, a Co-ordinator of Prison Nursing Services, a Deputy Governor Training Officer for Drug Treatment work by prison grades, a Co-ordinator of Drug Treatment Services (Prisons) by the Eastern Regional Health Authority, Prison Nurse Officers and a number of Senior Probation and Welfare posts approved for the Drug Team in the Mountjoy complex. Despite some difficulties, significant progress is now being made in the recruitment of Psychologists and Addiction Counsellors and it is hoped that appointments will be made in the near future. A number of measures are also being implemented to curtail the supply of drugs into prisons, including video surveillance, improved visiting/searching facilities, netting over yards and increased vigilance by staff. The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform is considering drug policy proposals drawn up for the Irish Prison Service and intends to publish a settled policy document in the coming months. The intention is that a drugs policy will facilitate consistent regulation and operational structure in pursuing both supply and demand reduction;
- In total, the Government has allocated or spent just under €90 million to implement projects contained in plans of the Local Drugs Task Forces (LDTF) since 1997;
- Approximately €12.7 million has been allocated to 60 capital projects under the Premises Initiative, which is designed to meet the accommodation needs of community

based drugs projects, the majority of which are in Local Drugs Taskforce areas; and

- The Garda Síochána and the Customs and Excise Service are achieving considerable success in relation to the drug supply reduction targets set in the National Drugs Strategy. Data on the street value of drug seizures is as follows:
 - Gardaí seizures: 2000 - €20 million, 2001 - €45 million, 2002 - €49 million, 2003 - €100 million; and
 - Customs & Excise seizures: 2000 - €11 million, 2001 - €60 million, 2002 - €34 million, 2003 - €21 million.

In addition, approximately €86.5 million has been allocated to support approximately 450 facility and services projects in LDTF areas and the four other urban centres under the Young Peoples Facilities and Services Fund. A second round of funding for this initiative was announced in March 2004. All ten Regional Drugs Task Forces, are now up and running and meeting regularly since late 2003. They are currently working on mapping out the patterns of drug misuse in their areas as well as services already available with a view to co-ordinating these existing services and addressing gaps in service provision.

Actions in relation to the aim of reducing alcohol consumption and related harm are detailed in section 4 on Vulnerable Groups.

3.3 Arts, Culture, Recreation

As general access to arts, culture, sporting and recreational facilities is improved, it is expected that there will be a positive impact on socially disadvantaged groups and individuals.

(i) Sport Capital Programme

The Sport Capital Programme operated by the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism is the vehicle through which funding is provided on an annual basis to voluntary and community organisations to assist with the provision of sporting facilities aimed at increasing levels of participation and improving standards of performance. In the period 1999 to 2004 almost €331 million has been allocated to 4,271 projects throughout the country.

Under the Sport Capital Programme, priority is awarded to applications from organisations located in areas of social disadvantage - applicants from these areas are required to provide a lower level of local funding contribution (20 per cent) as against other areas (30 per cent). In addition extra marks are awarded to projects located in disadvantaged areas during the assessment process to ensure them a higher placing when considering what projects to recommend for funding.

(ii) Access 2001-2004

The Arts and Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS 2001 – 2004) provides funding for Arts and Culture projects throughout the country. In August 2001, forty four projects were selected for funding amounting to €45.71 million.

Following consideration of all applications for the Arts and Culture Capital Enhancement Support Scheme (ACCESS), five projects were selected for funding in the Border, Midlands and West (BMW) region in August 2001.

- Letterkenny Arts Centre;
- Greencastle Museum (Donegal);

- The Courthouse Arts Centre Carrick on Shannon;
- Dundalk Townhall Theatre and Basement Gallery; and
- Sligo County Museum.

Projects approved in the South and East (S&E) region in August 2001 were:

- Visual Arts Centre Carlow;
- Music Centre Ennis;
- Ennistymon Artist Studios;
- The Mall Arts Centre Cork;
- Martin Valley Sculpture Park Cork;
- Liberty Corner Arts and Dance Centre Dublin;
- Gate Theatre Dublin;
- Ballyfermot Arts Centre Dublin;
- Daghda Dance Company Limerick;
- Navan Arts Centre;
- Thurles Arts Centre;
- Lismore Heritage Waterford;
- Wexford County Museum;
- Gorey Little Theatre Wexford; and
- Mermaid Arts Centre, Bray Co. Wicklow.

Some of these projects have been completed whilst others are at varying stages of drawing down funding.

3.4 Domestic Violence

Awareness-raising campaigns to highlight the issue of violence against women are conducted in conjunction with the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women. A nationwide poster campaign was undertaken in December 2003 which aimed to highlight the role which our society should play in reporting incidents of violence perpetrated against women. Consultation has taken place in relation to the focus/themes of awareness campaigns for 2004.

Grant funding is provided to local and regional groups working on the issue of violence against women to undertake awareness raising and prevention initiatives at a local and regional level. Grant funding is also provided for the development of intervention programmes for the perpetrators of domestic violence. Funding of approx. €480,000 has been provided towards the cost of running 17 programmes in 2004. An evaluation of these intervention programmes is underway and results are expected to be available in Autumn 2004.

In addition, the National Crime Council is conducting a National Study on Domestic Abuse. The findings of this survey are expected to be available in early 2005.

3.5 Homelessness

The Government's policy on adult homelessness is contained in the following documents:

Homelessness, An Integrated Strategy and the *Homelessness Preventative Strategy*. These strategies are cross-departmental and are led by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (D/EH&LG). The *Youth Homelessness Strategy* is led by the National Children's Office.

(i) Integrated and Preventative Strategies on Homelessness

Action to tackle homelessness through the implementation of the Integrated Strategy on Homelessness, the Homeless Preventative Strategy and the associated action plans together with the Youth Homelessness Strategy will be maintained. Arrangements are underway at central level for a review of the Integrated and Preventative strategies and associated action plans. Tenders will be sought by end September, the consultants appointed and the review commenced by early December 2004.

Since the introduction of the Integrated Strategy, efforts have been particularly concentrated on providing emergency accommodation services for homeless people and in getting people off the streets. Homeless fora have been established and local action plans have been completed in all local authority areas and work is underway on implementing them.

There has been a significant improvement in both the quality and range of services for homeless persons. Additional accommodation, ranging from emergency night shelter to long-term sheltered accommodation, to enable homeless persons move out of emergency accommodation into accommodation that is more suitable to their needs, has already been provided and more will be provided as part of the full implementation of the action plans. In this context, in Dublin, over 1,000 emergency beds have been provided in addition to designated accommodation for street drinkers and drug users and provision of a night bus to assist people access homeless services.

Initiatives in other local authority areas include a wet hostel in Limerick City, 24 hour direct access hostel in Tralee, a rough sleepers project in

Dundalk and improved accommodation facilities for homeless persons countrywide including Cork, Galway and Longford.

(ii) Funding on homelessness

In 2003, the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government recouped €49.25 million to local authorities in respect of accommodation and related services for homeless persons, compared to about €12.5 million in 1999. This year, the Department has an allocation of €51 million for this purpose to bring to €190.6 million the amount spent on these services since 2000. Since the publication of the Integrated Strategy in 2000, over €26 million additional funding has been made available by the Department of Health and Children to meet care related commitments under the Strategy. This is ongoing funding and will remain available to health boards for the provision of care related services to homeless persons.

The Cross Department Team on Homelessness continues to monitor progress, at national and local level, on the implementation of the homeless strategies and local action plans. Arrangements are also underway at central level to review the operation of the action plans with a view to evaluating the progress made in implementing them, and to make recommendations to promote further progress in addressing homelessness.

(iii) The Homeless Offenders Strategy Team (HOST)

HOST - a unit of the Probation and Welfare Service (PWS) of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, was established in 2002 on foot of the Government's Homeless Preventative Strategy and the National Economic & Social Forum (NESF) Report on the Re-Integration of Prisoners (2002). One of the roles of

HOST is to identify the accommodation and other related needs of homeless offenders and those at risk of homelessness. It is a relatively small unit with a national remit and a mainly strategic focus.

HOST has developed and published a strategic plan (2004-2007), the main aims of which are to:

- Prevent and minimise homelessness amongst offenders; and
- Improve access to accommodation for homeless offenders.

A primary objective of the HOST strategy is to provide for a coherent, integrated implementation mechanism that contributes to and facilitates the development of a more comprehensive and co-ordinated delivery of services to homeless offenders by all relevant agencies. Cognisance of the need to promote greater social inclusion and minimise as far as possible the potentially stigmatising effect of living in specialist offender hostels has been a key principle underpinning the ethos of this strategy. The strategy recognises the need to add value to existing mainstream services rather than replace or duplicate them. In so doing, HOST and the PWS work to reduce re-offending and promote community safety, as well as enhancing the social inclusion of offenders.

HOST has developed a template protocol for co-operation between the PWS and local authorities, with a view to improving access by offenders to local authority housing. This protocol has formed the basis for discussions currently taking place with Dublin City Council to facilitate improved access to its tenancy dwellings. HOST will continue to stimulate awareness of the accommodation and other service needs of offenders and how they can be addressed by interagency co-operation, participation in the local

authority homeless fora and through the Cross Department Team on Homelessness. Health boards have also drawn up protocols for the discharge of homeless persons from mental facilities.

(iv) Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2004-2006

The second Dublin Action Plan on Homelessness 2004-2006 entitled *Making it Home* was launched on 28 July 2004. The Plan was prepared by The Homeless Agency on behalf of the four Dublin local authorities in conjunction with health boards, other relevant statutory and voluntary bodies.

(v) Youth Homelessness Strategy

The Youth Homelessness Strategy (YHS) was published on 31 October 2001. At national level, given the cross-sectoral dimensions of youth homelessness, the National Children's Office has lead responsibility for driving and co-ordinating the actions necessary to ensure the successful implementation of the Strategy.

The YHS requires that a range of bodies in the public sector, including schools, the National Education Welfare Board, local authorities, the City and County Development Boards either support the actions of health boards or take specific steps themselves. Direct implementation is undertaken primarily by the Health Boards with family support and other preventative services being developed on a multi-agency basis for children at risk of becoming homeless. In particular, this will incorporate a generic out-of-hours crisis intervention service and where necessary multi-disciplinary teams to target at-risk young people up to the age of 18 years. Emergency responses will be provided promptly, with specialised 24-hour Reception Services in cities where appropriate.

(vi) Monitoring Implementation of the YHS

The Health Boards have prepared detailed action plans with regard to implementation, which will be phased in over 2002-2004. The implementation of the YHS is being monitored and co-ordinated by a monitoring committee, which is chaired by the National Children's Office and is representative of the relevant stakeholders.

Since the publication of the YHS other significant progress has been made, including:

- Approximately €12 million has been allocated by the Department of Health and Children to the health boards for the development of youth homelessness services since 2001; and
- 193 new whole-time equivalent posts (including Management Staff, Project Workers, Social Workers, Family Support Workers, Aftercare Workers and Public Health Nurses) have been filled across the 10 Health Board regions up to August 2004. 11 new units have opened nationwide and 42 new/extended services have been developed around the country.

Considerable investment in recent years has enabled many services to be developed to counter the problem of youth homelessness which is mainly concentrated in the Dublin area. It is considered that there is sufficient emergency night-time accommodation for the current youth homeless population of Dublin.

(vii) Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA) Services in the Dublin area

The ERHA provides a range of services to young homeless people in the Dublin area:

- The Emergency Social Work Team responds to all young people out of home and, having

completed an assessment, the team decides on the placement most appropriate to the young person. There are protocols in place between the team and the Gardaí, i.e. should a young person come to a Garda Station, the emergency team will be contacted and will respond as soon as possible;

- The Crisis Intervention Service for young people out of home is based in the city centre and includes an outreach service, emergency out-of-hours social work service, reception centre, residential units and a day centre. Seven residential units provide accommodation for 58 young people in the Eastern Region. Five centres (Crosscare, Sherrard House, Off the Streets, Le Froy and Caretakers) provide accommodation for 42 young people ranging in ages from 12 to 21 years. 16 newly homeless young people aged from 12 to 17 years can be accommodated in two further units (St Judes and Parkview);
- The ERHA provide an Outreach service which is available 7 days a week. The hours during which the service is provided is currently under review to ensure that it is available at the most appropriate times;
- The ERHA are working closely with local groups in Blanchardstown and Clondalkin in developing local responses to youth homelessness including information, advice, support and future accommodation.

The Action Plans referred to above were devised by each individual health board following publication of the YHS in 2001. The timeframe for implementation of the Action Plans is 2002 to 2004. Additional funding was not received in 2004 in the area of youth homelessness.

The health boards are continuing to implement their action plans within the resources available to them. As the original timeframe for the implementation of the action plans is coming to an end i.e. end of 2004, the Department of Health and Children will at the end of this timeframe, review the progress made to date in the implementation of the health board action plans, in consultation with the health boards.

Six key areas were identified to drive the implementation of the Strategy in an effective, co-ordinated way, on a nationwide basis. They are:

- i) Inter-agency Co-ordination and Linkages;
- ii) Leaving and Aftercare;
- iii) Statistics;
- iv) Information and Advocacy;
- v) Education and Training; and
- vi) Family Support Services.

The first three areas were prioritised and sub-groups established. Of the six sub-groups outlined, work is complete on 2 areas i.e. Statistics and Leaving and Aftercare. As a result of the work of the Statistics Sub-group new data forms were developed and issued to the health boards in December 2003 to ensure that data collation in relation to youth homelessness is undertaken in a consistent and accurate way.

As a result of the work of the Leaving and Aftercare sub-group "Guidelines for Health Boards on Developing a Leaving and Aftercare Policy" were developed and were circulated to the health boards to assist them in drawing up their individual written policies if they have not already done so.

The Information and Advocacy sub-group has met on a number of occasions since 21 May 2004. The work of the group is progressing in accordance with the agreed terms of reference and work plan. The Education sub-group has met twice since 23 June 2004. The statutory and voluntary education and health sectors are involved on the group and good progress is being made. The area of Family Support Services will be considered, pending finalisation of the work of the Department of Health & Children's Review of Family Support Services.

