



**Combat Poverty**  
*working for the prevention  
and elimination of poverty* **Agency**

# WORKING TOWARDS A POVERTY-FREE SOCIETY

Submission to the National Action Plan Against  
Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005

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Against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005**

July 2003

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# 1. Introduction

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The Combat Poverty Agency, as the national statutory advisory agency on poverty policies, welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the preparation of Ireland's second National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005 (NAPincl) which is being submitted to the European Commission. Combat Poverty's submission draws on its own research, knowledge and experience as well as points raised during the consultation process.

Combat Poverty welcomes the establishment of the Office of Social Inclusion, which is leading on the implementation of Ireland's National Anti-Poverty Strategy. In particular, Combat Poverty applauds the consultation process undertaken in preparation of the NAPincl, seeking to address issues of regional and local concern as well as issues of standards in public services, issues for migrants and ethnic minority groups and consideration of appropriate indicators.

In drawing up the NAPincl, particular attention should be paid to the European context. This is the added value of the NAPincl, building upon the Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2002 *Building an Inclusive Society*. Thus the Irish NAPincl 2003-2005 should seek to:

- benchmark performance and set targets in a European context
- utilise European instruments such as the transnational exchange projects, the development of indicators to monitor the NAPincl and peer review of the plans
- underpin the NAPincl with a recognition of economic, social and cultural rights through setting and monitoring agreed minimum standards as the most effective way to achieve the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion in the longer term.

This submission proposes targets, policy measures and mechanisms which are designed to work towards achieving the prevention and elimination of poverty in Ireland, drawing on European best practice.

## 2. Executive Summary

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### 2.1 Long-Term Vision: Working Towards a Poverty-Free Society

Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion should set out a long-term vision to the year 2010 of a fully inclusive poverty-free society and the steps to be taken in the next two years to work towards this goal. Progress made in

recent years indicates that this is possible, but many issues remain to be addressed. Ireland should work towards the elimination of consistent poverty, the elimination of unemployment and a substantial reduction in relative income poverty to below the EU average. This would be supported by a fully inclusive society through addressing issues such as racism and discrimination and improving the provision, access to and integration of public services. This long-term vision should be underpinned by a recognition of the Government's commitment, and the support of the broader society, to work towards a poverty-free society, where everyone has the right to expect a certain standard of living guided by agreed minimum standards and entitlements.

To realise this vision a Government commitment is required that poverty elimination is a national priority and must be resourced accordingly. The existing National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) *Building an Inclusive Society* (2002) sets out a comprehensive range of targets to work towards the goal of eliminating poverty in Ireland. This NAPincl should strengthen the NAPS, adding a European dimension. A key feature of the NAPincl should be to identify appropriate policies and measures to deliver on the NAPS targets.

## **2.2 New Targets**

Ireland should aim to have one of the lowest poverty rates in Europe. In order to achieve this Ireland should benchmark its poverty performance against the best in Europe. Combat Poverty has identified the following areas for the setting/ improvement of targets, based on the European Council's guidance and the commonly agreed indicators.

### **Primary Outcome Targets**

- to reduce relative income poverty by a quarter by 2005, and to halve it by 2007
- to reduce the extent of income inequality in Ireland to below the EU average by 2005 and be amongst the lowest three countries in Europe by 2007
- to reduce the percentage of people of working age in jobless households so that Ireland performs amongst the best three countries in the European Union by 2007
- to reduce the proportion of early school leavers to 10 per cent by 2005
- to work towards Ireland achieving the average EU life expectancy.

### Secondary Targets for Groups in Vulnerable Situations

- *People with Disabilities*: to aim to reduce the numbers of people with disabilities who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent and if possible eliminate consistent poverty
- *Migrants and Ethnic Minority Groups, including Travellers*: to aim to reduce the number of migrants, and ethnic minority groups, including Travellers who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent and if possible eliminate consistent poverty
- *Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals*: to aim to reduce the numbers of gays, lesbians and bisexuals who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent and if possible eliminate consistent poverty.

### Policy Targets

- to raise the minimum social welfare rate to €150 per week, in current prices, by 2005
- to set the child income support package at €55 per week (approximately 35 per cent of the average industrial wage)
- to deliver 20,000 new local authority housing completions between 2003 and 2005
- to increase to 10,000 the number of pre-school places for disadvantaged children,
- to increase the medical card thresholds by 15 per cent for adults and reform the scheme.

## 2.3 Key Mechanisms

### Gender Mainstreaming

The EU requires a stronger gender dimension to the plan. In all policy areas, attention should be paid to the impact on men and women, and policies to tackle poverty and promote social inclusion should take this into account. There should be a particular focus on gender groups at high risk of poverty including: lone parents (mainly women), 'qualified adult dependants', older women, as well as men living alone.

### Poverty Proofing

The Plan should undertake to mainstream poverty issues across policy areas. In particular it should commit to the development and full implementation of poverty proofing, based on work done to date, and setting this within an equality framework. Consideration should be given to the idea of 'top slicing' where a percentage of each Department's budget is allocated specifically for poverty reduction/ social inclusion measures.

### **Provision of Quality Public Services**

The provision of quality and accessible public services is the mark of a successful modern society. The provision of such services is particularly important in promoting social inclusion for low-income groups and those who find themselves in vulnerable situations. Thus, there should be a particular emphasis in the NAPincl in putting in place policy measures and standards to ensure the provision of such services.

### **Regional/Local Implementation**

Key to ensuring the successful implementation of the NAPincl is to improve the delivery of services at local and regional levels, particularly through the local authorities, health boards, VECs, partnerships, community and voluntary groups, and the regional operational programmes of the National Development Plan. The development of integrated service delivery at local level should take account of learning from the Integrated Services Process and RAPID (Revitalising Areas through Planning, Investment and Development), Combat Poverty's Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage and the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network. The County/City Development Boards will play a key role in this.

There are particular issues of poverty and exclusion in the Border Region of Ireland as a result of the conflict situation in Northern Ireland. Particular attention needs to be paid to addressing issues of poverty and exclusion in this region, along with peacebuilding and reconciliation measures. Collaboration with Northern Ireland is especially relevant in this regard.

### **Monitoring, Benchmarking, Implementation and Data**

In order to deliver on the targets and commitments on NAPincl it will be necessary to:

- undertake ongoing consultation with all stakeholders to monitor progress in implementing the plan
- benchmark against best practice in the European Union, with a view to being amongst the best three countries across the range of indicators
- undertake to develop an appropriate data strategy supported by agreed indicators and ongoing monitoring and research.

### **Resources**

Given the current international economic circumstances, Ireland cannot rely on economic growth to lift people out of poverty. There will need to be additional revenue-raising to fund increased social inclusion, particularly a reduction in tax breaks in expenditures and a greater emphasis on value-for-money. The details of these policy measures are elaborated on in the body of the submission.

## 3. Major Trends and Challenges

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The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of the economic and social context for tackling poverty in Ireland. It begins with a description of the changing economic situation and then outlines trends in poverty, using statistical and qualitative data. The final section sets out the policy challenge for tackling poverty in an economic downturn.

### 3.1 Economic Context

This National Action Plan will be submitted at a challenging time. The Irish economy has expanded rapidly in the last decade and greater social inclusion has been achieved. However, the economy has now slowed. While unemployment is low, it is trending upwards. Jobs and the income and social integration they provide are critical to social inclusion. Higher unemployment raises the amount spent on unemployment payments and reduces the tax take. Slower economic growth also reduces tax revenue from the business sector. Appropriate and compatible macro- and micro-economic policies are critically important in maintaining employment and competitiveness.

Investment in physical and social infrastructure and service provision has both economic and social benefits. Good quality physical infrastructure is an important factor in allowing the economy to grow at its potential by catalysing private investment. Social investment builds human capital, and if done well provides ‘increasing returns’, so that initial investments more than repay themselves. Social investment also improves the quality of life and helps to bolster social cohesion.

Ireland now faces new poverty challenges. There are emerging vulnerable groups, such as migrants and ethnic minorities. Also social change, the disruption of traditional support systems and the emergence of new family forms have re-emphasised the importance of gender in considering the risks of poverty and social exclusion.

### 3.2 Poverty Trends

Recent poverty trends in Ireland are mixed. In the last 10 years, major progress has been made in reducing the official government measure of poverty (below 70 per cent of median income and experiencing basic deprivation) from 15.1 to 6.2 per cent of households (or from 14.5 to 5.5 per cent of persons).<sup>1</sup> 5.5 per cent of the population is equivalent to 210,000 people. Over the same period, however,

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<sup>1</sup> The data referred to here are taken from Brian Nolan *et al.* (2002), *Monitoring Poverty Trends in Ireland: Results from the 2000 Living in Ireland Survey*, Dublin: ESRI.

