

a catalyst for change »

Working for a Poverty-Free Ireland

Combat Poverty Agency » Strategic Plan 2005 : 2007



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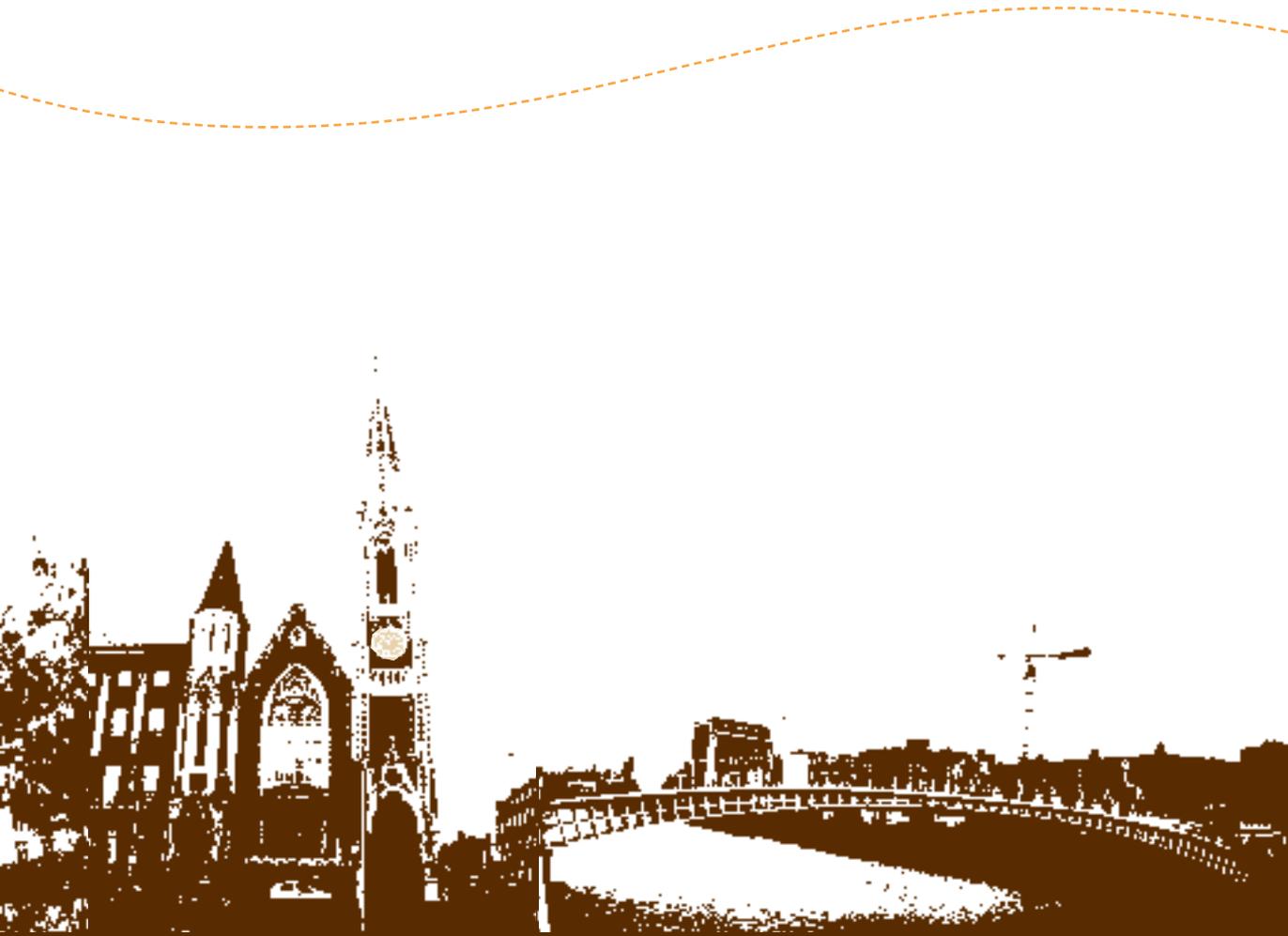
Foreword »

This is Combat Poverty's seventh strategic plan since our establishment in 1986. Over the last eighteen years we have seen many changes. Economically Ireland has made great strides, with high levels of economic growth and low levels of unemployment. Levels of severe or consistent poverty have fallen. However, not everyone has benefited equally and there are widening income gaps between those who have been able to avail of the opportunities provided by the economic growth and those who have not. Our public services also require further improvement. In addition, there are still people in our society who are marginalised and excluded.

The infrastructure to tackle poverty is greatly improved since the late 1980s. We have national targets for poverty reduction, as set out in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion. In many Government departments and local authorities there are social inclusion units, with the Office for Social Inclusion having overall responsibility for coordinating, monitoring and evaluating anti-poverty strategies.

It is in this context that we present our seventh strategic plan, with a focus on three key objectives:

- ▶ Distribution of Income and Jobs;
- ▶ Access to Quality Services;
- ▶ Local and Regional Responses to Poverty.



In implementing our Plan we are conscious of the need to ensure that policy makers and the wider public are kept informed about the extent and nature of poverty, as well as the solutions to address it. The policies being implemented through the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion are important in this regard, as is the involvement of people experiencing poverty, their representatives and the social partners in the process. We will seek to support practice on the ground, with a view to informing policy.