(viii) Youth Advocate Programmes

Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) were established on a pilot basis in 2002 in the Northern Area Health Board and in the Western Health Board. YAP aims to maintain young people at risk of out-of-home placement in their own homes or other family placements such as with relatives, in foster care, or supported lodgings. A Youth Advocate Programme in the North Eastern Health Board has been in operation since May 2004. It covers the whole of Meath Community Care Area. The programme can facilitate 12 young people and their families at any time and will work with 24 young people in a year.

An evaluation of the Programme in the Western Health Board was launched in May 2004. The Northern Area Health Board Programme is currently being evaluated. The interim evaluation is complete and phase two of the evaluation will commence shortly.

(ix) Data Sources

Annual reports have been received by the Department of Health and Children in relation to progress by health boards on the implementation of the Strategy and the development of services. Partial data is available at this time and the Department is currently working on this data.

3.6 e-Inclusion

Including Everybody in the Information Society is a Special Initiative under Sustaining Progress

The growing influence of information and communication technologies in our daily lives is transforming the way we interact and do business. The Government is committed to developing a socially inclusive information society to ensure that all citizens, including those on low incomes and late adopters, can participate fully.

(i) e-Inclusion Implementation Strategy

A revised national e-Inclusion Implementation Strategy has been developed. This revised strategy was based on the findings and recommendations of a comprehensive review of national e-Inclusion policy that was undertaken by the Department of the Taoiseach in consultation with the relevant Departments, agencies, organisations and bodies.

The revised strategy recommends action in five priority areas: Information Communication Technology (ICT) access, learning and skills; building the ICT capacity of the Community and Voluntary sector; measuring Inclusive Information Society development; awareness raising; and mainstreaming Information Society issues.

(ii) ICT Literacy

ICT literacy and training is a core priority to be progressed under the Sustaining Progress Special Initiative 'Including Everybody in the Information Society'. This priority will be progressed within the context of Lifelong Learning and the commitment under the e-Europe 2005 Action Plan to produce a national Lifelong Learning Strategy by 2006.

In advance of this, the Department of the Taoiseach has initiated examination of the involvement of local government in fostering

appropriate partnerships between the business community, the education/training sector and community development groups to respond to local ICT training and literacy needs.

(iii) Building the ICT Capacity of the Community & Voluntary Sector

In April 2004, the *Mobhaile* Community and Voluntary Services Project was launched and an analysis of the ICT needs and the ICT capacity of the Community and Voluntary Sector was initiated by NUI Maynooth.

The *Mobhaile* project is being piloted in Westmeath, Offaly, North Tipperary and South Tipperary Local Authorities. These pilot projects will help to build the ICT capacity of the Community & Voluntary sector. They aim to meet the demands of the C&V Sector in establishing an online presence and providing them with the ability to communicate with members, interested parties and citizens by means of websites, hosted intranets, secure e-mail and SMS gateways.

The results of the analysis by NUI Maynooth of the ICT needs and the ICT capacity of the Community and Voluntary Sector will feed into the rollout of the *Mobhaile* projects. It will build on the work already undertaken by The Wheel, the Muintir na Tire Project and the needs analysis of the C&V Sector in Meath. This analysis, which was approved for funding from the Information Society Fund up to a maximum of €154,000 in 2004, will:

- identify the components of an ICT educational programme specifically for the C&V Sector;
- identify the specific needs of the C&V Sector in order for them to promote access to and participation in the Information Society within their own organisations and among late adopters of technology;
- identify the existing mechanisms, if any, used by this Sector to e-enable individuals and communities and to highlight the benefits and opportunities afforded by ICTs; and
- ensure that a bottom up approach to building the capacity of the Sector is implemented. This analysis will not be seeking to evaluate how technology may be imposed on this Sector but it will evaluate how technology may be used to maximise the potential of these organisations to benefits their constituents and the wider society.

In addition, in November 2003, for the first time, the CSO published statistics on how ICTs are being used in Ireland today in the home and in the business. These statistics highlighted:

- that approximately, 660,000 people use a computer every day. In the last five years, the number of households with home computers has more than doubled.
- that since 2000, there has been a 75 per cent increase in the number of households that have a home computer with internet access;
- that computer ownership and internet usage are strongly related to age, employment and geographical location;
- that the top three reasons given for using the internet were; searching for information, banking and financial services, and monitoring markets; and
- that virtually all enterprises use computers today. The majority of businesses also use e-mail and the internet. However, the percentage of total purchases made via e-commerce remains very small.

(iv) Access to Broadband Technology

The widespread availability of high-speed, affordable, flat-rate, always-on internet access, referred to as broadband, is central to the development of Ireland as a knowledge and information society. The availability of broadband will enable individuals and communities to take advantage of the internet and enhanced communications links and associated economic and social benefits. Broadband services will reduce the peripherality of many communities in Ireland and lead to improved employment opportunities, enhance the sustainability of those communities and create a more positive environment for investment.

The €25 million Group Broadband Scheme, operated by the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, is co-funded by the E-commerce and Communications Measures of the Border, Midlands and Western and Southern and Eastern Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan 2000-2006. The Scheme, to be implemented over three years, will address broadband needs in small, rural or more remote communities by empowering smaller communities to implement their own broadband plans in partnership with broadband service providers.

The first call for proposals from would-be applicants was made in March 2004 with additional calls to be made every six months. The Scheme is open to all smaller and rural communities of less than 1,500 people. The Government is to provide 55 per cent capital funding - the maximum allowable under EU rules - with half of the funding payable at the commercial launch of broadband services to local businesses and residents. The balance of funding will be allocated when the scheme reaches the minimum subscriber targets for the projects.

(v) Public Libraries

Public library policy, as set out in the **Branching Out** report, links libraries to two crucial objectives of overall Government policy. These are:

- To ensure that Ireland moves rapidly to embrace the opportunities of the Information Society; and
- To establish an inclusive society in which all citizens can participate fully in the social and economic life of the country.

The public library service can provide an important social inclusion service. Since 1999 the improved funding that has been available for better buildings, library materials and computer facilities from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the increased investment from local authorities, has helped to further develop this role.

(vi) ICT Internet Access Points and Internet Training for Staff

The services and facilities provided by the Irish library in response to the challenge of addressing the digital divide include PCs, training, access to online services, online catalogues and facilities for the visually impaired.

Since 1999 over 1,500 Internet access points have been installed in over 280 public libraries throughout the country with grant assistance from the D/EH&LG of over €2.5 million. A training programme, including production of a training manual to enable library staff assist members of the public learn about the new technologies, was funded by the Department and managed by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna in 2001. Twenty six (of the thirty two library authorities) have their catalogues on the web and provide on line renewals and reservation services, with several more due to go live over the coming months.

Grant-aid of €1,135,151 towards the development of this service was provided by the D/EH & LG in 2003.

(vii) Lifesteps Project

The Lifesteps project will enable users of public-access Internet PCs in public libraries to use the Internet's many facilities for major life events, such as job-seeking, shopping, company establishment, accommodation finding etc. It will support research and encourage new Internet users to get started. The project will provide online and paper-based guides giving simple, step-by-step instructions to the users, with worked examples and real web sites. The guides are being prepared by expert library staff.

Training of all library staff will be provided initially in order that they are familiar with the information presented in the guides, and so able to support their users.

(viii) Optical Scanning Facilities

The roll out to about 100 public libraries of PC based optical scanning facilities for visually disabled people began in 2003. Using the PC based approach goes further than the **Branching Out** recommendation and will give users access to all of the electronic services available in the library. The facility is being funded at a unit cost of €4,400, with €50,038.57 provided in 2003 and in excess of €390,000 being provided in 2004.

3.7 Indebtedness

The Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS) is a free and independent information and advice service funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. It has a budget of €11.4 million and operates via 52 service providers located in 65 offices throughout the country. MABS advisors

deal with approximately 10,000 individual new clients annually. The key features of the service may be summarised as follows:

- an emphasis on practical, budget-based measures that will succeed in removing people permanently from dependence on moneylenders and open up alternative sources of low cost credit through the credit unions;
- an approach which targets families identified as having problems with debt and money-lending, in particular, those dependent on social welfare or on low income; and
- a prominent role for local statutory agencies, such as the Social Welfare Regional Managers, Community Welfare Officers, local voluntary and community groups, credit unions, St Vincent de Paul etc.

The MABS has set up important relationships with many of the "main" group of creditors encountered by MABS money advisors in the day-to-day business of money advice. These include the utilities e.g. ESB, the Local Authorities, with whom a code of practice has been developed, and the Financial Institutions, with whom a Debt Settlement Pilot has been established. This MABS/Irish Bankers Federation (IBF) Debt Settlement Program, which was piloted in a limited number of MABS, has now been extended to include all of the 52 offices.

MABS National Development Limited, set up in September 2004, will support, promote and develop the MABS services. The new company has set six strategic priorities and has employed a National Development team to carry them out:

- To set a national standard for best practice in the delivery of money advice

- Ensure operational efficiency;
- Develop community education on debt prevention, budgeting and financial management;
- Identify and inform policy makers on social policy issues that impact on indebtedness;
- Promote and market MABS services; and
- Develop strategic partnerships to further the strategic aims of MABS.

3.8 Preserving Family Solidarity

(i) Family Policy

A series of nationwide public consultation fora on the family were held in the latter half of 2003. The thematic report, *Families and Family Life in Ireland - Challenges for the Future*, produced from the nationwide consultative process, was launched in February 2004.

International aspects of family policy were the subject of discussion at the EU presidency conference on Families Change and Social Policy in Europe held in Dublin in May 2004. A report on this conference will shortly be available, together with the conference papers, on the D/SFA website at http://www.welfare.ie/topics/eu_pres04/fam_conf/.

The findings from this process of national and international consultation will feed into the development of an integrated strategy, aimed at strengthening families. A high level inter-departmental group has been established to contribute to and oversee the development of the strategy document. Submissions from interested parties on the proposed strategy document have been received and it is proposed to publish a synthesis of these with the strategy.

(ii) Family Support Agency Strategic Plan

The Family Support Agency's strategic plan (2004 - 2006) was launched in May 2004. The following five Strategic Priorities that set the overall direction for the organisation for the next three years have been identified:

- Support and strengthen families through the delivery of high quality support services for families throughout the country;
- Foster a supportive community environment for families in partnership with the community, voluntary and statutory sectors;
- Contribute to the effectiveness of family policy and services by undertaking or commissioning research into matters related to the Agency's functions or such other matters as the Minister may request;
- Promote the Family Support Agency as a key provider of support services and related information for families in Ireland; and
- Create an environment which recognises the value of Family Support Agency staff and supports their continuing development.

Their priorities capture the essence of the Agency's functions, delivering direct and indirect support services for families and contributing to the effectiveness of family policy and services through research. In addition, the importance of raising awareness of the leading role the Agency plays in delivering support services and related information for families throughout Ireland is highlighted.

SECTION 4

TO HELP THE MOST VULNERABLE

4.1 Introduction

The overall objective of the NAP/Inclusion is to eliminate consistent poverty for those in vulnerable groups and to improve their access to health care, education and employment, thereby reducing their vulnerability to poverty. Earlier sections of this report detail actions taken under the other three common policy objectives (facilitating participation in employment; facilitating access to resources, rights, goods and services; and preventing the risks of exclusion) which also address the needs of vulnerable groups. This section, which provides further information on specific measures taken to reduce the risk of poverty and exclusion of people in these groups, aims to complete the picture in terms of reporting on the full range of policy actions directed towards the most vulnerable. These specific targets are as follows:

4.2 National Action Plan 2003-2005 targets

Vulnerable Groups in general

- To reduce the level of unemployment experienced by vulnerable groups towards the national average by 2007;

Women

- To increase employment participation of women to an average of 60 per cent in 2010, as envisaged in the National Employment Action Plan;

Older People

- By 2003, national guidelines will be put in place for the provision of respite care services to carers of older people;

- Access to orthopaedic services will be improved so that no one is waiting longer than 12 months for a hip replacement. This is an initial short-term action to improve quality of life for older people and it will be reviewed in 2003;
- By end 2007, adequate heating systems will be available in all local authority rented dwellings providing for older people;

People with Disabilities

- Aim to increase participation by students with disabilities at Third Level to 1.8 per cent by 2006;
- Aim to improve access to planned respite care for carers of disabled people by 2003;

Travellers

- Age appropriate placement of all Travellers in primary school will be achieved by 2003;
- The transfer rate of Travellers to post-primary schools will be increased to 95 per cent by 2004;
- Each third-level institution will double the participation by mature disadvantaged students, including Travellers and refugees, by 2006 (within the 15 per cent quota);
- The gap in life expectancy between the Traveller community and the whole population will be reduced by at least 10 per cent by 2007;
- All Travellers' families identified in the local authority five-year Traveller accommodation programme process as being in need of accommodation will be appropriately accommodated by end 2004;

Areas marked by Exclusion – Urban Poverty and Rural Disadvantage

- Improve transport facilities to rural dwellers through a combination of State support and community-based provision;
- Improve access to employment, health, education and housing services for rural dwellers;
- Foster public safety and prevent crime through better detection, use of approved youth diversion programmes and restorative schemes, optimum use of community-based sanctions and reducing the level of offending;
- Ensure that the basic needs of all families, especially young parents, lone parents, older people, and ethnic minorities are met through enhanced and better co-ordinated State support services.

Information on action taken on foot of these targets, and on other policy measures which address the needs of vulnerable groups, is set out below.

Care – Children, People with Disabilities and Older People is a special initiative under Sustaining Progress

4.3 Vulnerable Groups and Employment

A strategic objective of employment policy is to increase the labour market participation levels and job progression rates among women and marginalised and excluded groups, as a key means of promoting their social inclusion.