**Table 1: Poverty trends 1997-2000 ( percentage of persons)**

<b>Poverty measure</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2000</b>
<b>Consistent poverty</b> (70 per cent of median income and basic deprivation)	14.5	10.7	8	5.5
<b>Relative income poverty</b> (60 per cent of median income)	15.6	18.2	20	22.1

relative income poverty has increased from 18 to 22 per cent of the population, that is 844,000 people.<sup>2</sup> The fall in consistent poverty indicates that the living standards of the poorest section of society have improved, measured by a package of basic needs originally set in 1987. This improvement in basic living conditions reflects the impact of falling unemployment and higher welfare payments in the intervening years.

While this fall in consistent poverty is welcome, there are a number of cautionary notes. First, it is a cause of concern that a minority of society still does not have basic necessities such as a warm overcoat or a meal with meat, chicken or fish at least every second day. Second, the set of deprivation indicators requires updating to reflect changing expectations as to basic living standards. A revised set of deprivation indicators across a range of European countries indicates that 10.5 per cent of the Irish population are on low incomes and lacking basic necessities. Third, the increase in relative income poverty reflects the widening income gap between those on low incomes and the remainder of society, due to rapid income growth (wages and tax reductions) for those in work. While reflective of our recent unique period of high economic growth, the trend in income poverty is a matter of concern in terms of a long-term widening of divisions in society. Fourth, this information is based on national household surveys, and thus does not include people not living in households. People who are known to have relatively high levels of poverty but are not in the figures include people who are homeless, many Travellers and some people living in institutions. In addition, the information does not tell us about poverty risk within households but assumes that resources are shared equally. In particular, Combat Poverty Agency research indicates that child poverty may be under-reported.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Relative income poverty refers to the proportion of the population falling below a proportion of an average income, most commonly 60 per cent of median income. The median is the middle value of distribution when people are ranked from richest to poorest in the country. Consistent poverty measures this, along with indicators of basic deprivation, such as not being able to afford a warm overcoat.

<sup>3</sup> Sara Cantillon, Brenda Gannon and Brian Nolan (forthcoming), *The Allocation of Resources Within Households: Learning from Non-Monetary Indicators*, Institute of Public Administration in association with the Combat Poverty Agency.

Looking at the composition of the 5.5 per cent of people in consistent poverty, individuals in non-working households account for 70 per cent of this category, made-up of people working in the home (35 per cent), unemployed people (17 per cent), retired people (9 per cent) and disabled people (8 per cent). Employees are the main in-work category, accounting for a quarter of the consistently poor. In terms of poverty risk, the unemployed are the most vulnerable, with one-in-five likely to be affected. There are significant variations in poverty risk for various demographic groups. Thus, children are twice as likely to experience consistent poverty than adults, women have a 50 per cent higher poverty risk than men, older people are 1.6 times more likely to be poor than adults aged less than 64 years, and one-parent families and those with four or more children have by far the highest consistent poverty risk of all household types.

Turning to relative income poverty, slightly over a fifth (22 per cent) of the population were below 60 per cent of median income in 2000 (equivalent to €147 per week).<sup>4</sup> The composition of the income poor as between out-of-work and in-work is similar to the consistently poor (two-thirds/one-third), though there are changes among specific groups: the retired double their share to 17 per cent, while farmers and the self-employed each account for 8-9 per cent of the income poor. Risk of income poverty is highest among the unemployed, disabled people and those working in the home, with one in every two affected. Among the general population, older people – in particular older women – have a high risk of income poverty. Also, single adults on their own join one-parent and larger families as households vulnerable to income poverty.

### 3.3 Lived Experience of Poverty

The lived experience of poverty in Ireland has recently been graphically illustrated by a study on low-income families.<sup>5</sup> The families were chosen to reflect the broad spectrum of circumstances facing Irish families in poverty: rural and urban, one and two parents, small and large families and working and non-working.

The average income of the families in the study was about €124 per week. Almost all of their money went on food, household bills and their children's needs so that these households were very vulnerable to shortages for regular and irregular expenses. One in three households highlighted health problems in relation to children. Many of the women suffered from depression and were on medication. The level of educational and other resources available to the families was also limited. People's incomes were low because of their employment situation, but

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Nolan *et al.* (2002), *op cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Mary Daly and Madeline Leonard (2002) *Against All Odds: Family Life on a Low Income in Ireland*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration in association with the Combat Poverty Agency.

equally many people could not secure employment because educational and other human resources available to the families were limited. Strategic policy interventions can break this cycle of exclusion to the benefit of people in poverty and society as a whole.

### 3.4 Tackling Poverty in a Period of Economic Downturn

The policy framework for tackling poverty is set out in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (2002), *Building an Inclusive Society*, the social partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*, and the *Agreed Programme for Government*. The strategy for tackling poverty is founded upon a model of economic growth, high employment, quality public services and lifelong learning. Rapid economic growth in the late 1990s was the basis for the reduction in consistent poverty, generating both increased employment opportunities and additional resources for welfare improvements.

However, with the economic downturn, this approach may have to be adjusted. One illustration of the new policy challenge is evidenced in Budget 2003. The welfare allocation in the Budget was €530 million, half the amount provided in Budget 2002. The modest income gains for welfare recipients in Budget 2003 are threatened by a forecast inflation rate of 5 per cent. In addition, there is evidence that the inflation rate underestimates the impact of price increases on lower-income households.<sup>6</sup> Of particular concern is the fact that a significant component of inflation is government taxation measures and user charges, which disproportionately impact on lower-income groups.

The reduced welfare allocation in Budget 2003 is reflected in the limited progress towards key welfare targets for tackling poverty.<sup>7</sup> The likelihood is that government expenditure will be of a similar magnitude in the next few Budgets due to revenue constraints. This indicates that a policy shift is required to target resources towards those in poverty. One element of this will be to generate the additional tax resources that will enable government to make a significant impact on poverty. The commitment in *Sustaining Progress* to review ways of broadening the tax base is important in this regard, given that the estimated cost of discretionary tax exemptions is €7.3 billion, which is the equivalent of a quarter of current government revenue.

There is also a strong case for increased investment in social provision.<sup>8</sup> However, in some cases, higher investment may not result in better services because of

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6 E. Murphy and E. Garvey (unpublished), A consumer price index for low-income households in Ireland (1989-2001). Available from Combat Poverty Agency.

7 For details, see Table 2 in Combat Poverty Agency *Analysis of Budget 2003*.

8 Virpi Timonen (2003), *Irish social expenditure in a comparative context*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration in association with the Combat Poverty Agency.

inefficiencies in service delivery structures. As set out in *Sustaining Progress* a greater emphasis on service standards, customer involvement and overall value-for-money is required. Also, a stronger role for voluntary and community organisations in service delivery can produce better outcomes, especially in terms of meeting the needs of groups in vulnerable situations. There is also scope for better targeting of resources within policy areas. Thus, the priority should be on services where early intervention and prevention can prevent subsequent inequalities, e.g. primary education, primary health care.

Finally, employment policy should be re-assessed in the light of job trends. Government programmes should be focused on those in low-paid, low-skilled employment, who are most at risk of job loss. In addition, job supports should be directed at those facing the greatest difficulties, such as the long-term unemployed, lone parents, people with disabilities and other at-risk groups.

## 4. Assessing Progress towards Eliminating Poverty

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This section assesses the extent to which overall targets in relation to poverty reduction have been achieved. Ireland's first National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2001-2003 was submitted at the time the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) was being reviewed and hence did not contain any new targets. The revised NAPS *Building an Inclusive Society*, launched in February 2002, contains 36 poverty reduction targets. Some of these targets are quantifiable, whereas others are dependent on improved data sources for measuring their progress. Further 'targets' could be more properly referred to as objectives or aspirational statements. Table 2 below sets out some of the key targets in the revised NAPS and the progress made in the interim towards achieving these targets.