(i) EQUAL Community Initiative

The total investment of the European Social Fund (ESF) funding in Ireland from the EQUAL Community Initiative will be €34.5 million up to the end of 2007. Together with matching funding from the public and private sector, the total investment in the programme over the period in question will be in the region of €47.8 million. EQUAL funding is used to test new ways of tackling discrimination and inequalities in the labour market and increasing access to training and work for the low skilled and educationally disadvantaged. A prime objective is to test new ways of approaching **training, education and employment support** through formal partnership structures involving key stakeholders in a strategic, collaborative approach.

Some of the results of the current round of EQUAL in Ireland include:

- customised vocational training and in-work supports to the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities and refugees;
- customised efforts to encourage economic activity and entrepreneurship amongst atypical groups including women and Travellers;
- the rolling out of ambitious work-life balance initiatives in semi-state and private sector companies;
- the piloting of new approaches to lifelong learning for low-skilled and educationally disadvantaged people; and
- the development of enhanced approaches to the integration of asylum seekers.

Mainstreaming best practice from EQUAL into a wider policy arena is a key objective of the

D/ET&E in managing the programme. This process is overseen by a Mainstreaming Policy Group, which comprises high level representatives of mainstream public and private sector organisations, as well as representatives of the Development Partnerships. The Mainstreaming Policy Group is co-chaired by the D/ET&E and the Equality Authority, both of which have a clearly defined responsibility for mainstreaming under the EQUAL programme in Ireland.

4.4 Women

In addition to the NAP/Inclusion objective of eliminating consistent poverty for women, the plan also identifies as a key aim the achievement of a more equal society for men and women through the mainstreaming of equal opportunities across the National Development Plan (NDP). Progress against these objectives is set out below. In addition, Section 2 of the report contains further information on progress in relation to gender mainstreaming and gender equality.

(i) National Women's Strategy

Commitment: A five-year National Women's Strategy is to be developed, the scoping for which will be done in 2004.

A key recommendation in Ireland's Report to the United Nations on the National Plan for Women, published in October 2002, was the development of a National Women's Strategy as the framework for Ireland's gender equality agenda for the coming years.

Sustaining Progress provides for the development of a National Women's Strategy. Scoping of the Strategy has been largely completed and meetings have been arranged with the Social Partners and the National Women's Council to discuss the

development of the Strategy. It is intended that the Strategy will be completed during 2005.

(ii) Increasing the employment participation of women

The following are details of activities that focus on increasing female participation in the workforce.

Equality for Women Measure in the NDP

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is implementing an Equality for Women Measure which will provide targeted opportunities for women in training and decision making. The Measure is a positive action programme funded under the National Development Plan. It is intended to transfer the lessons from the measure to the mainstream. Among the interventions being delivered which will provide opportunities for disadvantaged women are:

- outreaching to very marginalised women, including refugee women, older women, women with disabilities and Traveller women;
- promoting the empowerment and participation of women at community level;
- developing new linkages between women's organisations and service providers;
- developing progression routes to employment for very disadvantaged women;
- developing new interfaces between public services and specific categories of women;
- training women to become involved in influencing policy at all levels; and
- developing linkages to structures of local decision making.

The Equality for Women Measure is currently funding 70 projects nationwide; 51 in the Southern and Eastern Region and 19 in the Border, Midland and Western Region. A total of €14.5 million has been allocated over a three year period to these projects, of which approximately €3 million is co-financed by the EU.

Proposals for implementation of Phase II of the measure have recently been approved. The primary focus of Phase II will be on women experiencing economic disadvantage. Of the almost €11 million earmarked for Phase II of the Measure, over the period 2004-2006, €7 million has been set aside to fund the development of projects located in RAPID areas. There will also be a focus on mainstreaming the learning from Phase I. Funding will be made available to third level institutions to assist women to develop and pursue careers in science and technology.

Workforce Gateway for Women Initiative

Gateway for Women is an initiative aimed at proactively encouraging women to return to the workforce. It is supported by IBEC, ICTU, the National Women's Council of Ireland and the Northside Partnership, Dublin. It is jointly funded by FÁS and The Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform under the Equality for Women Measure (EWM).

Delivery is through the local FÁS Employment Services Offices and through the Local Employment Services (LES) offices. Pre-work training is delivered through FÁS Training Services and Community Services using local resources (e.g. local women's groups, local facilitators, etc.) Work-based training is currently being piloted with 10 women post-placement.

The 'Gateway' process has successfully acted as a vehicle to promote, assess, select, train and develop women returners to the workforce. Starting in Dublin, the pilot process has, over the last 12 months, been extended to the West: It was expanded in 2004 to the North East and North West of the country funded under the Peace II programme, and part-financed by the NDP and FÁS.

By July 2004, almost 700 women have engaged with the 'Gateway' process since its commencement.

Of the approximately 700 women who have actively engaged with the process, 54 per cent have progressed to employment or further training/education. A further 40 per cent are in continued mediation. Some 600 women have received pre-work support, while some 460 have received specific skills training and work experience. This process also provides for on-the-job training and development. Such training greatly enhances the employability and career potential of women returners and minimises the risk of women returners falling into the category of low-paid workers.

The following are three other examples of projects funded under the Equality for Women Measure:

- The **Tullamore Wider Options** project is developing a model to improve the socio-economic status of the most marginalised women in the area while also strengthening the capacity of local community and voluntary sector to support female clients. Training is provided in personal and life skills, consciousness raising and goal setting, and leadership and decision making;

■ **St John of God Kildare Services** is delivering a customised programme to enable women with mild learning disabilities to work in their community, thus enhancing their economic and social wellbeing. Training focuses on interpersonal issues and on workplace experience. The latter includes training in work ethics, punctuality, interview skills, identification of work preference and so on, as well as work-experience with local companies. Participants are mentored throughout their work placement and local employers have been provided with information and training in disability awareness; and

■ **The Carlow Equality for Women Project** is providing an anchor point for women in the county to access a very broad range of training, education and employment options. The project links and co-ordinates actions by local agencies and service providers. It has been very successful, with demand from women generally outstripping supply.

(iii) Women's Health

Following on from the publication of Promoting Women's Health, (the review of the Women's Health Plan), the Women's Health Council has recently established a forum to plan for future action in the field of women's health.

BreastCheck, the National Breast Screening Programme, commenced in March 2000 with phase one of the Programme covering the Eastern Regional Health Authority, Midland Health Board and the North Eastern Health Board region. In 2003, the extension of the BreastCheck programme to counties Carlow, Kilkenny and Wexford was announced, as was the national roll out to the Southern and Western regions. Screening commenced in Wexford in March 2004.

Approval was recently granted for the establishment of a Design Team to progress the implementation of the BreastCheck programme in Cork and Galway. Capital funding in the region of €20 million has been earmarked as part of the capital investment programme 2004 – 2008 to progress the national roll-out. Approximately 150,000 women in the target population 50 to 64 years of age will be eligible for screening.

In general the programme tends to focus promotion more heavily on lower socio-economic areas. This includes greater advertising - supported by emphasis on 'on the ground' work such as information stands at supermarkets and networking with existing social infrastructure such as GPs, women's groups, community groups, public health nurses, primary healthcare nurses, local politicians, local newsletters etc. Letters and leaflets are proof read by NALA (the National Adult Literacy Association).

Phase 1 of the **National Cervical Screening Programme** commenced in the Mid-Western Health Board area in October 2000. Approximately 74,000 women in the 25-60 age group are being screened free-of-charge at minimum intervals of five years. Almost 57,000 smears have been processed in the first 3 years. A review of Phase 1 is currently under consideration by the Health Board Executive (HeBE) in advance of referral to the Department of Health and Children, following which decisions will be required on how best to move forward.

The number of smear tests nationally has increased by almost 20 per cent in recent years and additional cumulative funding of €11 million was provided by the Department since 2002 to assist the laboratories in meeting this demand and in improving colposcopy services. The Department

is also investing in new technology through extending the use of Liquid Based Cytology (LBC).

4.5 Children and Young People

The overarching aim under the NAP/Inclusion concerning this category is to eliminate child poverty and to move to a situation of greater equality for all children in terms of access to appropriate education, health and housing.

Ending Child Poverty is a Special Initiative under Sustaining Progress

The OSI has lead responsibility for co-ordinating the *Sustaining Progress* initiative. It is working closely with the National Children's Office (NCO), relevant Government Departments, the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) and the Social Partners in developing and implementing a multi-dimensional policy response.

A number of policy issues and objectives which must be progressed in order to meet this objective have been identified. It has been agreed to commission the National Economic and Social Council to examine child income support arrangements including the effectiveness of Child Dependant Allowance and Family Income Supplement. Following consultation with the social partners, terms of reference have been finalised.

The Thematic Report from the Family Fora organised by the Department of Social and Family Affairs was launched in February 2004³. It is available on the internet. This will inform the development of a strategy for strengthening families to be published by the end of 2004. An inter-departmental committee will be established shortly, by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, to examine issues relevant to parenting alone. Work is ongoing in relation to improving

linkages between Departments and Agencies with responsibility for children.

At the end of April 2004, the National Children's Office, working with the Department of Social and Family Affairs, issued a request for tenders for a Children's Longitudinal Study that will examine the progress and well being of children at critical periods from birth to adulthood. Further analysis is being undertaken to address obstacles to employment, with particular reference to lone parents, in the light of NESC research and the OECD report on family friendly policies.

Work on the Ending Child Poverty initiative will be closely aligned to other Special Initiatives relating to Care, Educational Disadvantage and Long term Unemployed and Vulnerable Workers to ensure that the child poverty dimension of each is fully addressed.

(i) Teen Parent Support Initiative

This Programme developed by the Department of Health and Children (D/H&C) provides a wide range of support services for teen parents during pregnancy until their child reaches two years of age. Based on the very positive evaluation report on the Teen Parent Support Pilot Initiative, the pilots will be mainstreamed to the relevant health boards. Initial pilot projects have been mainstreamed in Dublin, Galway and Limerick. Two additional projects are being established in 2004 in the North Eastern Health Board and the Northern Area Health Board.

(ii) Springboard

The D/H&C through its *Springboard* programme (or equivalent intensive family support projects) targets young people at risk. There are currently 22 Springboard Projects established. An application has been made to the Dormant

³ http://iyf2004.welfare.ie/Family_Life_FINAL.pdf.

Accounts Disbursement Fund for seed funding for two additional projects. The report on the three year evaluation of Pilot Springboard projects published in December 2001 showed that as a model of service delivery, intensive targeted family support is meeting a recognised need to support vulnerable families.

(iii) Development & implementation of National Play Policy

Ready, Steady, Play: A National Play Policy was launched on 8 March, 2004 with targeted resources to provide for play facilities. The Policy covers public play facilities for children up to and including primary school age for the five year period 2004-2008. It contains 52 actions for eight Government Departments, local authorities, health boards, and a number of other agencies. €1.5 million capital funding is being made available by the D/H&C to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaelteacht Affairs (D/CR&GA) for implementation of play facilities in RAPID areas. The NCO, as part of the National Children's Strategy, is currently working on Recreation Policy for older children.

(iv) Appointment of Ombudsman for Children

Ms Emily Logan took up duty as the first Ombudsman for Children on 22 March 2004. The involvement of children and young people in the appointment process was managed by the National Children's Office. The Office for Ombudsman is operational and staff are currently being appointed.

(v) Review of Family Support Services in Health Boards

The D/H&C together with the Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA), health boards and The

Health Boards Executive (HeBE) established, in 2003, a Review of Family Support Services in Health Boards. The Review will map out a national policy and plan for the future development of family support services by health boards. In order to inform the work of the Steering Group for the Review two pieces of work were commissioned in 2003:

- A project to compile a comprehensive overview of family support services provided by health boards or funded by them; identify and report on the current use of resources and the management of resources; identify gaps in service provision; identify and report on the views and experiences of families, practitioners, managers and funding stakeholders involved in service provision and service use; and
- A project "Towards a Working Definition of Family Support" commissioned in order to overcome the considerable difficulties in defining family support.

In order to ensure the balanced development of the continuum of service provision, the Review will develop a clear strategic statement to guide the development and operation of appropriate family support services by health boards.

The Review of Family Support Services is reaching completion. The work of the Consultants to the Review has been completed and their reports have been signed off. Work is continuing on the Family Support Strategy Statement. A consultation process set up as part of the Review is ongoing. It is expected the Review will be completed and launched in November 2004.

(vi) Education

School Meals Programme

Funding to provide nutritious meals for children in schools is available under the expanded school meals programme, from September 2004. This programme makes an important contribution to ensuring that school children receive better nutrition and contributes to improved school attendance, quality of learning and life chances. .

In 2003, funding of €3.29 million was given to 278 projects benefiting approximately 28,300 children. €6.08 million has been allocated for school meals funding in 2004. Funding is targeted at children who are at risk of leaving school early, disadvantaged children and children with special needs. Primary and secondary schools throughout the country may now participate in the scheme following the review and expansion of the scheme. Discussions between the D/S&FA and the D/E&S are ongoing to encourage a greater take up of the expanded scheme.

(vii) Health

Measures to reduce alcohol consumption and related harm

A Strategic Task Force on Alcohol was established in January 2002, to recommend evidence based measures to Government, aimed at reducing and preventing alcohol related harm. The Group published their recommendations in an Interim report in May 2002. A second report was published in September 2004, which contains further recommendations in this area.

An Inter-Departmental Group was established to co-ordinate responses to the recommendations of the Task Force. The Group reported back to Cabinet earlier this year on progress made.

Strategies that have been proven to be most effective in preventing and reducing alcohol harm are concerned with regulating availability and providing deterrence. Evidence presented to the Task Force shows that increases in alcohol taxation are also effective in reducing consumption and harm. In the Budget of December 2002, excise duty on spirits was increased, which saw a subsequent reduction in spirit sales.

One of the recommendations of the Task Force concerns limiting the exposure of children and adolescents to alcohol advertising and marketing. Legislation is currently being drafted which will restrict alcohol advertising, sponsorship and sales promotions. The Health Promotion Unit has been engaging with members of the Association of Advertisers in Ireland, various media, and the Drinks Industry Group in relation to the content and placement of advertisements.

The Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 has responded to certain recommendations of the Commission on Liquor Licensing and the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol. The main provisions of the Act include:

- Revised provisions, including stronger penalties, in relation to the sale and supply of intoxicating liquor to drunken persons and drunkenness in licensed premises;
- Stronger provisions relating to the maintenance of order and the prohibition on disorderly conduct on licensed premises;
- Wider use of temporary closure orders where licensees are found to be in breach of the licensing laws;
- Local authorities may adopt resolutions in relation to the duration of special exemption orders in their areas; the courts shall have

regard to such resolutions when granting special exemption orders;

- Extension of the grounds for objection to the grant of special exemption orders to include undue inconvenience or nuisance to persons residing in the locality or an undue risk to public order in the locality;
- Prohibition on the provision of entertainment during “drinking-up time”;
- Stronger provisions regarding the supply of intoxicating liquor to under 18s;
- Prohibition, subject to a number of exemptions, of persons under 18 years of age from the bar of licensed premises after 9 p.m.;
- Obligation on those aged 18 - 20 to have an age document with them in a bar after 9 p.m.;
- The extension of enforcement powers under the licensing laws to non-uniformed Gardaí; and
- Prohibition of the supply of intoxicating liquor at a reduced price during a limited period after 10.30 am on any day, e.g. “happy hours”.

The Health Promotion Unit in the Department of Health and Children has recently completed an alcohol awareness campaign. The aim was to raise awareness of alcohol-related problems as a public health issue. The Health Promotion Unit is currently planning a new campaign in association with the National Children’s Office.

Other Alcohol-related Initiatives include:

- A Responsible Server Training Programme has been developed by the Department of Health and Children in association with the Drinks Industry Group;

- The Health Promotion Unit produced A Framework for the Development of a College Alcohol Policy, in association with the Heads of Colleges and the Union of Students of Ireland; and
- Provision for Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) Programme on the school curriculum at primary and secondary level junior cycle has been made mandatory from September 2003.

4.6 Older People

The elimination of consistent poverty for older people and improving their access to required services is a priority objective under the NAP/Inclusion.

Respite care services to carers of older people – national guidelines

The issues of guidelines for the provision of respite services to carers of older people will be referred to the Health Information and Quality authority which is due to be established at the beginning of next year.

Additional funding of almost €10.75 million has been provided for health services for older people in 2004, of which approximately €3.75 million went to the Home Help Service. The National Implementation Group to monitor the introduction of the recommendations contained in the Elder Abuse Report has commenced its work. Indications of commitment and some early progress have been received from the ERHA and from the health boards.

The Review of the Nursing Home Subvention Scheme has commenced on foot of the recommendations of the O’Shea report on the scheme. Funding was provided in 2004 to develop

models of good practice in the care of older people in the community and some Health Boards have developed pilot projects. These evaluations will inform the workings of the health board group in consultation with the Department of Health and Children group in the design of a National Home Care Grant Scheme. This scheme will be introduced as resources permit.

(i) Access to orthopaedic services – waiting times

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) now has responsibility for the collection and reporting of waiting lists and waiting times nationally. As at January 2004 the NTPF has reported that only 19 per cent of those reported to be waiting for hip replacement operations were waiting longer than 12 months. It is now the case that in the Midland Health Board, North Eastern Health Board, Southern Health Board and Western Health Board, there are no patients reported to be waiting longer than 12 months for hip replacement operations. Patients who have been waiting longer than 3 months can now contact the Fund directly or through their General Practitioner to arrange treatment.

(ii) Long-Term Care of Older People

A Study to Examine the Future Financing of Long-term Care in Ireland was launched in June 2003. In order to progress policy in this area the Department has circulated a consultation document which aims to focus interested parties on the specific complex issues which need to be addressed. These issues, which are discussed at length in the report, include benefit design, delivery, cost and financing of long-term care in the future. The document has been circulated to over 70 interested parties including government departments, health boards, interest groups and the social partners.

It is envisaged that the feedback from the above process will act as the starting point for the working group referred to in *Sustaining Progress*, which will examine the strategic policy, cost and service delivery issues associated with the care of older people. It is planned that this working group will be established by the end of 2004.

(iii) Heating systems in local authority dwellings

To progress the achievement of the 2007 target for adequate heating systems and to accelerate the provision of central heating facilities the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government introduced a central heating programme in July 2004 for local authority rented dwellings. The Department will provide €12 million capital funding in 2004 with the local authorities providing a further €3 million, bringing the total funding for the programme in 2004 to €15 million.

4.7 People with Disabilities

The overall aim of policies in relation to people with disabilities is to increase their participation in work and society generally, and to assist them and their families to lead full and independent lives. The material below reports on some key integration measures being pursued in this regard.

Employment

(i) Data and research

The Quarterly National Household Survey for the second quarter of 2002 (which contained a special module on people with disabilities) showed that just over 40 per cent of people who were ill or had a disability were in employment compared with an overall rate of 65 per cent of the total population in the same age category.

A report by the Equality Authority:

Accommodating Diversity in Provision of Labour Market: 2003 indicates that overall only 42.9 per cent of people with disabilities were available to work. The percentage is only 30 per cent in the older age groups. Additional analysis and longitudinal studies are required to determine specific requirements, actual need and the size of the active population. This is a pre-requisite for planning coherent service provision.

(ii) Employment policy approach

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment continues to develop policy for vocational training in a specific employable skill and for employment of people with disabilities on a three-dimensional basis involving:

- Developing the skills of people with disabilities to enable them to access employment;
- Stimulating awareness amongst employers of the contribution which people with disabilities can make to their businesses and encouraging companies to more actively consider recruiting people with disabilities; and
- Providing specific employment supports for people with disabilities and employers.

(iii) FÁS services

For the year January – December 2003, 3,819 disabled people registered with FÁS. In addition, FÁS commissioned a ‘customer survey’ to obtain feedback from people with disabilities who availed of FÁS programmes post June 2000. This report was completed in February 2003, and its recommendations to improve service provision are being implemented.

(iv) Supported Employment

This programme is designed to assist in the integration of persons with a disability into a job in the open labour market, leading to independence and career progression. On-the-job training and individualised supports are key elements. An important outcome of this programme is that it has demonstrated to employers the value of employing a person with a disability. Since its inception in 2000 and up to the end of June 2004, the number of participants was approximately 700.

In the light of a review carried out on behalf of FÁS, new criteria for the provision of supported employment services were introduced in 2003. FÁS engaged in active dialogue with representative organisations on aspects of the new criteria. Criteria are structured under the following headings:

- Programme duration;
- Structure;
- Profile & Recruitment of Participants;
- Monitoring & Reporting;
- Employment Requirements; and
- Information requirements of FÁS under FOI Act.

Following a tender process with project sponsors, FÁS has contracted with a number of organisations to deliver supported employment services under the new criteria.

(v) Review of Vocational Training

A review of vocational training provision for people with disabilities was completed in 2003. The purpose of the review was to examine the delivery of vocational training for people with

disabilities through various forms of provision funded by FÁS, and to identify areas where efficiencies and effectiveness could be improved. Consultations with key service providers and other stakeholders on the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report were conducted by FÁS under the aegis of the National Advisory Committee on Disability. The broad thrust of the consultants' recommendations have been accepted and will be implemented by FÁS during 2004, under an Action Plan approved by the FÁS Executive Board. The review highlighted that FÁS has made a significant investment in its training centres in terms of ensuring that reasonable access and accommodation are provided for persons with disabilities, along with disability awareness training for its own staff. The review also identified some of the areas that could be improved in the future, such as greater co-ordination between FÁS and external Specialist Training Providers, to ensure consistent delivery to people with disabilities.

Some of the specific recommendations include consideration of the potential for increased training of people with disabilities in an integrated way alongside those who do not have a disability; the future role of specialist training providers in the context of all training providers to people with disabilities, and the identification of operational procedure improvements.

(vi) Workway Project

Workway is the first initiative in Ireland to bring together employers, people with disabilities, trade unions and other groups representing the interests of people with disabilities in networks established under the initiative to improve their employment opportunities. It is the first such known

partnership initiative in Europe to seek to address the high levels of unemployment among people with disabilities in the private sector.

This initiative was conceived under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, which acknowledged that social partners have a major role in raising awareness and promoting the employment of people with disabilities in the private sector. Workway was launched by the Taoiseach in July, 2002.

Funding for the duration of Phase I of Workway - 2001 to March, 2004 - was provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (a total of €818,000). Phase II (April 2004 - March 31, 2005) is being funded by FÁS in the amount of €223,000.

The first phase of the project had seven policy objectives:

- (i) awareness raising amongst employers;
- (ii) exploration of skill availability and labour shortages;
- (iii) identify barriers to employment from the perspectives of employers and people with disabilities;
- (iv) ensure involvement of all parties in finding practical solutions;
- (v) impart information to assist with the integration of people with disabilities;
- (vi) ensure links with existing networks; and
- (vii) inform public policy makers and service providers of the implications for developing employment and training services.

Phase I is currently being reviewed by external consultants commissioned by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, arising from a commitment under Sustaining Progress. A Draft Report was received in the Department in July 2004, and at time of going to print it was expected that the report would shortly be finalised.

Phase II has three specific strands:

1. Development of a Template to address the deficits as identified at Pre-Employment stage
2. Piloting joint IBEC / ICTU Employment and Disability Guidelines
3. Development of a one stop information and employment website.

(vii) Regional Disability Events

The European Union designated 2003 as the European Year of People with Disabilities (EYPD) in order to raise awareness of the abilities, talents and participation of people with disabilities in Europe, as well as barriers to inclusion and the difficulties they face daily.

As a key contribution towards promoting the EYPD employment theme, a consortium of organisations working for the employment of people with disabilities was assembled to present a series of five regional awareness raising conferences in Cork, Galway, Limerick, Sligo and Waterford. The conferences took place in November and December, and were funded under a combination of a grant awarded by the EYPD National Co-ordinating Committee and match funding by consortium members. A significant amount of the match funding was provided through the ESF-funded EQUAL Community Initiative, which is managed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The objective of the conferences was to present flagship local events aimed at generating the maximum possible publicity, designed to capture employers' imaginations and change attitudinal thinking towards employing people with disabilities by taking a fresh approach.

Income Support

(i) Review of the income support schemes for people with disabilities

The report of the Working Group on the Review of the Illness and Disability Payment Schemes was published in September 2003 by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. In addition to consultations with a range of organisations representing the interests of people with disabilities and people who are ill, submissions were also received from many individuals. The key elements of this review included:

- clarifying the objectives of each of the illness and disability payment schemes;
- identifying gaps and overlaps in the overall provision;
- examining overall trends in numbers and expenditure;
- examining the extent to which schemes support access to work, training or rehabilitation; and
- looking at possible alternative approaches to the design and delivery of social protection for people who are ill and people with disabilities.

In relation to the effectiveness of the employment support objectives of schemes the report found that *"While the Department of Social and Family Affairs does not itself operate specific employment and training programmes, it aims through its range*

of supports to encourage and assist people with disabilities and long-term illnesses to identify and take up available employment, training, educational and other self-development opportunities. However, sample surveys undertaken by the Working Group highlight that availing of these supports results in generally very poor outcomes, in terms of progression to employment.”

The Working Group identified a number of difficulties with the operation of the current social welfare employment supports, including the loss of secondary benefits on taking up employment, and the conflicts in trying to reconcile the underlying qualifying criteria that require claimants to be incapable of work, with the fact that many claimants have some employment potential. The Group concluded that there were a number of significant gaps in the operation of the current system of employment supports for this group which needed to be addressed, including the fact that there was no provision for partial (in)capacity for work; there was no meaningful assessment of employment potential; there was little active engagement with those who have an employment potential; and there was no follow-up on completion or cessation of the employment support measure. The Working Group also stressed the importance of meeting the additional costs of disability in ways that were less dependent on labour force status, if people with disabilities were to be given the opportunity of participating in the workforce.

The Working Group considered that a combination of measures was required to answer these problems:

- A recognition of the fact that some people's medical and other circumstances might mean that they have some capacity for work, but may never achieve full-time work;

- Ensuring that whatever employment support measures are adopted do not act as a disincentive for people with disabilities and long-term illnesses in maximising their employment and earnings potential;
- Retaining a range of employment supports for different client groups, and ensuring that clients are referred to the most suitable option, having regard to the nature of their illness/disability, age and social circumstances, etc.; and
- The introduction of early intervention measures, aimed at re-integrating people who sustain serious illnesses, injuries and disabilities back into the workforce, before they become long-term dependant on social welfare payments.

The Group recommended that the measures should initially be explored by way of pilot projects, which would better assess the benefits of such approaches, the additional resources that would be needed to be deployed and potential savings involved.

(ii) Cost of Disability Payment

The Working Group on the Feasibility of introducing a Cost of Disability Payment, under the aegis of the Department of Health and Children, has finalised a position paper and now proposes to examine the scope for rationalising and streamlining the various disability support measures, with a particular focus on mitigating the additional costs of disability for a greater number of people with disabilities, particularly those who wish to move from a position of total welfare dependence to one of greater economic independence.

Education

(i) Third Level Participation rate

Further research on access to third-level for people with disabilities is underway. AHEAD (Association of Higher Education Access and Disability) carried out a survey for the Higher Education Authority, which showed a first year under-graduate participation rate of 1.4 per cent in 1998/99. The report on the survey was published in 2004.

(ii) The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004

The purpose of the Act is to provide a new framework for the assessment of and provision for the needs of children with educational disabilities. Among the key provisions of the Act are:

- The establishment of the “National Council for Special Education” (NCSE) to co-ordinate special education provision and the provision of Special Educational Needs Organisers to ensure children with special needs receive an appropriate education, and to promote good practice in special education;
- Education for children with special educational needs is, as far as practicable and appropriate, to take place in an inclusive setting;
- Every child with special educational needs is entitled to an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to be prepared by appropriate professionals;
- Parents have a right to be involved in the assessment of their children and the preparation of the IEP and assessments are to take a whole-child, holistic approach;
- Parents, if they feel their views are not being given full recognition, or where they feel the Plan is not being implemented, may effectively

appeal any decisions concerning their children and these matters to an independent review Board. The Board has the power to compel bodies, including health boards to take specific actions to address matters before it; and

- Greater co-ordination between the education and health agencies in order to ensure clarity in their respective roles.

Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOs) will act as a point of contact for parents of each child with special needs, co-ordinate the provision of the range of services available to children with disabilities, liaise with parents, children, schools and organisations such as health boards, the National Education Psychological Service and the Department of Education and Science, and report to the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) as required.

The recruitment of Special Educational Needs Organisers is underway and the first such SENOs commenced training in September 2004.

An additional 350 teaching posts for special needs pupils and a new system for the allocation of resources for special needs in primary schools have been approved.

(iii) National Council for Special Education (NCSE)

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act provides for the establishment of the National Council for Special Education. However, the Council was established on 24 December, 2003 with the purpose of undertaking a number of specified functions in relation to the provision of education services to children with disabilities.

The main functions of the Council, under the Act are:

- to plan and co-ordinate the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs (in consultation with schools, health boards and such other persons as the Council considers appropriate);
- to plan for the integration of education for students with special educational needs with education for students generally (in consultation with schools and with such persons as the Council considers appropriate);
- to make available to the parents of children with special educational needs information in relation to their entitlements and the entitlements of their children;
- to ensure that a continuum of special educational provision is available as required in relation to each type of disability;
- to review generally the provision made for adults with disabilities to avail of higher education, continuing education, rehabilitation and training, and to publish reports on the results of such reviews; and
- to advise in relation to any matter relating to the education of children and others with disabilities.

The Council is required to make an implementation report within 12 months of establishment. This implementation report will outline the steps that must be taken in order that the provisions of the Act will be fully implemented within a period not exceeding five years.

Health

(i) Respite Care for Carers of Disabled People

There was an increase of 255 per cent (an additional 445 people) who received service-based respite care between 2001 and 2002, the latest year for which figures are available. Budget 2004 provided for an increase of €100 in the Respite Care Grant from €735 to €835 and to €1,670 for carers who are caring for more than one person.

(ii) Support for Carers

In 2004, the Department of Social and Family Affairs supplied funding to The Carers Association towards the cost of producing and distributing an Information Pack for the benefit of carers, their families, support groups and information providers.

(iii) Review of Existing Service Provision

A Strategic Review of existing service provision for people with disabilities is underway. Specialist Working Groups are in the process of reporting. This will be followed by an Open Consultation process. A review of waiting lists for residential care is being undertaken as part of the Strategic Review.

92 per cent of people on the National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD) were in receipt of services in 2003; 82 per cent of those on the NIDD assessed as requiring residential services are in receipt of same, while 97.7 per cent of those on the NIDD assessed as requiring day services are in receipt of same.

(iv) Implementation of a Code of Practice for Sheltered Occupational Services

The development of the Code of Practice for Sheltered Occupational Services, completed in

2003 by the Department of Health and Children is one of two key measures that are required to regularise the status of current sheltered workshops for people with disabilities. The other essential measure is the production by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment of “a policy framework aimed at enhancing the potential of sheltered employment to provide better employment opportunities for people with disabilities” (Sustaining Progress 13.13).

It is essential for an effective transition from current arrangement for sheltered workshops that these two measures are taken in tandem. A policy framework on sheltered employment is currently under development by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

(v) Service Standards

A set of National Standards for Disability Services to be provided by the D/H&C is being developed in association with the National Disability Authority (NDA). The formal consultation process for draft standards has been completed. The Draft Standards will be submitted by the board of NDA to the Department for approval.

A Physical & Sensory Disability Database is currently being implemented on a national basis. This will allow services to be planned in an efficient and effective manner.

Access to Public Services - National Disability Strategy

National Disability Strategy

On 21 September 2004, the Government launched a National Disability Strategy to underpin the participation of people with disabilities in society. The strategy comprises four elements:

- Disability Bill 2004;
- Comhairle (Amendment) Bill 2004;
- Six Outline Sectoral Plans; and
- A commitment to a multi-annual Investment Programme for disability support services.

The Strategy builds on existing policy and legislation including the Employment Equality Act 1998, the Equal Status Act 2000, the Equality Act 2004 and the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 and the policy of mainstreaming service provision for people with disabilities within the State agencies that provide the service to citizens generally.

The elements of the Strategy

The Disability Bill 2004 is a positive action measure designed to support the provision of disability specific services to people with disabilities and to improve access to mainstream public services for people with disabilities. The Bill provides an individual right to an independent assessment of need, to a related Service Statement and to independent redress and enforcement. It provides a statutory basis for accessible public buildings and services, six Sectoral Plans, positive action for the employment in the public service, restrictions on the use of genetic information and the establishment of a Centre for Excellence in Universal Design to support the design of buildings, products, systems etc. which are usable by all.

The Comhairle report, *Developing an Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities*, was launched in July 2004. It provides vital information for Comhairle in planning for the introduction and future development of an appropriate advocacy service for people with disabilities. This will be

facilitated by a new Comhairle (Amendment) Bill, which is currently being prepared. The proposed new service will provide for the assignment of a personal advocate to a person with a disability who is unable or who has difficulty in obtaining a social service without the assistance or support of the personal advocate. The main function of the personal advocate will be to assist, support and represent the person with a disability in applying for and obtaining a social service and also in pursuing any right of review or appeal in connection with that service.

Under the Disability Bill, six Departments are required to draw up Sectoral Plans as follows - Health and Children, Social and Family Affairs, Transport, Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The six plans were also published in outline form on 21 September 2004.

A Multi-annual Investment Programme will apply to a number of priority disability specific services and will be developed and announced as part of this year's estimates and budgetary process. The multi-annual Programme will have both a capital and revenue (current) element starting in 2005.

Access to the built environment

Provisions for access to public buildings are contained in the Disability Bill. The Building Regulations will be reviewed in 2005 with a greater effort made to involve disabled people in the process of reviewing Disabled Access standards.

New dwellings commencing on or after 1 January 2001 must be visitable by people with disabilities. This is a first step towards "Lifetime Adaptable Housing", designed to meet the changing needs of households from youth to old age. For non-residential buildings, disabled access must now be

"adequate", which is deemed to impose a stricter access requirement.

The Building Control Bill, planned to be introduced by mid-2005, will require the building control authority to issue a Disability Access Certificate confirming that the design of a proposed new non-domestic building or apartment block complies with disabled access standards. The introduction of these certificates will implement a core recommendation of the 1996 Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities.

Electronic Voting

In the context of the introduction of electronic voting, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is examining the feasibility of introducing a facility to enable visually impaired persons use the voting machine without assistance. In addition, specially designed tilt tables have been procured by returning officers for the electronic voting machines to enable easier access by disabled voters.

Transport

The major development in accessible transport policy in recent years has been the decision that from the year 2000 onwards, all major refurbishment projects at bus and rail stations, together with the construction of new stations and the purchase of trains or buses would take account of the needs of people with mobility and sensory impairments. Under this policy all new buses purchased for the urban services of Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus are now low floor and wheelchair accessible. Similarly in the rail sector all new rail carriages are specified to full accessibility standards. In addition all appropriate staff in the state owned bus and rail companies now undergo disability awareness training. LUAS

has been designed and is operating as a fully accessible service. The current position regarding the various elements of the public transport fleet is as follows:

- The regular urban bus fleets in Waterford, Galway, Limerick and Cork are entirely low floor. In addition, Bus Éireann has some low floor wheelchair accessible buses in operation on a number of rural routes and on some commuter routes in the Greater Dublin Area previously served by non-accessible coaches. The company continues to examine opportunities for the introduction of low floor buses on its commuter routes;
- Bus Átha Cliath currently has some 486 low floor buses, which represents some 45 per cent of the fleet and some 50 routes have been converted to full accessibility. In addition, all the company's premises that provide customer facilities, e.g. ticket offices, lost and found offices etc., are now fully accessible. Bus Átha Cliath, in conjunction with some local authorities, is also upgrading a number of bus stops to facilitate low floor bus operations;
- The current Dublin and suburban rail services are wheelchair accessible over most of the network;
- All Dublin-Belfast Enterprise trains are fully accessible;
- The LUAS tramcars are fully accessible and have audio/visual facilities similar to the new DART (electric)/Arrow (diesel) suburban rail cars;
- Significant progress has been made to date in upgrading railway stations to improve access for mobility and sensory impaired people and further work is ongoing. An accessibility audit

of all railway stations, which was funded by the Department of Transport, has been completed. This provides a comprehensive assessment of the works that have to be carried out at each station to make it fully accessible to people with mobility and sensory impairments. A programme of station investment is being implemented based on the findings of this audit; and

- Accessibility improvements have also been made at a number of bus stations and major work is ongoing in this regard.

4.8 Travellers

Under the NAP/Inclusion the overall aim is to improve the life experience of Travellers through the provision of appropriate education, health and housing services and to remove any remaining barriers to their full participation in the work and social life of the country. Actions under the various targets in the plan are set out below.

(i) Employment

FÁS Services

FÁS records show that there are 1,399 Travellers registered with FÁS in total to date, 734 male and 665 female; included in this figure are 79 who registered as a Traveller with a disability. For the year January-December 2003, 342 Travellers have registered, with 19 registering as a Traveller with a disability.

In addition to the inclusion of Travellers on a range of FÁS programmes, there are a number of special initiatives that have been developed in response to approaches from Traveller support groups locally. Also, at any given time, there are a number of Travellers attending FÁS Programmes who may not have registered as such.

EQUAL Programme

FÁS is one of the partners with Pavee Point on an Equal Project that is exploring the job creation potential of the Traveller Economy. This is a new project and is being piloted at Pavee Point, Galway and Clondalkin. The programme, which has been running since 2002 and is due to be completed in 2005, involves working with Traveller men who want to develop or formalise new businesses. Each programme has 10 participants.

(ii) Education

Traveller Education Strategy

Work commenced in autumn 2003 on developing a five-year *Traveller Education Strategy*. An external expert has been appointed to lead the process with a joint working group drawn from the Educational Disadvantage Committee and the Advisory Committee on Traveller Education. The report on the Strategy is expected to be completed in early 2005. The main focus of the *Traveller Education Strategy* exercise will be to review/evaluate existing activities, the wide range of inputs, the quality of outcomes and the experience of Traveller learners within the education system. The Strategy will provide recommendations on the way forward in relation to Traveller education and will also recommend a phased implementation plan. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science has conducted an evaluation of provision at primary level and a preliminary evaluation at post-primary level as part of the strategy exercise.

A senior official from that Department has been appointed to take a lead role in co-ordinating the measures and support services in place to facilitate Traveller participation at every level of the education system. A national evaluation report on Pre-Schools for Travellers has been published.

On a national basis, the Department provides a continuum of provision for Travellers from pre-school to further education, encompassing the following specific measures: 52 Pre-Schools for Travellers; 520 Resource Teachers for Travellers and an enhanced capitation grant for Traveller pupils enrolled in primary schools; additional teaching resources and an enhanced capitation grant for Travellers enrolled at post-primary level; 40 Visiting Teachers for Travellers which encompass all levels of education; 4 Junior Education Centres which cater for Traveller children aged 12 to 15 years; Senior Traveller Training Centres which provide a programme of general education, vocational training and work experience programme for Travellers in the 15+ age group; and a National Education Officer for Travellers to, *inter alia*, identify the needs of Travellers and assist in planning education provision.

In designing and revising School Plans, schools must affirm minority groups such as Travellers. This requirement is contained in a pamphlet entitled "Schools and the Equal Status Act" which was launched in September 2003. The pamphlet was prepared to assist schools to meet their obligations under the Act.

Placement in Primary Schools

There were almost 6,000 traveller children in primary schools in 2003. The new *Traveller Education Strategy* will further address the age appropriate placement of all Travellers in Primary schools.

Transfer rate to Post-Primary Education

The School Completion Programme targeted approximately 2,000 Traveller children in 2003 and the integrated approach to tackling early school leaving will have particular regard to Traveller children.

The transfer rate to post-primary level was 85 per cent in 2003. There are approximately 1,700 Traveller students in mainstream schools at present out of a possible 4,000 i.e. 40 per cent of all Traveller students of post-primary school age. In addition, there are also over 900 in Senior Traveller Training Centres and over 200 in *Youthreach*. The majority of Traveller children leave mainstream schooling prior to completing Junior Cycle.

Participation in Third Level Education

Recent data from the Central Statistics Office indicated that 1.4 per cent of Travellers over 15 years of age, have a third-level qualification.

(iii) Health

Reduction of gap in life expectancy

A Study Group incorporating the members of the Traveller Ethics, Research and Information Working Group and with representatives from relevant statutory and non-statutory organisations in Northern Ireland has been established to progress a Travellers' All-Ireland Health Study. The study has been designed by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland in consultation with approximately 400 stakeholders throughout the country. The Department of Health and Children is currently preparing a Request for Tender for the study which is expected to commence in early 2005. The study will provide national data in relation to the target.

The Traveller Health Strategy

The Department of Health and Children, in consultation with the Traveller Health Advisory Committee, has undertaken and/or completed the following actions specified in the Strategy:

- Regional Action Plans for the implementation of the Strategy have been developed by the Eastern Regional Health Authority/health

boards in their areas and priorities for implementation in 2004 have been identified;

- All health boards have designated a regional Traveller health co-ordinator with responsibility for Traveller health;
- Cultural awareness training is being provided to staff in all health boards;
- Primary Health Care for Travellers projects are currently in place in all health boards;
- The Department of Health and Children, in conjunction with the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has established a joint committee to examine issues proper to both Departments;
- The Traveller Ethics, Research and Information Working Group has been established and has met regularly to consider applications on research into Traveller health for ethical approval;
- A sub-group of the Traveller Ethics, Research and Information Working Group has been established to progress the implementation of an ethnic identifier question on the Hospital Inpatient Enquiry/Perinatal Systems in the Tallaght and Rotunda hospitals; the project in Tallaght Hospital commenced in July 2004;
- The Department, in consultation with the Traveller Health Advisory Committee, has completed a review of the operation of Traveller Health Units in all health boards; and
- Travellers and Traveller organisations are involved in determining health priorities for their community and in decisions on the allocation of resources through membership of the Traveller Health Units in health boards.

Primary Healthcare Project

Since 1994, Pavee Point in partnership with the Eastern Health Board, has helped develop a primary healthcare project for Travellers. Part of this project has been to train Traveller women to work as healthcare workers in their own communities. Other Traveller support groups around the country are now using this model. The health board provides the training and the tutors and FÁS provides a training allowance. In June 2003 there were a total of 23 projects with 183 participants in Pre-Training and 60 in Health Training. Three projects have finished with a total of 113 participants completing training, 41 of whom are now employed.

(iv) Housing/Accommodation

Accommodation supply

At the end of 2003 a total of 1,369 additional families had been provided with, or assisted in the provision of, accommodation through the local authority five-year Traveller accommodation programme. There were 419 less families on the unauthorised sites than had been on such sites at the beginning of the programme in 2000. The numbers of families on unauthorised sites has been reduced to 788 from 1,207.

The Traveller accommodation element of the housing and accommodation special initiative under *Sustaining Progress* is being progressed through the review of the operation of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998. The National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee which had been requested by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to advise him on the operation of the Act, has completed its review of the Act, during which barriers to the implementation of the local authority Traveller accommodation programmes were examined. A response to the

recommendations contained in the report is expected at an early date.

Local authorities are in the course of preparing follow-on Traveller accommodation programmes to the current five-year ones which expire at the end of this year. These new programmes will cover the period 2005 to 2008. In order to assist in giving a renewed focus to making progress on providing accommodation for Travellers, local authorities are now required to include annual targets for the number and type of accommodation to be provided in each year of the programme. In addition, the performance measurement scheme introduced for local authorities provides that the performance of local authorities in relation to Traveller accommodation will be specifically measured against targets set for implementation of the programme.

A High Level Group was established under the aegis of the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, with a remit to ensure that the relevant statutory agencies involved in the full range of services to Travellers focus on the immediate and practical delivery of such services, including accommodation. This group which is chaired by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has commenced its consideration of the issues involved.

Expenditure on Traveller accommodation 2003/2004

Travellers are provided with accommodation through the local authority housing programme as well as through the provision of new and refurbished Traveller specific accommodation. In 2003, a total of €29 million was spent on the provision of Traveller specific accommodation, with the allocation increased by one-third to €40 million for 2004. This is in addition to the cost of

providing standard housing allocated to Traveller families provided and funded under the local authority housing programme. It is expected that the increased accommodation provision of recent years and the reduction in the number of Traveller families in unauthorised encampments will continue.

4.9 Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners

(i) Positive Sentence Management

Positive sentence management (PSM) has been developed as a mechanism for effective integration and co-ordination of all services and programmes designed to meet the complex and diverse needs of offenders. An important aspect of the elaboration of PSM is the building of alliances and partnerships with the wider community and the development of a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of drug treatment, education, vocational training and multidisciplinary programmes - including offender behaviour programmes. Among the corporate aims of the Irish Prison Service is one of developing appropriate partnerships with agencies in the wider community. Each of the prisons and places of detention includes tasks and actions to this end in its local Business Plan.

A Scoping Group on PSM has been established by the Irish Prison Service to prepare a report, including terms of reference for the introduction of PSM, an evaluation process and any IT requirements etc. This work is being done in consultation with other relevant services within the Criminal Justice system, outside agencies and prisoners, and is in the final stages of completion. The next steps will involve presentation of the Scoping Group's report to the Director General of the Irish Prison Service, to the Prisons Authority Interim Board and to the Minister.

The National Economic and Social Forum's Report on the 'Re-integration of Prisoners', published in January 2002, was prepared as the NESF *"input to policy evaluation and the process of important changes that the Government has been initiating in our penal system, with particular reference to the Prison Service, the Probation and Welfare Service, and the Parole Board"* (quote from Foreword to Report). The central focus of the Report is on the barriers to policy implementation and the related need for more focused, targeted and integrated mechanisms or models to ensure that prisoners can be more effectively integrated back into society.

The Co-ordination Group on Offender Integration (COGOI) was established and met in December 2002, under the chair of an Assistant Secretary from the Equality side of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, to facilitate the re-integration of offenders. The Group comprises senior officials from Departments and other statutory agencies identified in the NESF Report as having a role to play in progressing its implementation. The Group is also drawing on the expertise of many community and voluntary groups who have experience of dealing with the issues raised by the Report. A Work Plan has been agreed for the Group's activities and five plenary meetings have been held to date. NESF has expressed satisfaction with the establishment of this Group as meeting the terms of the Report's recommendation regarding the setting up of a national Re-integration Group.

The COGOI has been influential in progressing a number of the NESF recommendations especially in the area of post-release accommodation for prisoners and streamlining of the process followed by ex-prisoners to obtain welfare benefits. The most notable of these positive changes are as follows:

■ The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has agreed that:

- prisoners will be entitled to apply to be placed on local authority social housing lists nine months before completing their sentences or likely release dates;
- local authorities will be required to address prisoners' housing needs in their reviews of their housing strategies; and
- subject to estate management considerations, remand and short sentence prisoners will be able to retain their local authority tenancies whilst in custody.

■ The D/S&FA has provided that short sentence and remand prisoners can continue to receive rent supplement for a maximum of 13 weeks. This change (which came into operation from 31 January 2004) will help to preserve private rented accommodation for such prisoners and avoid them becoming homeless whilst in custody. In addition, time in custody can be counted towards the six month qualification period for access to rent supplement.

In June 2004, the Department of Social and Family Affairs launched an information guide for ex-offenders entitled 'What Now - useful things to know before and after your release'. This guide brings together important contact information on a range of topics such as social welfare, housing, health, education and training, legal issues and managing money. The initiative follows on from one of the specific recommendations of the NESF report to 'produce a comprehensive information leaflet on prisoners' options on leaving prison'.

(ii) Employment

FÁS Services to prisoners and ex-prisoners and youths at risk

FÁS and the Probation and Welfare Service collaborate on a number of projects called Justice Workshops for which the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform through the Probation and Welfare Service provide substantial funding and where FÁS pay the Trainee Allowances. These Workshops, which are managed and administered by Management Committees in association with the Probation and Welfare Service, were established for youths at risk, offenders and ex-offenders. The aim of the Workshops is to prevent custodial sentence, rehabilitate ex-offenders and accordingly afford clients the opportunity to access education and the labour market. There are 13 such projects run by the Probation and Welfare Service in association with FÁS and the Vocational Educational Committees. All 41 FÁS Community Training Centres (CTCs) are open to accepting youths at risk who are referred on by the Probation and Welfare Service and ex-prisoners. At any given time across all FÁS CTCs and Justice Workshops there would be a number of ex-prisoners not specifically identified as such. FÁS supports 40 Garda Youth Diversion Projects in targeted areas.

FÁS staff visit prisons before release to talk about the range of FÁS services available to this group. Informal links have also developed between FÁS and the Training and Education Officers from the Linkage Programme. This has resulted in new projects being set up in the regions. Currently FÁS and the Probation and Welfare Service are looking at ways to strengthen these links and improve services to offenders prior to and after release from prison.

Other pilot initiatives for this group have taken place in conjunction with the Area Partnerships, Drug Task Force and Local Employment Services.

(iii) Education/training/work/integration

During 2004, the Irish Prison Service aims to maintain participation in education among those in custody as close as possible to 50 per cent. With the aim of tackling the poor literacy levels of prisoners, the Irish Prison Service is developing a service-wide strategy for implementing the recommendations of the 'Prison Adult Literacy Survey - Results and Implications'. The latter Survey, published in September 2003, found that 52 per cent of the prisoner population were at Level 1 or pre-Level 1 literacy levels. In other words, more than twice as many prisoners are at the lowest level as compared with the general population. In April 2004, the Irish Prison Service published the Curriculum Review Group Report and will be developing proposals for consultation with a range of other stakeholders on curriculum development.

The Regimes Directorate of the Irish Prison Service is carrying out an internal review of the prisons' Work/Training provision with a view to drawing up an action plan aimed at maximising skill training opportunities leading to enhanced employment prospects for prisoners on release.

4.10 Areas marked by Exclusion – Urban Poverty and Rural Disadvantage

The NAP/Inclusion refers to the objective to combat social exclusion in urban areas by, *inter alia*, building viable and sustainable communities, improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged urban areas and building social capital and community ownership of strategy. Tackling poverty and social exclusion in rural areas

requires the provision of an adequate income through employment and support services, together with access to required services and infrastructure, and the empowerment of the local community.

(i) Community Development Programme

The Community Development Programme aims to counter social exclusion by involving people, most especially, the disadvantaged in making changes to their communities which they identify to be important and which put to use and develop their skills, knowledge and experience.

The Programme, operated by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, provides funding, on a multi-annual basis, to a network of 175 community development resource centres and projects in communities experiencing social and economic disadvantage. This funding covers core costs such as staff and overheads. Over €20.6 million has been allocated to the Programme in 2004.

Projects provide facilities such as meeting rooms, crèches, office facilities and training or education projects to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups in their communities. The Programme also includes groups, which act as a resource for community development work with particular interest groups, e.g. Travellers, lone parents and people with disabilities.

Progress to date

In line with the Partnership 2000 commitment to identify 30 priority areas for inclusion in the Community Development Programme, 15 new community development projects were funded with effect from September 2003. In selecting projects for funding, priority was given to areas of greatest need, particularly with reference to RAPID and CLÁR areas.

(ii) Rural Communities - CLÁR Programme

The CLÁR regeneration programme, targeted at areas of specific population decline, co-ordinates existing sources of public and private finance and provides additional stimulus funding for the provision of small scale economic and social infrastructure. This helps rural communities overcome local difficulties and achieve access to a range of essential services such as water supply, sewage disposal, road access, broadband communication and other community and economic infrastructure.

The areas targeted under the CLÁR programme continue to benefit from assistance under the range of measures operated. These areas are parts of counties Cavan, Clare, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Limerick, Longford, Louth, Mayo, Meath, Monaghan, Roscommon, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, Westmeath and all of County Leitrim.

A number of measures have been taken to support enterprise in maintaining existing jobs and in possibly creating new jobs. These include: the ESB single-phase to three-phase electricity conversion for small businesses; broadband & wireless internet supply to various locations; and funding towards some town fibre optic networks.

Funding is provided, with the D/H&C and health boards, for major and minor health projects to improve health services in the selected areas.

Support for education is provided, with the D/E&S, for the enhancement of outdoor play facilities in primary schools while funding is provided with the D/EH&LG for the provision of flashing amber safety lights at schools.

To improve access to housing services for rural dwellers, funding is provided, with the D/EH&LG, for improved water supply and for improved

facilities on local authority housing estates. CLÁR also provides 100 per cent funding for improved road access to rural dwellings.

(iii) Employment

Employment Supports for rural communities

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs is subventing the cost of a co-ordinator from the Rural Development Fund for a period of one year from July 2004. The co-ordinator, employed by the Comhar LEADER na hÉireann programme, will work with the small food production sector, in recognition of the potential which that sector has as a source of employment at local level.

In 2003, the Western Development Commission approved assistance, in the form of loans or equity, of €5.7 million for 27 projects. Those projects approved in 2003 have the potential to create or sustain more than 700 jobs. This level of activity is continuing for 2004/2005.

(iv) Health

Primary Health Care Implementation Projects

Seven of the 10 Primary Care implementation projects approved under the Primary Care Strategy are in rural areas i.e. Bangor Erris/Belmullet, Co. Mayo; Cashel, Co. Tipperary; Dingle, Co. Kerry; Lifford, Co. Donegal; Portarlinton, Co. Laois; Virginia, Co. Cavan; West County Limerick. These are delivering services in line with the multidisciplinary primary care model set out in the Primary Care Strategy: *'Primary Care: A New Direction'*.

Building Healthy Communities

Two of the three Building Healthy Communities programme projects being funded in 2004, by the D/H&C, are in rural areas i.e. Lifford and Dingle where they are associated with Primary Care

Strategy implementation projects. The Building Healthy Communities programme has a specific focus on community development approaches to reducing health inequalities.

General Practice Out-of-Hours co-operatives

General Practice (GP) Out-of-Hours co-operatives form a cornerstone of the Primary Care Strategy document. There are co-operatives in at least part of 23 counties. The Department of Health and Children has asked health boards to develop initiatives to give effect to multidisciplinary teamworking on a more widespread basis. Funding of some €1.5 million was allocated in 2003 to initiatives which will move towards this objective. The programme of extending the network of 24 hour GP co-operatives will continue.

(v) Improving Transport facilities for Rural Dwellers

The Rural Transport Initiative (RTI) has been operating since 2002 to provide funding on a pilot basis for community organisations and community partnerships to address the particular transport needs of their rural area by actively engaging in the provision of transport services. Area Development Management Ltd. (ADM) is managing the RTI on behalf of the Department of Transport.

All of the thirty-four community transport groups being funded under the RTI were operational by July 2003 at which point some 1,800 transport services were being operated on some 300 new rural routes, and some 13,000 people were being carried each month. Currently some 2,500 transport services are being provided on approximately 380 new rural routes and some 20,000 people are using the RTI transport services every month.

While €4.4 million was originally earmarked for the RTI in the National Development Plan, €6 million has been provided by the Department of Transport for the initiative in the two year period ended December 2003 and further funding of €3.0 million is being provided for the RTI in 2004.

The provision of transport services for the elderly and mobility impaired is a core feature of the RTI. Many of the services are door-to-door, are operated with accessible vehicles and are designed to fit in with existing scheduled services. The Free Travel Scheme operated by the Department of Social and Family Affairs was extended to the RTI in July 2003 and some €400,000 was made available to the initiative for free travel in that year. It is understood that some €500,000 is being provided as a contribution towards the cost of free travel under the RTI in 2004.