**Table 2: Assessing progress in meeting key poverty reduction targets**

Target	Progress
To reduce the numbers of those who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent, and if possible eliminate consistent poverty	6 per cent of the population are living in consistent poverty (2000)
To achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare by 2007	Current lowest rate of social welfare is €124.80

To eliminate <b>long-term unemployment</b> as soon as circumstances permit, but in any event not later than 2007	Long-term unemployment rate is 1.3 per cent (2002)
To reduce the level of <b>unemployment</b> experienced by vulnerable groups towards the national average by 2007	Unemployment national average is 4.5 per cent (2002)
To halve the proportion of <b>pupils with serious literacy difficulties</b> by 2006	11 per cent of pupils (15 year olds) had serious reading difficulties in 2000
To reduce the proportion of the <b>population aged 16-64 with restricted literacy</b> to below 10 - 20 per cent by 2007	About 25 per cent of the population aged 16-64 had restricted literacy in 1995
To reduce the number of <b>young people who leave the school system early</b> , 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	Completion rate was 81 per cent in 1999
To reduce the gap in <b>premature mortality</b> between the lowest and highest socio-economic group by at least 10 per cent for circulatory diseases, for cancers and for injuries and poisoning by 2007	In 1998, the mortality rate for the lowest compared with the highest socio-economic group was: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 120 per cent for circulatory diseases</li> <li>■ 110 per cent for cancer</li> <li>■ 160 per cent for injuries and poisoning</li> <li>■ 130 per cent for all deaths</li> </ul>
To reduce <b>the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest and highest socio-economic group</b> by 10 per cent from the current level, by 2007	In the 1990s, women in the unemployed socio-economic group were over twice as likely to give birth to low weight babies as women in the higher professional group
To ensure that <b>housing supply</b> is brought more in 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	Housing completions 2000-2 were 160,109 or 32 per cent of target

To deliver 41,500 <b>local authority housing</b> unit starts (including acquisitions) between 2000 and 2006	Local authority housing acquired and commenced 2000-2: 16,564 or 40 per cent of target
Over the period to 2007, to reduce the numbers of <b>children</b> who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent, and if possible, eliminate consistent poverty	8 per cent of children are living in consistent poverty (2000)
Over the period to 2007, to reduce the numbers of women who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent, and if possible, eliminate consistent poverty	5 per cent of women are living in consistent poverty (2000)
To increase the <b>employment participation rate of women</b> to an average of more than 60 per cent in 2010	The female participation rate was 48.9 per cent in 2002
Over the period to 2007, to reduce the numbers of <b>older people</b> who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent, and if possible, eliminate consistent poverty	7 per cent of older people are living in consistent poverty (2000)
To reduce the gap in <b>life expectancy between the Traveller Community and the whole population</b> by at least 10 per cent by 2007	Life expectancy at birth for Traveller men is 9.9 years less than for settled men and 11.9 years less for Traveller women than for settled women
To increase the <b>transfer rate of Travellers to post-primary schools</b> to 95 per cent by 2004	Current transfer rate is 80 per cent
To increase the <b>participation by students with disabilities at third level</b> to 1.35 per cent by 2003 and 1.8 per cent by 2006	Current participation rate is 0.9 per cent
Over the period to 2007, to reduce the number of <b>farm households</b> who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent, and if possible, eliminate consistent poverty	1.5 per cent of farm households are living in consistent poverty (2000)

The table identifies the progress that is being made in many areas. In addition, the targets are wide-ranging and reflect the necessity of a multi-dimensional approach to poverty reduction. In NAPincl, the European primary and secondary commonly agreed indicators should be added to these targets and progress monitored.

## 5. Strategic Approach, Main Objectives and Key Targets

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### 5.1 Overall Vision

The reduction of poverty is most effectively achieved through a combination of productionist (economic), welfarist and community based approaches, and synergies between these. There is widespread consensus that provision by the state of social welfare, and high quality, efficiently delivered social services have key roles to play in poverty reduction. The mixed policy approach as defined in the NAPS is to:

- sustain economic growth and employment
- provide adequate levels of income support, while facilitating employment
- address the needs of high-risk groups
- provide high-quality public services
- tackle intergenerational poverty
- support disadvantaged communities.

Within this overall approach, the government has proposed a strategy of targeting the most vulnerable in society, based on the following targets:

- provision of a basic welfare payment of €150 per week (2002 values) by 2007, incorporating a child income support rate of 33-35 per cent of the minimum adult rate and various subsidiary welfare improvements
- elimination of long-term unemployment
- reduction in illiteracy and early-school leaving
- reduction in health inequalities
- greater access to housing and accommodation.

Economic and social development are often viewed as being in competition, but there are significant complementarities between the two. For example, investment in housing contributes to the development of human capital, in the form of a healthier and more productive workforce.<sup>9</sup> More socially cohesive societies have

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<sup>9</sup> Gary S. Becker (1993), *Human Capital*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

lower crime rates and this thereby offsets the necessity of other expenditure.<sup>10</sup> While Ireland has converged on, or overtaken, many of the European Union states economically, significant infrastructural and social deficits remain and these, in turn, have substantial economic costs which may block further development.

Poverty reduction and its ultimate elimination must be a national priority. The Combat Poverty Agency fully supports the government's goal of eliminating consistent poverty by 2007. In the fight against poverty a target should now be set to reduce relative income poverty. Eliminating poverty would be an important step towards allowing everyone in Ireland to live in human dignity and achieve their potential.

## 5.2 New Targets

Ireland should aim to have amongst the lowest poverty rates in Europe. In order to achieve this Ireland should benchmark its poverty performance against the best in Europe. Combat Poverty has identified the following areas for the setting/ improvement of targets, based on the European Council's guidance and the commonly agreed indicators.

### Primary Outcome Targets

- Across Europe poverty is measured using the relative income poverty measure. High levels of relative income poverty have many negative impacts on the quality of people's lives and on social cohesion. Combat Poverty recommends that the NAPincl sets a target to reduce relative income poverty by a quarter by 2005, and to halve it by 2007.
- Ireland has one of the higher rates of income inequality in the EU. The EU monitors income inequality and in order to reduce relative income poverty it is necessary to reduce income inequality. The NAPincl. should set a target to reduce the extent of income inequality in Ireland to below the EU average by 2005 and to be amongst the lowest three countries in Europe by 2007.
- Joblessness is still the main cause of poverty. In Ireland in 2001, approximately 10 per cent of people of working age lived in jobless households. A target should be set to reduce this so that Ireland performs amongst the best three countries in the European Union on this measure by 2007.
- Educational qualifications are a key route out of poverty. It is proposed to set a target to reduce the proportion of early school leavers to 10 per cent by 2005.
- Life expectancy in Ireland is the lowest in the EU. Increasing life expectancy will take time. People living in poverty are particularly at risk of morbidity

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10 Ivana Bacik *et al.*, 'Crime and Poverty in Dublin: an analysis of the association between community deprivation, District Court appearance and sentence severity' in Ivana Bacik and Michael O'Connell (eds.) (1998), *Crime and Poverty in Ireland*, Dublin: Round Hall Sweet and Maxwell.

and premature mortality. A target should be set to work towards achieving the average EU life expectancy.

### **Secondary Targets for Groups in Vulnerable Situations**

The revised NAPS (2002) *Building an Inclusive Society* has set a wide range of targets for the reduction and elimination of poverty. A number of these targets relate to groups in vulnerable situations, i.e. women, children and older people. These targets should be retained. There are also a number of areas where groups in vulnerable situations are recognised but for whom poverty reduction targets have not been set. To work towards a reduction in the risk of poverty for these groups the following targets are proposed:

- *People with Disabilities*: to aim to reduce the numbers of people with disabilities who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent and if possible eliminate consistent poverty. This will require improved data collection as well as additional policy measures to tackle the risk of poverty for disabled people.
- *Migrants and Ethnic Minority Groups, including Travellers*: to aim to reduce the number of migrants, and ethnic minority groups, including Travellers who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent and if possible eliminate consistent poverty. This will require improved data collection as well as additional policy measures to tackle the risk of poverty for migrants and ethnic minority groups, including Travellers.
- *Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals*: to aim to reduce the numbers of gays, lesbians and bisexuals who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent and if possible eliminate consistent poverty. Again this will require improved data collection as well as additional policy measures to tackle the risk of poverty for gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Some members of this group were identified as at a particular risk of poverty in the original NAPS (*Sharing in Progress, 1997*) and in the poverty proofing guidelines. Research by the Combat Poverty Agency, the Equality Authority and the National Economic and Social Forum has identified poverty and exclusion issues for this group.

The three groupings outlined above can face discrimination which can lead to poverty. These wider discriminatory issues need to be addressed to ensure their full inclusion.

### **Key Policy Targets**

Combat Poverty has highlighted a number of particular policy targets for emphasis in the NAPIncl. To achieve these targets, an increase in revenue is required, in addition to public service reform which will deliver greater efficiency. The suggested targets are as follows:

- to raise the minimum social welfare rate to €150 per week, in current prices, by 2005

- to set the child income support package at €55 per week (approximately 35 per cent of the average industrial wage). This would require raising Child Benefit to €34.34 per week, as promised by the government, in the 2004 Budget, and raising the basic Child Dependant Allowance to €20.60
- to deliver 20,000 new local authority housing completions between 2003 and 2005
- to increase to 10,000 the number of pre-school places for disadvantaged children
- to increase the medical card thresholds by 15 per cent for adults and reform the scheme.

Section 6 proposes policy measures which would work towards the achievement of these targets.

## 6. Policy Measures

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The Combat Poverty Agency believes that an approach which links rights with standards is the most effective way of achieving the goal of poverty elimination and the enhancement of social inclusion. This approach is in line with Ireland's international treaty commitments, while acknowledging scarcity and compromise.<sup>11</sup> The issue is how rights are most effectively delivered.

### Objective 1: Participation in Employment and Facilitating Access to Resources, Rights, Goods and Services

#### 6.1.1 Employment

An expanding labour market in the past decade has increased people's chances of escaping unemployment. However, particular groups of people are at a high risk of experiencing prolonged spells of unemployment. The inter-related factors of educational attainment, age, gender, previous work-experience and the duration of unemployment determine why some people are successful in finding work more quickly than others.

Unemployment remains the largest single cause of poverty. The priority is to remove the remaining structural barriers to employment, especially for women, older people, people with disabilities and members of ethnic minorities. Also, unemployment has begun to increase again and this trend is forecast to continue at least in the short term. This is most likely to affect low-skilled workers in short-term contracts and those in part-time employment, mostly women. Combat Poverty

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<sup>11</sup> Rory O'Donnell, presentation to NAPIncl consultation seminar on Public Services, Dublin, 14 May, 2003.

recommends that the following areas receive high priority:

### **Targets**

- Ensure existing targets are met.

### **Priority Actions**

#### **Access to Employment and Training**

- Facilitate employment creation
- Ensure there are no further cuts in the Community Employment (CE) Scheme. The review of the Scheme should clarify its objectives
- Reverse changes in the Back-to-Work Allowance with a view to returning eligibility to one year; after five years unemployment potential participants will be too distant from the labour market
- Develop a 'profiling system' that would identify those most likely to experience difficulties in escaping unemployment and long-term unemployment
- Develop and make sustainable the jobs developed through the Community Employment Scheme, the Back-to-Work Initiative, the Social Economy Programme
- Reduce barriers for those entering the labour force, especially for vulnerable groups
- Facilitate and resource the Employment Services to carry out planned career development that offers sustained outcomes for women and men and that takes into account the particular needs of vulnerable groups.

### **Welfare to Work**

- Fulfil the commitment to carry out a comprehensive audit of welfare-to-work practices within the Department of Social and Family Affairs to eliminate employment and poverty traps
- Review the eligibility guidelines for retention of the Medical Card vis-à-vis former Job Initiative and Back-to-Work Allowance participants and long-term unemployed people and their spouses
- Assist with child care costs for those in low paid employment.

### **Progressing to better work**

- Target investment in education and training on people in low-paid employment, people with low levels of educational qualifications and people who are unemployed, particularly families headed by an unemployed lone parent
- Provide improved scheduling of available training
- Develop 'bridge-building' programmes to ensure that transitions from unemployment are into high-quality sustainable jobs.<sup>12</sup>

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12 J. Peck and N. Theodore (2000), 'Beyond "employability"', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 24 (2000): 733.

## 6.1.2 Housing and Accommodation

Housing and accommodation are vital social goods with important impacts on quality of life and life chances, poverty, health and the economy. An effective response to the acute shortage of good quality affordable accommodation for those living in poverty will require responses on a variety of fronts. There is a need to pay particular attention to social housing and the private rented sector. The provision of social and affordable housing should also be integrated with the National Spatial Strategy to ensure it does not reinforce further uneven development. Homelessness remains a serious and acute social problem, particularly in Dublin where there are an estimated 2,583 people who are homeless.<sup>13</sup> Homelessness is an abrogation of basic human rights and is incompatible with human dignity.

Combat Poverty recommends the following:

### Targets

- The NAPIncl should commit, at the very least, to delivering previous targets (in *Building an Inclusive Society* and the National Development Plan) on housing starts and completions for local authority and social housing and ensure that these are met annually by the end of 2005 and thereafter. The trend of increasing numbers on local authority housing lists should be halted as a matter of urgency
- Halve the number of homeless people over the next two years, and eliminate homelessness by 2007
- Deliver on Traveller Accommodation Plans
- Eliminate fuel poverty.

### Priority Actions

- A process should be established whereby the commitments in local authority Traveller Accommodation Plans are met annually by end of 2005 and thereafter
- Under NAPIncl, an investigation should be completed that examines the impact of Irish policy treatment of owner occupation, particularly tax treatment, on the ability of people in poverty and on low incomes to access the housing market
- Budget 2003 increased the 'own contribution' to mortgage and rent allowance under the supplementary welfare allowance and this may restrict people's choices. To increase the supply of good quality housing for people dependent on social welfare there is a need to support the development of social, non-market alternatives.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Homeless Agency (2002), *Counted in 2002: the report of the assessment of homelessness in Dublin*, Dublin: Homeless Agency.

<sup>14</sup> See David Mullins, Mary Lee Rhodes, Arthur Williamson (2003), *Non-Profit Housing Associations in Ireland, North and South: Changing Forms and Challenging Futures*, Belfast: Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

- Affordability is a major issue and cause of poverty in the private rented sector.<sup>15</sup> Under NAPincl, greater financial and human resources should be allocated by the relevant authorities to promote and ensure greater enforcement of legislative guarantees on tenancy agreements, rent books, minimum standards and landlord registration. By 2005 each relevant authority should publish an annual report on the outcomes of such enforcement practices
- Sufficient resources must be made available to ensure delivery of the Integrated Strategy on Homelessness and associated strategies.

### 6.1.3 Income Adequacy

The elimination of poverty and social exclusion is dependent on every person having an adequate income that facilitates him/her to live with dignity and to participate fully in society. The Irish tax and welfare system is a 'low tax, low spend' system and consequently the level of redistribution achieved through the system is also relatively low.<sup>16</sup> In Ireland social transfers, other than pensions, are heavily concentrated on low-income individuals and households. In this way welfare spending is more directly targeted on those who most need it. However, this approach has also given those who are better-off incentives to take out private insurances promoted by the state through tax reliefs, leading to the development of a 'two-tier system'. People in receipt of welfare payments either have rationed access to services such as health care, have to accept lower quality services, or both. This has further knock-on effects for health, human capital formation and life-time earnings.

In order to tackle poverty it is necessary to reconceptualise the nature of the Irish welfare state. One approach would be to move closer to the Danish model of 'flexicurity', with a flexible labour market and a strong welfare state, where adequate income and access to high quality services are guaranteed. Higher social expenditure requires higher rates of taxation, broadening the tax base and/or the reduction of tax reliefs.<sup>17</sup>

#### Objectives

- The NAPS objective commits to ensuring that employment, tax, social welfare and pensions provide sufficient income for people to move out of poverty and live in a manner compatible with human dignity. Combat Poverty

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<sup>15</sup> Tony Fahey, Brian Nolan and Bertrand Maitre (forthcoming), *Housing, Poverty and Wealth in Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

<sup>16</sup> Virpi Timonen (2003), *Irish social expenditure in a comparative international context*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration in association with the Combat Poverty Agency.

<sup>17</sup> Analysis of the tax system and the impact on poverty reduction is the subject of a Combat Poverty Agency study to be published in the future.

recommends that in the forthcoming NAPincl (2003/5) the current NAPS objective is revised to incorporate the notion that income policies support the full participation of people in society

- Combat Poverty recommends that the forthcoming NAPincl prioritises income redistribution to reduce the extent of relative poverty. Much of the revenue to achieve this could be found through a review of and reduction of tax expenditures.

#### **Priority Actions**

- Assess and publish the allocation of tax and social welfare allocations in each Budget for their impact on poverty
- Index welfare payments in line with wage growth or inflation (whichever is the highest)
- For the lowest welfare payments, in addition to indexed welfare increases, frontload payments in 2004/5 to appreciably reduce the margin between the lowest social welfare payments and the government commitment of €150 (in current values) by 2007.

#### **6.1.4 Health**

Research has shown that when it comes to health care, prevention is better than cure, not only for patients but also for government finances. Preventive, community health care approaches have an important contribution to make in this regard.