The RTI was originally due to conclude at the end of 2003 but was extended to provide more time to generate further practical experience in the provision of rural transport services. Following the recommendations in a comprehensive appraisal of the initiative, an extension of the RTI to 2006 has recently been announced.

(vi) Access to Services for Rural Dwellers

Community Development

A provision of €3.09 million was made available in the revised estimates of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in 2004 to fund improved co-ordination of local and community development structures.

As part of the joint initiative between the Departments of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Department of

Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and following a Government Decision in January 2004, local and community development groups were asked to draw up proposals under the auspices of the County/City Development Boards (CDBs) and Údarás na Gaeltachta aimed at greater cohesion in the delivery of local and community development services. Proposals from 31 CDBs were received and were examined by an independent assessor. These proposals were very focussed on improving current arrangements with regard to resources, staffing and geographic coverage. The Fingal CDB proposal was accepted for funding. Although many other good ideas were put forward by other CDBs, these were asked to take a more focussed look at current arrangements, and to resubmit their proposals in September. The plan is to have these fresh proposals assessed very quickly.

(vii) Public Safety and Crime Prevention

Youth Diversion Programmes and Restorative Schemes: Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme

The Juvenile Diversion Programme provides an opportunity to divert juvenile offenders from criminal activity. It operates under the supervision and direction of the Garda National Juvenile Office, Harcourt Square in Dublin and is implemented throughout all Garda Divisions by 85 specially trained Gardaí known as Juvenile Liaison Officers.

Diversion under the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme constitutes a significant means of dealing with young offenders. According to referral data under this Programme, the principal offences committed are, in descending order of frequency, larcenies, criminal damage (vandalism), burglaries, alcohol-related offences, vehicle offences and public order offences. As such, young offenders commit broadly similar crimes to adults.

Upon detection, young offenders may be either prosecuted or diverted from prosecution under the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme by means of cautioning or a decision that no further action is warranted. Almost two out of every three referrals to the Programme are dealt with by means of caution rather than prosecution. The decision to caution is made on the basis of an admittance of wrongdoing, the nature of the offence and the juvenile's criminal history. Those prosecuted and convicted comprise, on average, approximately 12 per cent of all persons convicted.

Part 4 of The Children Act 2001 places the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme on a statutory basis and incorporates into it, as new features, restorative cautioning and conferencing. Implementation of restorative cautioning and restorative conferencing measures has involved providing most of the Juvenile Liaison Officers with a minimum of 60 hours mediation training. In addition, under the Act, the age limit for inclusion in the Programme was increased from 17 to 18 years of age.

Garda Youth Diversion Projects

Garda Youth Diversion Projects are community based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives. Sixty-four projects, catering for approximately 2,500 participants per annum, are funded by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and administered by the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána. Areas and individuals are selected for Garda Youth Diversion Projects according to internationally recognised risk factors for offending which include reference to socio-economic status and educational attainment.

The projects are a tangible measure of crime prevention and reflect the commitment to multi-

agency partnership approaches to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour at community level. Those involved in operating the projects include the Garda Síochána, Probation and Welfare Service, youth organisations, statutory and voluntary groups and local community representatives. Through a combination of intervention and prevention programmes, Garda Youth Diversion Projects aim to:

- Prevent crime through community and multi-agency co-operation and to improve the quality of life with the community;
- Divert young people from becoming involved in criminal/anti-social behaviour;
- Provide suitable activities to facilitate personal development and encourage civic responsibility; and
- Support and improve Garda/community relations.

Participation in Garda Youth Diversion Projects is voluntary. The primary project target group, which forms the majority of project participants, is young people who have entered the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme and are considered at risk of remaining within the justice system. The secondary project target group are young people who, although they have not been officially cautioned, have come to the attention of the Gardaí, the community or local agencies as a result of their behaviour and are considered at risk of entering the justice system at a future date. The number of participants in each project differs according to local circumstances and resources. The focus is on the quality of the work/intervention with the participants rather than on the quantity of participants.

In 2001, the Department commissioned Dublin Institute of Technology to prepare comprehensive guidelines for the establishment, operation, management and administration of the projects. The guidelines were launched in May 2003. One of the recommendations contained therein has seen the establishment of a National Advisory Committee. The Committee, which first met in February 2004, will deal with issues brought to its attention from project co-ordinators, the employing organisations and local community representatives who are involved in the projects and will guide the future policy direction of the projects.

Probation and Welfare Service

The Probation and Welfare Service contributes to the drive to foster public safety and prevent crime by:

- Measuring the risk of further offending posed by those offenders referred for assessment; and
- Managing offenders who are on supervision in the community as a sanction for criminal actions, whether court ordered or following release from custody.

Nearly 7,000 requests for reports are received annually from the courts, and over 6,000 orders are made requiring offenders to refrain from further crime and to implement the programme determined for them by observing all the conditions of their court order / release from custody. At any given time, in excess of 5,600 persons are being dealt with by the Service.

To help manage these offenders safely in the community, effective inter-agency working relationships are developed and maintained, changing over time to address new challenges and

meet new demands. A network of 75 projects has been built up, including day programmes, residential programmes and specialised intervention (e.g. drug and substance abuse, car related crime, aggressive and anti-social behaviour, etc.). Just under half are specific probation projects, established to take referrals from the Service and to buttress supervision by providing focussed programmes. Others take referrals from a number of sources, and receive significant financial support for the input provided. Some €16 million, or over 60 per cent of the Service's operation budget, is expended on projects for offenders.

Within the last year, the number of staff vacancies remaining unfilled was reduced to near zero, so that increasing requests for court could be responded to and additional numbers taken on supervision (a census of offenders dealt with showed a rise of over 400 such, including 100 juveniles). Discussions were finalised with a number of new projects, increasing the range of interventions available to underpin community based supervision. Drug awareness programmes, funded under the National Development Plan (NDP), were commenced in some prisons and places of custody. The initial discharges from custody to court ordered post-release supervision under the Sex Offenders Act 2001 took place during the year, and the first implementation order under the Children Act 2001 that involved the Service was made. This empowered courts, from July 2004, to require that a Family Conference be held and an action plan drawn up, so that effective steps could be taken to divert the young people concerned from further crime. The Family Conference is convened by the Probation and Welfare Service. The convening of the Conference is directed by the court where the child accepts responsibility for his/her criminal behaviour and where it appears to the court that the preparation

of an action plan would be desirable in an individual case. If the action plan is complied with, the individual will avoid conviction. The Family Conference will involve a Probation Officer, the offender, the offender's family, the victim and relevant others such as the local Gardaí.

In the next twelve months and beyond, it is expected that further sections of the Children Act 2001, that involve this Service, will be implemented. These are expected to include mentor orders and parental supervision orders in addition to those aspects of criminal sentencing already in force for offenders generally e.g. probation orders and community service orders. Increased numbers of post-release supervision orders are being made, so the numbers who finish their custodial sentence and go on to their community programme will continue to increase. Service agreements are being negotiated with projects that the Service funds and more sophisticated reporting should result, both financial and operational. Work underway on articulating the future role and function of the Service, drawing on both the 1999 Expert Group report and the 2004 Value for Money examination by the Comptroller and Auditor General, will provide a sharper focus to the work of the Service. At the same time, reports for courts will be more scientifically based through the use of a standard risk assessment instrument, so that optimum use can be made of community sanctions, to address relevant issues with offenders and reduce the level of crime in communities.

Meeting Families' needs through better State support services

The RAPID Programme is a focused initiative by Government to target the most concentrated areas of urban disadvantage in the country. It requires Government Departments and State Agencies to

bring about better co-ordination and closer integration in the delivery of services. There are 2 Strands of the RAPID Programme - Strand I targets 25 urban areas while Strand II targets 20 provincial towns around the country.

In each of the areas, an Area Implementation Team (AIT) was established to prepare a plan outlining the specific needs of each area. This Team brought together local state agency personnel (health board, local authority, VEC, Department of Social & Family Affairs and FÁS), the local Partnership Company, residents of the local community and, where they exist, Local Drugs Task Forces. A local co-ordinator was appointed to each area to work with the local community to draw up an audit of local needs and to see how best to tackle the problems and to ensure provision and co-ordination of services and investment, involving the kinds of services and facilities that are most urgently needed in the area. Proposals from the plans were then forwarded to the relevant Government Departments for consideration.

The scale of the proposals in the plans was large and quite varied, with many of them more appropriate for progression at local level, rather than by Government Departments. In light of this, a new, additional delivery mechanism supported by a dedicated fund of €4.5 million in 2004 has been introduced to progress these proposals. These proposals will be co-funded by the relevant department or local agency under a number of categories, with broad levels of funding agreed at national level. Funding totalling €5 million has been allocated to RAPID areas to support the development of playgrounds and for enhancement works in local authority estates. A further €2 million top-up funding was allocated to sports clubs in RAPID areas that were successful under

the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, Sports Capital Programme 2004. This is in addition to funding of some €10.5 million, which was awarded to projects in RAPID areas under the original Sports Capital Programme allocations.

The larger projects from RAPID plans will continue to be considered for funding from within existing funding streams in each Department. Work on improving integration and co-ordination of service delivery at local level will continue, as this is a key component of the RAPID Programme.

4.11 Migrants and Ethnic Minorities

The NAP/Inclusion refers to the need for an overall framework on migration which would cover the regulation of inflows into the state, together with integration issues, racism and interculturalism.

(i) Education

The general aim of education policy in this sphere is to optimise access by migrants and ethnic minorities to all levels of the education system. A pamphlet "Schools and the Equal Status Act" was launched in September 2003. The pamphlet was prepared to assist schools to meet their obligations under that Act.

Anti-racism intercultural programme

An anti-racism intercultural programme at every level of the education system will be implemented building on existing initiatives and focusing on curriculum, training and support issues.

Promoting Anti-Racism and Interculturalism in Education - Draft Recommendations towards a National Action Plan was produced by the Department of Education and Science in November 2002. Actions under way to support the

Plan include: information for schools on the integration of asylum seekers and migrants; and additional resources for schools to support the needs of students for whom English is not their first language.

Guidelines on intercultural education in the curriculum at primary level have been submitted by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to the Department and guidelines at post-primary level are nearing completion. It is planned to publish the guidelines for primary schools in the coming months.

Modules on interculturalism have been developed and approved for use in the Further Education sector and new initiatives for migrant groups have been developed under the Back to Education Initiative (BTEI).

Literacy and language training

Literacy and language training for adult minority linguistic groups will be expanded.

Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) have developed versions of the European Language Portfolio for primary and post-primary learners of English as a second language as well as providing training on an on-going basis for teachers in schools who provide English language support to non-nationals.

There are now more than 3,500 asylum seekers/refugees attending literacy courses through the VEC adult literacy service. A report on addressing the literacy and language needs of adult asylum seekers has been launched, and training for teaching staff has taken place in collaboration with the London Language and Literacy Unit.

Third Level participation

No statistics are yet available on this target insofar as it relates to refugees.

(ii) Health

Strategy

A Regional Health Strategy for Ethnic Minorities for the Eastern Regional Health Authority area was launched on 23 September 2004.

Research

A Health Research Board Fellowship in Health Services Research was awarded to the Department of General Practice, NUI, Galway in Autumn 2002. The project is entitled "Health Service Delivery in a Multicultural Ireland: Perceptions of Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Primary Health Care Providers". This work is due to be completed in Autumn 2005.

Building Healthy Communities Pilot

One of the projects the Department of Health and Children is funding under the Combat Poverty Agency's Building Healthy Communities pilot Programme in 2004 is Tallaght Intercultural Action. This project aims to improve the accessibility of health and social services to ethnic minority families and to train women from ethnic minorities to deliver awareness training to health staff.

(iii) Migration and Interculturalism

Migration and Interculturalism is a special initiative under Sustaining Progress

The inclusion of Migration and Interculturalism as one of the ten special initiatives under *Sustaining Progress* reflects the importance the Government attaches to these issues and their cross-cutting impact on Ireland's social, cultural and economic development. Designating these issues as a special initiative offers a timely opportunity to

analyse and review the building blocks which have been put in place over the past few years and adopt a strategic approach to identifying next steps.

Sustaining Progress contains a commitment that, “Government and the social partners agree on the desirability for the development of a comprehensive policy framework on migration (immigration and emigration)”. Issues highlighted for consultation with the social partners to achieve this goal include economic migration, integration issues, racism and interculturalism, and issues affecting Irish emigrants. The scoping paper on migration and interculturalism has been circulated and discussed by the social partners. The National Action Plan against Racism is the principal deliverable it contains.

(iv) Racism and Racial Discrimination

National Action Plan against Racism

The National Action Plan against Racism is a key commitment towards eliminating racism stemming from Ireland’s active participation in the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in September 2001. The development of a National Action Plan against Racism also represents a significant opportunity to both build upon and enhance existing policies and strategies to address racism in Ireland and to identify new priorities and aspirations.

A Steering Group representative of Government, specialist bodies, other bodies and civil society was formed to assist in the development of the Plan. The consultative phase of the preparation process for the Plan consisted of a national consultative conference, written submissions and

regional and thematic seminars. The report on the consultative process and a framework structure for the Plan “Diverse Voices” was published in 2003 and widely distributed. Following consultation with the Social Partners, the Equality Authority and Irish Human Rights Commission, the Plan will be sent to Government for approval and publication in the coming months.

Anti-Racism Awareness/In the Workplace

The National Anti-Racism Awareness Programme (Know Racism) has completed its three year term (2001-2003). A review and evaluation of the programme is currently being carried out with a view to incorporating lessons learned by the programme into the awareness aspects of the National Action Plan against Racism.

Anti-Racism in the Workplace Initiatives continue to be developed in partnership, by the Equality Authority, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, ICTU, the CIF, IBEC and the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland. The Anti-Racist Workplace Week took place this year from 1 to 7 November.