The design and delivery of a fair and equitable service should draw on the expertise and experience of people living in poverty and those who represent them. Cross-department working and health proofing of public policy should enhance health promoting policies and actions at all levels.

Tackling health inequalities is linked to broader measures to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and social exclusion. Policy measures on income inequality, income adequacy, child poverty, macro socio-economic policies of redistribution, tax/welfare reform, broadening the tax base and local implementation of NAPS will support action on health inequalities. Over the longer term, Combat Poverty recommends working towards the development of a universal health care system.

While Combat Poverty supports the objectives relating to health in the revised NAPS, the following priority actions are recommended for the NAPincl.

#### **Priority Actions**

- Improve eligibility to the General Medical System (GMS) by increasing the income thresholds. This should be complemented by reform and restructuring

- of the GMS as a component of a comprehensive primary health care service
- Establish and resource a community development health network as a mechanism for consultation, monitoring and supporting NAPIncl
  - Increase resources and support mechanisms for integrated approaches to tackling health inequalities at national, county/city and local levels
  - Invest and research into the development of a universal health system
  - Address operational issues in acute services that create problems for those on low incomes and women in particular, e.g. 'user-friendly' appointments, crèche facilities, and better co-ordination of services.

### 6.1.5 Education

Based on the experience of developing the Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage, Combat Poverty contends that local integrated multi-level responses, incorporating all interests involved in the education and welfare of learners, should be at the core of efforts to address educational disadvantage in Ireland. Specifically, Combat Poverty contends that there is a key role for local area-based networks in stimulating and developing integrated responses to educational disadvantage.

Combat Poverty supports the objectives on education contained in the revised NAPS (2002) *Building an Inclusive Society* and reiterates the recommendations relating to educational disadvantage and early childhood education. High quality early education has important benefits for children in terms of their cognitive development. There are also other benefits including building future human capital and allowing parents to more easily access the labour market.<sup>18</sup> The Combat Poverty Agency supports the targets set out in the NAPS and recommends the following priority actions and additional targets:

#### Targets

- Eliminate the costs of participating in education for disadvantaged families
- Double the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering third level education by 2005.

#### Priority Actions

- Reduce the student/teacher ratio in disadvantaged schools
- Mainstream the development of local area-based networks to tackle disadvantage.

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<sup>18</sup> This has been noted in the international literature as an important issue in Ireland. Ireland has a high 'incompatibility score' between having two or more children and employment for women (Blanchet and Penneac [1993] cited in Esping-Anderson, p. 69). Until such time as universal child care access has been guaranteed, great care should be taken in reducing the number of places for lone parents on programmes such as community employment (CE) as this risks complete detachment from the labour market.

## 6.1.6 Culture and Leisure

Culture and leisure have a vital role to play in achieving greater social inclusion. They are also important in children's development and can help raise public awareness around poverty and exclusion issues. Community arts are also an effective medium for delivering messages around health and well being.

### Priority Actions

- Resource the National Play Policy being developed by the National Children's Office
- Promote community arts initiatives.

## Objective 2: Preventing the Risks of Social Exclusion

### 6.2.1 Promoting E-inclusion

The emerging new information society offers both opportunities and dangers. It opens up possibilities for greater prosperity, information access, participation and the development of new forms of networking to facilitate problem solving. However, the risk is that some sections of society will be further left behind by new technological developments and that these will constitute a further layer of exclusion: a digital divide.

In terms of usage there are a number of 'late adopters' groups who are vulnerable to e-exclusion. Late adopters are 'adults without Internet access or using it less than once a month'. Those groups particularly at risk include women working in the home (425,000, 78 per cent of all), retired people (235,000, 90 per cent of all) and unemployed people (90,000, 73 per cent of all).<sup>19</sup>

There are five dimensions to achieving greater e-inclusion: skills, infrastructure, access, incentives and removal of structural barriers. Incentives must be put in place to encourage late adopters to use the internet: they must see that there is a practical benefit in order to engage with information technology. Structural barriers to participation must also be considered. For example, women working in the home may find it difficult to get the time to take internet training.

### Targets

- The government should put in place policies to ensure that vulnerable groups move towards having the same percentage internet usage as the general population

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<sup>19</sup> Itech Research (2003), *e-inclusion: Expanding the Information Society in Ireland*, report for the inclusion working group of the information society, mimeographed, Dublin.

- No child should leave school without internet and email training by 2005.

#### **Priority Actions**

- Integrate internet and email training into primary and secondary school curricula
- Require all publicly funded research with an ICT or information society dimension to include social inclusion objectives and incorporate appropriate indicators into their evaluation processes
- Bring forward proposals based on the experience of the Community Application of Information Technology (CAIT) initiatives
- Include in the NAPincl the indicators to measure the new risks of exclusion associated with the emergence of the knowledge society.<sup>20</sup>

### **6.2.2 Indebtedness**

Indebtedness is a major problem for low-income families. This is a social problem, linked to income adequacy, and not generally an individual failing. As with other issues a preventive approach should be taken. This would entail a twin-track strategy of delivering targets on income adequacy and ensuring access to appropriate and affordable credit, thus by-passing the exorbitant interest rates in the informal credit market. Credit unions should be supported in delivering appropriate credit to groups in vulnerable situations.

#### **Targets**

- Substantially reduce indebtedness amongst low-income families resulting from recurrent expenditures by 2005
- Ensure universal access to basic banking and credit facilities by 2005.

#### **Priority Action**

- Monitor levels of indebtedness through data collection.

### **6.2.3 Family Solidarity**

A general redefinition of the family is taking place which involves a move to a focus on the obligations of parenthood rather than marital ties. The increasing diversity of family types has implications for the types of policies required to support families. Some family types have a high risk of poverty. Families with four or more children and one-parent families have a one in two chance of being poor.

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20 Information Society Commission (forthcoming), *Building the Knowledge Society*, Dublin: Department of the Taoiseach.

### Target

- Universal access to high quality, affordable child care by 2005.

### Priority Actions

- Extend administrative arrangements to ensure individual payments of social welfare
- Consider individualisation through social insurance.

## Objective 3: To Help the Most Vulnerable

### 6.3.1 Introduction

There are groupings within society that have a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than others. Evidence from poverty research, using household surveys, indicates that children, women and older people have a relatively high risk of poverty. While data are limited in identifying the proportion of the population with disabilities it is clear from the data which are available that households headed by someone who is ill or has a disability have a very high risk of poverty.

Household surveys are limited in their ability to identify sub-groups of the population who do not always identify as having a household status. Yet from other research there are groupings who have a poverty risk and where policies need to be put in place to address their particular needs. These groupings include Travellers, other ethnic minorities and migrants, and some gays, lesbians and bisexuals. For all of these groupings discrimination and exclusion can exacerbate their poverty risk.

It is known that the causes and experience of poverty can differ as between urban and rural areas. For this reason it is important to focus on the needs of urban and rural dwellers and put in place appropriate policies to address their particular needs.

### 6.3.2 Substantially Reducing Child Poverty

Children in Ireland have a relatively high poverty risk. The most recent data (2000) show that 8 per cent of children are at risk of consistent poverty (low income and being deprived), with 25 per cent living in low-income households (below 60 per cent of median income). While trends show a welcome decline in child poverty, in comparative terms Ireland has a relatively high level of child poverty.

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In-depth research by Combat Poverty on the experience of poverty<sup>21</sup> illustrates the

21 M. Daly, and M. Leonard, (2002) *Against All Odds: Family Life on a Low Income in Ireland*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration in association with the Combat Poverty Agency.

difficulties for families trying to survive on a low income. While children's needs are put first, children have difficulty fitting in with their peers, especially in relation to the wearing of brand names. This often results in the children being bullied at school. Many of the children also had poor health. Further research undertaken for Combat Poverty by the ESRI<sup>22</sup> shows that child poverty is a specific issue within many poor households and some non-poor households.

Combat Poverty is undertaking research to assess the costs of child-rearing. Under NAPincl, the findings of this research should inform a review of child income support and its ability to meet the costs of rearing children, particularly for households in poverty. The possible taxation of child benefit, as a mechanism for targeting enhanced welfare outcomes for poor households, should be incorporated into this review.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy *Building an Inclusive Society* (2002) contains a number of targets for the reduction of child poverty. These targets should be retained, along with the subsidiary targets and policy actions and measures in the associated *Framework Document*. In particular attention should be given to the following:

#### **Priority Actions**

- Ensure that in addressing child poverty a children's rights approach is adopted, as set out by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and accepted in the National Children's Strategy
- Ensure that education, health and housing targets are met, as set out in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Meet existing commitments in Child Benefit and consider review of child income support, based on forthcoming research from Combat Poverty
- Expand the school meal/breakfast scheme
- Further develop initiatives like Springboard and Family Services Projects
- Implement the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland.

### **6.3.3 Independence and Well-Being of Women**

Vulnerable groups can be 'invisible' to policy makers and society generally. However, recently there has been a wider recognition of the way gender discrimination impedes access to opportunities and services. In this regard the overall strategy should acknowledge and address the following:

- The lesser social and economic status of women and their greater risk of poverty as compared to men: what is sometimes called the 'feminisation' of

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<sup>22</sup> Sara Cantillon, Brenda Gannon, and Brian Nolan (forthcoming) *The Allocation of Resources within Households*, *op. cit.*

poverty. Women make up the majority of vulnerable groups such as lone parents, older people living alone and people 'working full-time from home'

- 'Gender blindness' in a range of social and economic policies that limits their effectiveness in reducing poverty amongst women, and in turn children
- Historical and contemporary unequal participation of women (particularly marginalised/poor women) in policy and planning structures
- The focus on increasing employment rates for women, balanced with a recognition of the substantial existing social and economic contribution women make as carers for both adults and children. The NAPincl must also address the needs of women for whom employment is not an option due to caring responsibilities, retirement, ill health or disability and the issue that the majority in low paid/ part time work are women, limiting the benefits of employment in reducing poverty.

#### **Targets**

- Reduce the percentage of households headed by women, specifically older women, lone parents and women working full-time from the home, living in relative income poverty to the national average by 2005
- Substantially reduce the number of women on low pay.

#### **Priority Actions**

- Targeted strategies such as the National Women's Strategy to be poverty proofed with the most marginalised women being prioritised, and NAPincl to be gender proofed, with specific indicators on women and poverty identified and monitored
- Removal of barriers to education, employment and employment progression, particularly the lack of affordable child care provision, and financial disincentives to enter employment/education for those on benefits
- Provision of disaggregated data for women in all official national and local statistics.

### **6.3.4 Reducing the Risk of Poverty for Older People**

In 2000 it was estimated that 7 per cent of older people lived in consistent poverty, and 43 per cent lived in low-income households (below 60 per cent of median income). Two key issues are worthy of consideration: (i) poverty among older people has been increasing, particularly at 60 per cent of median income; and (ii) within the older population there are certain groupings at a particularly high risk of poverty.

Poverty trends among the older population have been increasing because pension increases, though significant in recent years, have been lower than the general

increase in household income. A trend of increasing poverty risk among older people is of concern as the proportion of older people in the population is set to increase in the years ahead.

Within the older population there are those who have a particularly high risk of poverty. These include older women living alone and older people in rural areas.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy, *Building an Inclusive Society* (2002), contains four targets for the reduction of poverty among older people. The targets are both short-term and long-term. Action should be taken to ensure the achievement of the short-term targets by year-end and medium term actions should be taken to ensure progress towards the longer term targets. This requires implementation of policies and measures in the *Framework Document* and in *Sustaining Progress*. In particular, attention should be given to the following:

#### **Priority Actions**

- Policies should ensure that older people have access to adequate and affordable health care
- Policies should ensure that older people have access to adequate and affordable housing. In particular there needs to be provision of integrated housing with care facilities and social support
- The transport needs of older people need to be met, particularly in rural areas
- There needs to be more flexibility in relation to retirement age and the capacity of older people to take up employment opportunities.

### **6.3.5 Recognising and Reducing Poverty for People with Disabilities**

Households headed by a person with a disability have one of the highest risks of poverty. Using the consistent poverty measure, households headed by a disabled or ill person have a 11 per cent risk of poverty. Using a low-income measure (60 per cent of median income), more than half of households headed by a disabled or ill person (54 per cent) are at risk of poverty – this is the highest risk for any grouping.

Accurate data have been among the reasons given for lack of targeted measures to address poverty for people with disabilities. While this is important in measuring progress towards meeting poverty reduction targets it is not a good reason for lack of policies to improve the opportunities for people with disabilities.

The policies presented in the draft NAPincl document are seen as being too focused on rehabilitation, retraining and employment needs. The needs of people with a disability should be underpinned by a recognition of the rights of people with

disability to full and independent lives, free from poverty. This should be reflected in the forthcoming Disabilities Bill. Policies should be put in place to set standards which would action these rights.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy *Building an Inclusive Society* (2002) contains two targets for the reduction of poverty for people with disabilities. These are specifically in relation to access to third level education and respite services for carers. Reference is made to the need to improve data on people with disabilities. The targets should be added to as follows:

#### **Targets**

- To reduce the number of people with disabilities who are ‘consistently poor’ to below 2 per cent and, if possible eliminating consistent poverty
- To improve and support the participation of students with a disability at primary and secondary level education, as well as at third level.

#### **Priority Actions**

- Improve data collection so as to collect more accurate data on people with disabilities
- Introduce a ‘costs of disability’ payment, which would take account of the extra costs associated with disability
- Extend the personal assistants programme
- Ensure the implementation of Part M of the building regulations
- Ensure public transport, including rural transport initiatives, are accessible
- Provide better supports for people with mental health disabilities
- Provide at least the minimum wage to people in sheltered employment.

### **6.3.6 Integration of Minority Ethnic Groups**

The integration and social inclusion of Ireland’s minority ethnic groups will be central to achieving the overall objective that they are not more likely to experience poverty than majority group members. Combat Poverty welcomes the government’s acknowledgement that dedicated objectives and policy measures are required to tackle the specific needs of minority ethnic groups. This is particularly the case given indications that racism and discrimination can lead to or worsen existing levels of poverty amongst these groups.<sup>23</sup>

The overall NAPinl strategy should be informed by the following principles, and be underpinned by a recognition of the right to citizenship and associated economic, social and cultural entitlements:

- A commitment to addressing racism and discrimination
- Promotion of interculturalism in synergy with other government strategies, in particular the annual Budget, the National Development Plan and partnership agreement, to ensure that they are proofed for impact on minority ethnic groups
- Participation of ethnic minority groups in developing and monitoring of NAPincl and other relevant government strategies at local and national level.

#### **Target**

- To reduce the number of migrants, and ethnic minority groups, including Travellers, who are consistently poor to below 2 per cent and, if possible eliminating consistent poverty.

#### **Priority Actions**

- Improve data collection. As the current NAPS lacks specific targets in this area on the basis of limited data, there is pressing need for a clear picture of the prevalence of poverty amongst ethnic minorities groups in Ireland. This should be priority area in the NAPS data strategy
- Undertake a scoping exercise to identify current levels of participation and barriers to full participation. A participation protocol for engagement with ethnic minority communities should be developed
- Alter existing policies that directly contribute to poverty and undermine the NAPincl objectives of encouraging self reliance through promoting empowerment and equal access to goods and services for all, such as the system of asylum seeker direct provision and bar on employment
- Improve access to employment and education services for refugees, migrants and other ethnic minorities, including Travellers. Focus on outcomes as well as access is important to ensure that services are effective given the particular needs of ethnic minorities.

### **6.3.7 Tackling Discrimination and Poverty among the Traveller Community**

Travellers are among the most disadvantaged groups in Irish society. This traditional ethnic minority experiences racism and discrimination which exacerbates their poverty and exclusion from Irish society. While data on the level of poverty among Travellers are limited, other information amply illustrates the high levels of disadvantage experienced by members of the Traveller community. Many Traveller families live in halting sites, encampments, caravans and mobile homes. The availability of serviced halting sites is limited. Thus, many Traveller families find it difficult to avail of adequate accommodation.

Participation in, and outcomes for, Travellers in education, health, employment and housing and accommodation remain dramatically poorer compared to that of the settled population. Infant mortality rates are relatively high and life expectancy for Traveller men and women is much shorter than for settled men and women.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy *Building an Inclusive Society* (2002) contains five targets for the reduction of poverty among Travellers. In essence many of the policy objectives and targets to improve the situation of the Traveller community are already contained in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, and other recent reports. What is required is a commitment to implement these policies and achieve these targets as a matter of urgency. This will require a commitment to address discrimination and racism. In particular, it means addressing issues for Travellers across the policy spectrum, i.e. in employment, in health, in education, in housing/accommodation, in social welfare and in justice, equality and law reform.

### **6.3.8 Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals and Poverty**

A significant minority of people (up to 10 per cent) living in poverty and experiencing social exclusion in Ireland are Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB). Research in Ireland<sup>24</sup> has shown that there are significant cumulative and interlocking processes of discrimination operating in key economic and social areas, which increase the risk of poverty for LGB people and further disadvantage those already living in poverty. In order to ensure that LGB people are not more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion than majority group members the NAPIncl needs to address the effects of harassment, discrimination and social exclusion as barriers to LGB participation in employment and education and access to services and resources.