Dignity at Work Policy and Equal Opportunities/Diversity Policy & Strategy Objectives for the Health Service

The Dignity at Work Policy, which was launched in conjunction with the Equal Opportunities/ Diversity Policy & Strategy Objectives for the Health Service, came into operation on 1 May 2004. This Policy document supersedes all existing local policies on dealing with complaints of bullying and harassment. Printed copies of the Policy have been distributed to each agency following launch and the policy is also available to download from Health Services Employers Agency (HSEA) website.

Policy on Migration

The elements of the framework for the development of an Immigration and Residence Bill, which included widespread consultation and a review of best practice elsewhere, have been completed. Work on the development of the specification for the Bill is ongoing.

(v) Refugees and Applicants for Refugee Status

Measures for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

European Refugee Funds are available for projects, the majority of which are involved in the reception of asylum seekers and the integration of refugees. In 2004, a total of €880,000 was made available to sixteen projects working in the areas of reception, integration and voluntary repatriation.

The Small Grants Scheme assists voluntary support groups in a range of activities to befriend asylum seekers to assist them to settle into local communities and to promote intercultural activities between asylum seekers and the local community. In 2003, a total of €140,000 was made available under this Scheme benefiting over sixty projects. The Scheme is operating again in 2004 when it is expected that approximately €145,000 will be awarded to support groups working with asylum seekers.

The Commemorative Awards Ceremonies initiative welcomes people who have refugee status to Ireland. Commemorative Certificates are awarded to refugees in the presence of their families at an informal ceremony. This initiative was piloted in December 2003 and in February 2004 and was launched during European Week against Racism in March 2004.

Processing Asylum Claims

Over recent years significant resources have been allocated by the Government to the asylum

determination process. This high level of investment continues to have very positive results both in terms of speed of processing and numbers of applications awaiting a final decision.

During 2003, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform continued to implement the Government's asylum strategy aimed at:

- achieving greatly increased processing capacity to deliver more speedy decisions in relation to applications for refugee status leading to the completion to finality of the processing of all new asylum applications within a six month period; and
- dealing with the increased numbers of repatriations arising in respect of persons who do not qualify for refugee status.

The number of asylum applications received in 2003 was 7,900 as compared to 11,634 in 2002. In 2003, Ireland experienced the second highest fall in asylum applications in the EU. This trend continued in the first five months of 2004.

Processing continued to move strongly in the asylum processing agencies, namely the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and the Refugee Appeals Tribunal (RAT) with 8,641 cases finalised by the ORAC and 5,031 decisions taken by the RAT. In addition, at the end of December 2003, there were 2,896 cases on hand in both agencies over six months old, compared with 6,500 cases over six months old at end September 2001.

In relation to processing times, prioritised applications, which represent over 50 per cent of the present caseload, receive a first instance decision in ORAC within six weeks of application and are also dealt with speedily by the RAT.

(vi) Information Provision to Immigrants and Emigrants

A Department of Social and Family Affairs Working Group has been established to review the information and other services provided to immigrants and emigrants. The D/SFA funds and participates in an Information Seminar in the UK every year in partnership with the Federation of Irish Societies and the annual meeting of the Coalition of Irish Emigrant Centres in the USA. The D/SFA will develop further contacts with a view to meeting the information needs of our emigrants in Australia.

In 2003, the D/SFA increased its financial support to voluntary organisations engaged in information provision to emigrants from €127,000 to €427,000 per annum. That significant increase allowed the D/SFA to engage with and support a wider number of agencies involved in information dissemination projects targeted at emigrants.

(vii) Task Force on Emigrants abroad

A Task Force on Policy regarding Emigrants was established to report and make recommendations on the development of a coherent long-term approach to our emigrants and their needs. Its findings include wide-ranging and far-reaching proposals. Action is underway to advance many of these. Key developments include:

- The establishment within the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Irish Abroad Unit to co-ordinate the provision of services to the Irish emigrants;
- The funding for emigrant services in the UK has passed from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment to the Department of Foreign Affairs; and
- A substantial increase in funding for emigrant services has been secured. Total funding in 2004 has risen to €5 million, which represents an increase of two thirds on 2003 and most of this is being allocated to services in the UK. Recipients of grants are organisations in Ireland, the UK, the United States and Australia that provide advice and assistance to Irish people and are engaged in the delivery of pre-departure services, services for the Irish Abroad and services to returning emigrants.

5.1 Extract from Joint Inclusion Report 2003

This assessment from the Joint Inclusion Report is a commentary on the Irish NAP/Inclusion 2003-2005, which was submitted to the EU in July 2003.

Therefore, it does not take account of progress made across policy areas since then. (Office for Social Inclusion)

Extract from Joint Inclusion Report 2003 - Detailed assessment of Irish NAP/Inclusion.

1. Situation and key trends

Ireland has continued to record high economic growth although the downturn in the global economy has sharply reduced the pace of growth. GDP grew at 6.9 per cent in 2002, which is the highest in the EU and far in excess of the EU average of 1.1 per cent. It is noteworthy, however, that the corresponding increase in GNP was just 0.1 per cent. Ireland's per capita income in PPS was at 118 per cent of the EU average in 2001. The downturn in the economy is reflected in a slight rise in the overall unemployment rate to 4.4 per cent, and also in the long term unemployment rate to 1.3 per cent (in 2002). It is also apparent in the latest social partnership agreement, which is less ambitious in the social domain than previous plans.

Analysis of poverty trends shows that the EU common indicator of 'risk of poverty' (defined at the level of 60 per cent of the national median) has risen from 19 per cent to 21 per cent between 1998 and 2001, and is now the highest in the EU. This trend indicates continued income disparities affecting, in particular, elderly people, large families and lone parents. Also worrying is the high rate of persistent poverty which, at 13 per cent in 2001, is one of the highest among the EU countries.

However, the national 'consistent' poverty measure, a composite indicator combining relative income and deprivation measures, continues to fall, from 8.2 per cent in 1998 to 5.2 per cent in 2001.

Expenditure on social benefits increased by 25 per cent between 1999 and 2001 but is still the lowest in the EU as a percentage of GDP.

2. Assessment of progress made since the 2001 NAP inclusion

Ireland has made substantial strategic progress in the last two years. The national anti-poverty strategy was reviewed and ambitious new targets and institutional arrangements have been established. Ireland has been very successful in facilitating participation in employment. A major achievement has been the 26 per cent increase in the participation of women in the labour force between 1998 and 2003. A High Supports Process was introduced in 2003 to target and support those suffering greatest disadvantage. While tailored programmes are aimed at specific vulnerable groups such as Travellers, people with disabilities, refugees and lone parents, there is inadequate data available on these groups, which presents problems in assessing the impact of policies.

Although education spending has risen substantially in recent years, Ireland still invests less of its national income in education compared with other EU Member States. Key targets have been set in the area of literacy and reducing the number of young people who leave school early. Very positive results have been achieved with the rate of early school leavers dropping from 18.9 per cent to 14.7 per cent between 1997 and 2002 (Eurostat - EU Labour Force Survey 2002). Participation has increased in adult literacy courses, while a radio and TV programme attracted weekly audiences in excess of 146,000 in 2002. In addition, a successful pilot on workplace literacy has now been mainstreamed.

Commitments to increase social security payments have been largely met with total expenditure increasing by 42 per cent between 2000 and 2002. All payments were increased in real terms, with the highest increases being granted to pensioners who are recognised as a group at high risk of poverty. Targets have been set to raise the lowest income support payments to EUR 150 per week by 2007 (in 2002 terms), to raise pensions to EUR 200 and to ensure that child income support is at 33 to 35 per cent of the minimum adult social security payment. Expenditure on universal child benefit increased by 129 per cent between 2000 and 2002, with monthly payments increasing from EUR 54.00 to EUR 117.60. However, the impact of these increases has been somewhat diminished by high inflation relative to other Member States, increases in indirect taxes, and other utility and service charges, which are regressive by nature. For those in low paid employment, the minimum wage will be set at EUR 7 per hour from February 2004, which is an increase of 25 per cent since its introduction in 2000.

In the area of health, life expectancy for women is the lowest in the EU and for men it is the second lowest. These figures are substantially lower again for the Traveller population, which accounts for 0.6 per cent of the population. A national health strategy was published in 2001 with a key target of reducing the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by at least 10 per cent for specific diseases by 2007. Despite major increases in expenditure on health, it is not clear if the resources will be available, or sufficient, to address health infrastructure and service deficiencies.

Rural disadvantage is a distinct problem in Ireland, particularly with regard to access to services. Approximately 1,800 new transport services on

300 new routes have been established as pilot projects, but it is not clear how many of these schemes will be mainstreamed. A number of initiatives to improve the quality of customer services have been introduced and there is a commitment to ensure 'the development of more formal expressions of entitlement across the range of public services'. Although developing standards of access goes some way to meet the type of rights based approach called for in the consultation process, it does not fully address the issue. It is also noted that there are few targets set in this area.

Affordability of housing and homelessness affect a significant group of people, due in part to house costs increasing far in excess of the Consumer Price Index. Targets in this area have been set and a social housing programme providing for the delivery of 25,000 houses reached 65 per cent of its target at the end of 2002. Improvements in housing for Travellers have also taken place, with the total number accommodated increasing from 3,805 in 2000 to 4,522 in 2002. However, there are still some 1,000 such families living in unauthorised sites with no facilities. An integrated strategy on homelessness, aimed at drawing up local action plans, was an ambitious and worthwhile exercise. However, specific targets for the elimination or reduction of homelessness were not required, thereby making it difficult to meet and measure long-term objectives.

Developments in a number of programmes designed to assist the most vulnerable groups have taken place. The 'Springboard' pilot projects, aimed at providing intensive family support to vulnerable families, have been mainstreamed. The Monetary Advice and Budgeting Service which assists more than 11,000 clients annually, agreed a new pilot scheme to develop a non-judicial

alternative for those who have intractable and multiple consumer debt. This service will be of particular benefit to women who comprise in excess of 66 per cent of the clients. Additional expenditure for sports and recreation is being targeted at areas of social disadvantage, indicating greater efforts to tackle broad social inclusion problems.

3. Strategic approach: main objectives and key targets

This NAP presents a greatly improved strategic approach that is well balanced and broad-ranging. It is based on a more complex understanding of the causes of social exclusion and better addresses the common objectives. There are a large number of targets that are quantifiable and time focused. It is also more balanced in terms of focusing on universal issues, as well as more specific groups, and is more comprehensive than the previous plan in covering a wider range of issues, such as access to legal services, equality, and participation in art and cultural activities. The establishment of a Social Inclusion Forum enables those experiencing poverty and social exclusion to contribute in a direct and active way. A wide ranging consultation process took place and, in an innovative exercise, the Equality Authority proofed the NAP with the participation of groups from across nine distinct grounds of discrimination set out in the equality framework. It is intended to continue with this approach over the lifetime of the Plan.

However, it is noteworthy that Ireland operates a national centralised model of policy formulation and implementation, which makes it difficult to progress integrated locally based strategies. This is evident in the slow progress in implementing RAPID, a programme aimed at developing an integrated approach in the twenty five most disadvantaged urban areas in Ireland. The

development of the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network and the extension of 'poverty proofing' to local areas may assist in enhancing the capacity of local stakeholders. The establishment of regional education offices is another positive development. Other recommendations put forward in a recent review of social inclusion co-ordinating mechanisms should also lead to improvements at local and regional level.

The key objective is to consolidate the economic success of recent years to ensure high levels of employment are sustained and a more equal society is achieved. While employment is foreseen as the major route out of poverty, it is also recognised that this is not the answer for everyone, and a number of targets are set in the area of adequate income support. A key target is to reduce the numbers of those who are 'consistently' poor from 5.2 per cent in 2001 to 2.0 per cent by 2007.

4. Key policy approaches: strengths and weaknesses

The NAP is focused and contains a large number of targets, far more than the previous NAP. The establishment of an Office for Social Inclusion should consolidate a cross-departmental and inter-agency approach, although one would have to question if the resources allocated to this new office are sufficient for the ambitious work programme outlined. The Plan is particularly strong in the area of employment, income supports and education. However, there is little reference to regional imbalance and this area needs to be strengthened. Demands in the consultation process for a right-based approach in social exclusion policies, are only addressed in terms of developing standards of access to quality public services. The position of refugees and

asylum seekers requires particular attention in view of their high risks of social exclusion and the identified problem of racism. The policy of 'direct provision', whereby asylum seekers are provided with lodgings, food and a small payment instead of social security payments, militates against their social inclusion and increases the isolation of people, who are racially and culturally different from the general population. However, some worthwhile measures to promote integration have been taken, including language support and allocation of additional teaching resources to schools. Another important initiative is a national anti-racism programme aimed at building an inclusive society.

5. Gender perspective

There are a number of specific objectives and targets relevant to gender equality, notably in the area of employment. Progress has been made in increasing the supply and affordability of childcare, particularly in disadvantaged areas, but more is required. Overall, the analysis in relation to gender mainstreaming is limited and there is an absence of targets in many areas. The under-representation of women in decision-making arenas is particularly marked. The proposal to develop a national women's strategy should be used to strengthen gender mainstreaming.

6. Current issues and future challenges

Although the level of public investment in Ireland is very high at 5 per cent, (almost double the EU average), it must be noted that infrastructure and many public services are still relatively underdeveloped because Ireland is starting from such a low historical base. Accordingly, there remain huge challenges to ensure that the deficits in infrastructure and social provision will be addressed. Educational disadvantage, and the

integration of refugees and immigrants, must continue to be a priority. Growing income inequalities remains a key challenge that requires greater focus and a target in this area would be useful. The commitment to research and monitor relative income poverty is welcome, particularly in view of the fact that the 'consistent' poverty measure has recorded dramatic decreases that are contradicted by rises in the risk of poverty indicator. Work has started on the development of a data strategy to monitor progress on the set targets. Data is particularly needed to inform policy on specific vulnerable groups such as the homeless, migrants and other groups who are not readily identifiable in national statistics. Also, it is crucial that social inclusion co-ordination mechanisms be strengthened at local and regional level in order to ensure an integrated approach that will enable the successful delivery and implementation of the NAP objectives.