Both the recent Equality Authority report<sup>25</sup> and NESF report<sup>26</sup> recommend that LGB people should be explicitly targeted as a 'vulnerable group' within the NAPIncl for priority action to address their exclusion and invisibility in current anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies and programmes. The lack of inclusion of LGB people in targeted anti-poverty measures, particularly community-based responses, has resulted in the capacity of the LGB community sector to participate being severely curtailed.

The Equality Authority includes the following specific recommendation, with which the Combat Poverty Agency would concur:

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24 'Poverty; Lesbians and Gay men', CPA/GLEN/NEXUS, 1995.

25 'Implementing Equality for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals', 2002.

26 Equality Policies for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People: Implementation issues, NESF 2003 (Draft).

*The Department (Social and Family Affairs) should ensure that the 2003 NAPincl adequately addresses poverty and social exclusion amongst LGB people through the targeting of resources and the inclusion of LGB people within mainstream initiatives to tackle disadvantage and exclusion. The plan needs to include an awareness that up to 10 per cent of those who experience poverty are lesbian or gay.*

#### **Target**

- To reduce the number of gays, lesbians and bisexuals who are 'consistently poor' to below 2 per cent and, if possible eliminate consistent poverty.

#### **Priority Actions**

- Target resources and funding of programmes to build the capacity of the LGB community to participate in anti-poverty programmes and policy development
- Include LGB people in data strategies as part of a response to cumulative disadvantage and to enable the setting of clear targets
- Ensure that measures are put in place to provide appropriate and accessible services for LGB people particularly in the areas of employment, education, housing, health and training.

### **6.3.9 Tackling Disadvantage for Urban Dwellers**

Poverty has a spatial dimension. People living in disadvantaged urban areas can experience particular issues of poverty, exclusion and isolation. Urban poverty has a number of facets:

- There are population groups living in disadvantaged urban areas who experience high poverty levels. This includes people living in local authority housing and private rented housing, in the larger cities or often on the outskirts of provincial towns.
- There are urban (in the main local authority) communities with high levels of poverty who face cumulative disadvantage and problems such as inadequate services, problems of social disorder and crime and often public stigma.
- At a structural level disadvantaged urban areas experience economic, social and environmental decline.

In improving the situation for disadvantaged urban areas a range of approaches is thus required.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy *Building an Inclusive Society* (2002) contains targets for the reduction of poverty in urban areas. While useful, these targets have

a number of shortcomings. Firstly there needs to be a clear definition of the extent of urban poverty and urban dwellers at risk of poverty, data collected accordingly and their situation monitored more closely. Secondly, four of the targets are very specifically focused. Additional needs, in terms of provision of, and access to, services and building social capital and community supports as well as urban renewal initiatives are required to address urban poverty. Implementation is a key issue in tackling urban disadvantage and there is a need for a co-ordinated approach.

#### **Priority Actions**

- A commitment towards balanced regional and urban development
- Integrate provision and delivery of public services
- Develop sustainable neighbourhoods, through participation with local communities and support for community development
- Target investment towards run down urban areas
- Implement 20 per cent affordable/social housing.

### **6.3.10 Tackling Poverty among the Rural Poor**

Rural poverty remains a key issue in Ireland although it may often be less apparent. Rural areas, unlike some urban areas, do not present homogeneous areas of disadvantage. Rural areas are more diverse and the experience of poverty may be more individual and spread over a greater geographic area. However, there are also concentrations of poverty in predominantly rural areas, notably in public housing estates on the fringes of small towns.

Both the farming and non-farming rural populations can be at risk of poverty. For example, while it is estimated that only 1.5 per cent of farm households were in consistent poverty in 2000, nearly one quarter (24 per cent) were living on a low income. Research for the Combat Poverty Agency in 2000 estimated that there are up to 30,000 low-income farm households in Ireland with approximately 10,000 to 15,000 of these households depending mainly on farming for their livelihood.<sup>27</sup>

Rural poverty also exists among the non-farm rural population, particularly in public housing estates on the fringes of small towns and villages.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy *Building an Inclusive Society* (2002) contains a number of targets for the reduction of poverty among rural dwellers. These targets/policy areas need to be expanded. There needs to be a clear definition of the extent of non-farm rural poverty, data collected accordingly and the situation of non-farm rural dwellers at risk of poverty monitored more closely. The

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<sup>27</sup> J. Frawley, P. Commins, S. Scott and T. Fergal (2000) *Low Income Farm Households: Incidence, Characteristics and Policies*. Dublin: Oaktree Press in association with the Combat Poverty Agency.

deprivation indicators need to be adapted to better reflect the nature of rural poverty.

Other issues which need to be addressed are as follows:

#### **Priority Actions**

- A commitment to balanced regional development, particularly in the west of the country
- Economic and social infrastructural investment in the border region and collaboration with Northern Ireland
- A commitment to targeted employment creation in rural areas
- Education and training programmes in rural areas to enable people to take up employment opportunities
- Support for community development projects in rural areas to promote the building of social capital
- Imaginative provision of services at local level
- Initiatives targeted at people at risk of poverty in rural areas, e.g. older people, women, lone parents, single men living alone, ethnic minorities
- Addressing the digital divide, e.g. through provision of training and facilities in local libraries.

## **7. Institutional Arrangements**

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### **Objective 4: Mobilising All the Actors**

As noted in the guidelines to the NAPs incl, effectively tackling poverty and exclusion requires a concerted effort by all actors. It also must involve the participation and empowerment of people experiencing poverty and on-going consultation.

#### **7.4.1 Expanding Social Inclusion at Local Government level**

At EU and national level there is increased recognition that local authorities and health boards are key stakeholders in progressing NAPincl. Through the establishment of the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network, Combat Poverty has been supporting local authorities to develop anti-poverty and social inclusion strategies, and to focus on the poverty and social inclusion impact in all functional areas and at corporate plan level. Social Inclusion Units have been set up on a pilot basis for three years 2001-2004 and are located within the offices of the Director of Community and Enterprise within nine local authorities.

These developments have been acknowledged as essential in the extension of NAPS

to local level. However, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed in order to advance this agenda. Local authorities need to ensure that their corporate, departmental and elected member structures and processes are geared to making the promotion of social inclusion a central organisational priority. In some cases there is limited commitment at corporate level to supporting internal processes in making adjustments to work practices, support for training etc. The responsibilities and roles of elected members and city/county managers are essential in this regard.

### **Priority Actions**

- Organisational objectives need to identify the main changes required in management and cultural/organisational processes and structures, both within local authorities and inter-agency, to deliver on local anti-poverty/social inclusion strategies
- Elected members and the senior management team, particularly the city/county manager must spearhead social inclusion as a priority. Training/induction reflecting this role should be mandatory
- Training on poverty and social inclusion needs to be mainstreamed within all relevant training programmes delivered to local authorities
- Social inclusion indicators need to be included in the performance management systems being developed
- The role of women at senior levels in local authorities needs to be significantly enhanced at operational and decision making levels
- A local anti-poverty strategy needs to be developed in all city/county areas with the local authority as lead agency
- The involvement of those experiencing poverty and their representatives in the development of the strategies is central
- An integral part of the strategy development process should be the involvement and the raising of awareness, amongst all stakeholders, about the impacts of poverty and social exclusion and what works in tackling it. Dedicated resources need to be assigned for this
- Monitoring, review and evaluation systems and procedures should be clearly identified and in place from the outset
- An evaluation of the social inclusion units should be undertaken as an immediate priority with a view to extending the units to all local authorities within an agreed timeframe. Local authorities should be asked to make detailed proposals for inclusion in the programme under a number of agreed headings, e.g. aims, structures, proposed actions, anticipated outcomes, who they envisage will be involved, monitoring, evaluation, dissemination, budget etc.
- Poverty proofing should be introduced to local authorities, health boards and other relevant agencies.

## 7.4.2 The Social Inclusion Consultative Committee

The role of the Directors of Community and Enterprise includes the co-ordination of all plans and strategies at city and county level including local development and community development plans. Thus the following is suggested:

- The Social Inclusion Consultative Committee should include representation from the City and County Development Boards, through the Director of Community and Enterprise Social Inclusion Sub-Committee, to reflect developments in relation to the integration of local government and local development
- There should be representation of NGO anti-poverty interests, including a European perspective, and inclusion of gender interests.

## 7.4.3 The NAPS Social Inclusion Forum

Established by the Government, the Forum is an important institutional mechanism to provide organisations not involved in the social partnership process with the opportunity to contribute to the process of monitoring and developing the NAPS, and to contribute to the development of the NAPsincl. The following is recommended:

- The Forum needs to be developed as an on-going process with the involvement of all stakeholders, including those directly experiencing poverty and exclusion and their representatives, and should link to the policy-making processes
- Central to the process of ensuring involvement of all stakeholders is the development of a public awareness programme and its implementation across all public services, involving the social partners including the community/voluntary sector at national and local level
- There is a need to ensure direct ongoing consultation with people experiencing poverty.

The NESF Social Inclusion Forum is a useful model to build on so as to involve all relevant stakeholders, including politicians, in an on-going process. Given the increased emphases from the EU on the gender perspective it should also ensure involvement of women's groups, particularly those representing disadvantaged women.

## 7.5 Mainstreaming

Much of the anti-poverty infrastructure and policies are already in place in Ireland. What is required now to reduce and eliminate poverty is political will and resources to enable implementation. There is also scope for the adoption of new evidence-based policies and the adoption of policy innovations. A significant emerging policy innovation is poverty mainstreaming. At both European and national level there is an increasing awareness of the co-dependence of the different aspects of government policy. All policies should include a preferential option for the poor, meaning that policies should prioritise empowerment and poverty reduction and elimination. There are different definitions of what constitute mainstreaming social inclusion, but in an Irish context it is taken to mean the introduction of anti-poverty concerns across policy areas. There are already examples of this, such as poverty proofing and the setting up of social inclusion units in government departments and local authorities. However, this approach has further potential.<sup>28</sup>

There are a variety of different approaches to mainstreaming, which vary in terms of the level of institutionalisation and the types of resource commitments they require. Administrative forms include poverty proofing; executive forms include skewing or ‘top slicing’ budgets across policy areas towards disadvantaged groups and areas, as is practised in Northern Ireland. In other cases social rights are enshrined in national law, such as the right to housing in France. Much work remains to be done to assess the effectiveness of mainstreaming in poverty reduction, but its logic is clear. As a tool mainstreaming needs to be used in conjunction with targeted approaches so as to ensure the continued visibility and priority to anti-poverty initiatives.

Effective mainstreaming to work towards the elimination of poverty requires:

- a high level of political commitment to put it at the centre of public policy
- administrative and political co-ordination
- administrative and political cultural change and training to prioritise poverty<sup>29</sup>
- formative evaluation, poverty proofing and policy co-ordination
- targets, monitoring and evaluation, and appropriate data<sup>30</sup>
- incentives and sanctions to facilitate the achievement of targets
- government department/agencies activity reports under NAPs incl
- involving and empowering people in poverty
- a good communications strategy to inform all sectors of society of the need for, and benefits of, such an approach

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<sup>28</sup> The Combat Poverty Agency is the lead partner on an EU funded trans-national exchange project on mainstreaming social inclusion. The results of this research will be disseminated in due course.

<sup>29</sup> This should focus on the lived experience of poverty.

<sup>30</sup> The various types and appropriateness of indicators are discussed in Guy Palmer and Mohibur Rahman (2002), *Monitoring Progress on Poverty: A Policy Guide to the Use of Social Indicators*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

- the setting of social inclusion within a broader equality framework, with a particular focus on gender and groups in vulnerable situations.

Effective institutional structures require centralisation to provide guidance and coherence and decentralisation to allow autonomy, innovation and responsiveness. The challenge is to achieve an appropriate mixture of both so as to enable goals to be met. The establishment of the Office of Social Inclusion should facilitate greater visibility and commitment across the policy system to the goal of social inclusion. All policies should be evidence-based on data, command widespread public support based on public education and be poverty and equality proofed. Working together, through the NAPsincl, process, poverty in Ireland can be eliminated.

## 7.6 Monitoring Poverty Trends – Data, Indicators and Research

A feature of the NAPsincl process is the setting of official poverty targets. For these to be meaningful a monitoring procedure is required to report on progress in achieving the targets. Effective monitoring requires the use of social indicators which track change over time, especially for groups vulnerable to poverty. The agreed 18 EU indicators are an important breakthrough in this regard. However, they need to be supplemented by national indicators that reflect particular Irish concerns. In this context, attention must be paid to the following:<sup>31</sup>

- the need for ongoing collection and analysis of data to enable up-to-date assessment of progress
- the need to put in place data collection systems for areas and groups where data are currently unavailable, e.g. for people with disabilities, for ethnic minorities
- the need to complement quantitative data with qualitative information
- the need to take into account the views of people living in poverty on improvements (or a deterioration) in their situation and on indicators appropriate to monitoring poverty levels
- the need to complement national data with relevant and appropriate local level data
- the need to review, on an ongoing basis, the appropriateness of the targets and associated indicators and to add and subtract to these as necessary.

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<sup>31</sup> See G. Palmer and M. Rahman (2002) *Monitoring Progress on Poverty: A Policy Guide on the Use of Social Indicators*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency; C. Corrigan, (ed.), E. Fitzgerald, J. Bates and A. Matthews (2002) *Data Sources on Poverty*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration and Combat Poverty Agency; National Economic and Social Forum (2003) *Inaugural Meeting on 30 January 2003 of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum: Conference Report*. Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

## 8. Good Practice

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These examples of good practice are recommended.

### 8.1 Combat Poverty Agency

The Combat Poverty Agency was established under the Combat Poverty Agency Act, 1986 to:

- advise and make recommendations to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs on all aspects of economic and social planning in relation to poverty in the State
- initiate measures aimed at overcoming poverty in the State and the evaluation of such measures
- examine the nature, causes and extent of poverty in the State and for that purpose the promotion, commission and interpretation of research
- promote greater public understanding of the nature, causes and extent of poverty in the State and the measures necessary to overcome such poverty.

Combat Poverty aims to provide leadership in working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion through:

- conducting high quality research and innovative initiatives
- advising policy makers on effective and innovative approaches to prevent and eliminate poverty
- promoting the results of its work.

Combat Poverty is a unique agency in European terms and would seem to provide a useful model in supporting the development, implementation and monitoring of the NAPincl and promoting social inclusion more generally.

### 8.2 Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network

The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network (LGAPLN) supports local authorities to address poverty and social exclusion as part of their work. The Network has been set up in collaboration with the Department of Environment and Local Government and the Office of Social Inclusion in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. The Network was established by the Combat Poverty Agency and the work is led by Combat Poverty. A key impetus for the work is to support the implementation of the national anti-poverty strategy at local level.

### **The Network aims to:**

- promote and support the development of a strong anti-poverty focus within local government
- provide a forum in which local authorities can consider and develop policy to tackle poverty and social exclusion
- enable local authorities to share information about developing new and innovative projects and initiatives
- exchange different local experiences and best practice.

Being a member of the Network enables local authorities to access:

- commissioned research on poverty and social exclusion
- regular newsletters for local authority staff and members highlighting good practice and new initiatives
- monthly electronic briefs exchanging ideas and information
- training – how to target and tackle poverty effectively
- evaluation support for new projects
- guidance on the facilitation, participation and consultation of communities
- support and resources on community development
- grants to develop joint initiatives between communities and local authorities.

The Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network is a key structure to ensure that NAPinCL is implemented at local level.

## **8.3 National Anti-Poverty Networks**

National Anti-Poverty Networks are national representative and co-ordinating organisations made up of independent member groups and/or individuals who link with each other on common or shared issues. Each Network has developed independently, with different structures, but they all share the characteristics of:

- an anti-poverty focus
- national membership bases that can give a voice to disadvantaged, marginalised groups in local, regional and national fora
- mechanisms to ensure that members are informed and consulted about the activities and policies of their national representatives
- an ability to inform policy at national level
- a willingness to work in partnership with other networks and groups
- a commitment to resourcing and supporting members in anti-poverty work.

A programme of National Anti-Poverty Networks has been established to:

- assist National Anti-Poverty Networks to develop their capacity to contribute to policy development at national level
- develop the capacity of National Anti-Poverty Network members to draw policy from their experience at local and national levels.

The Networks ensure that the voice of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion is heard in debates on national and local policy making. The Networks' involvement helps to ensure that public policy is relevant to people who experience poverty.

The programme is currently managed and supported by Combat Poverty. It covers the interests of disadvantaged communities, Travellers, people with disabilities, lone parents, refugees and asylum seekers, rural communities, unemployed people, children, older women and European anti-poverty interests.

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