Our Plan has been developed through a collaborative process, involving the Board and staff, as well as being informed by evaluation of the previous strategic plan and consultation with key stakeholders. We would like to thank everyone involved in the process for their ideas and support, and we hope that the implementation of this Plan will move us closer to a poverty-free society.

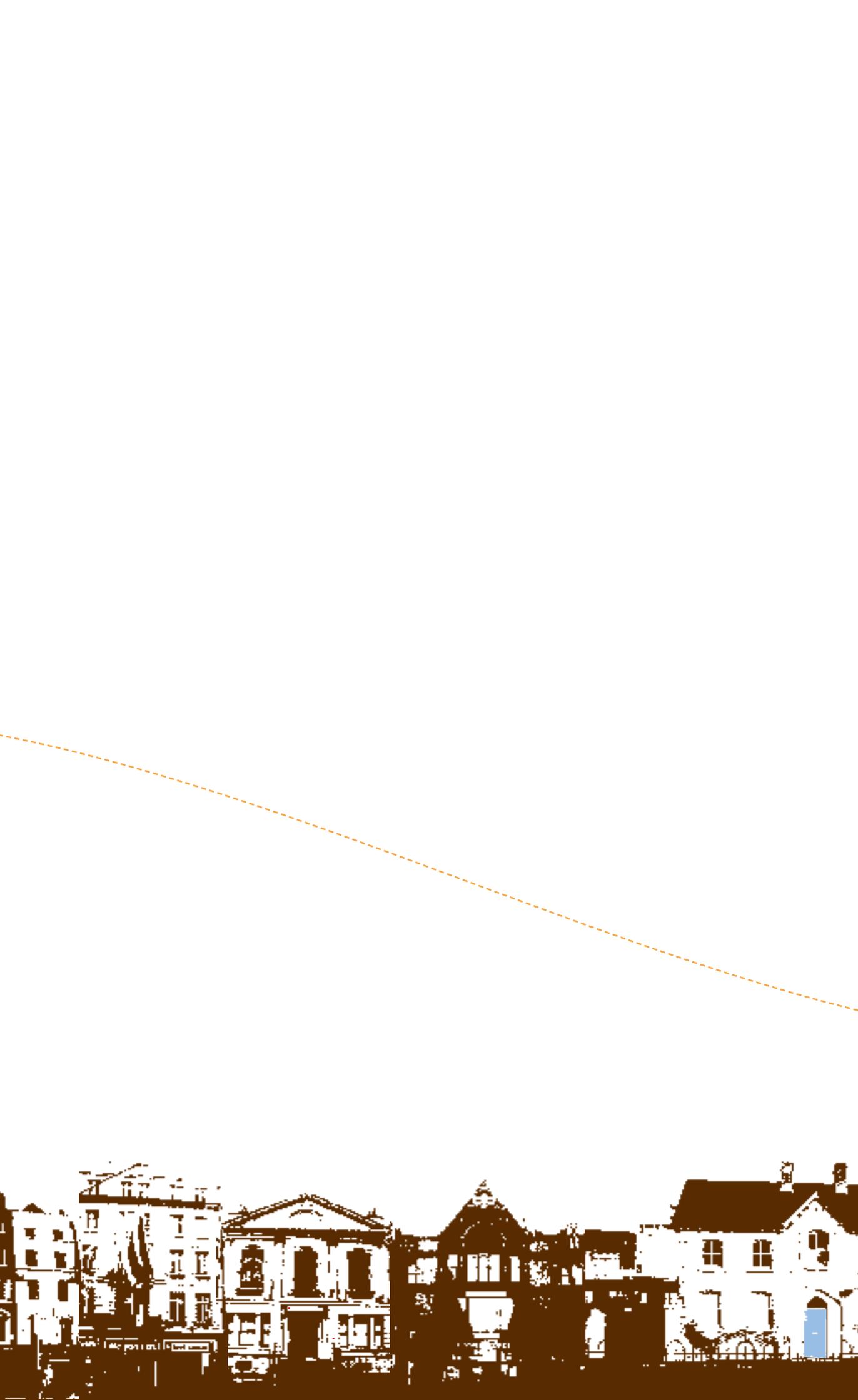


Brian Duncan
Chairperson



Helen Johnston
Director





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Summary »

Combat Poverty is a statutory agency established under the Combat Poverty Agency Act 1986. This Act sets out Combat Poverty's functions as: policy advice; research; project support, innovation and evaluation; and public education.

Under the Act we are required to prepare three year strategic plans. This Plan, for the period 2005-2007, is our seventh Strategic Plan. The key elements are summarised below.

» Our Vision

Working for a poverty-free Ireland.

» Our Mission

We are a state advisory agency developing and promoting evidence-based proposals and measures to combat poverty in Ireland.

» Our Strategic Objectives

▶ Distribution of Income and Jobs

To promote a fairer distribution of income and employment by providing evidence-based advice on tax, welfare and employment policies.

▶ Access to Quality Services

To develop and promote policy proposals for people in poverty to have access to quality health and education services.

▶ Local and Regional Responses to Poverty

To support local and regional responses to poverty, including border areas affected by the Northern Ireland conflict.

The delivery of our Strategic Objectives will be supported by sustaining and developing our organisational capacity. The details of the Strategy are contained in an Implementation Plan, published on-line at www.combatpoverty.ie



1 Introduction »



1.1 A Focus on Combating Poverty »

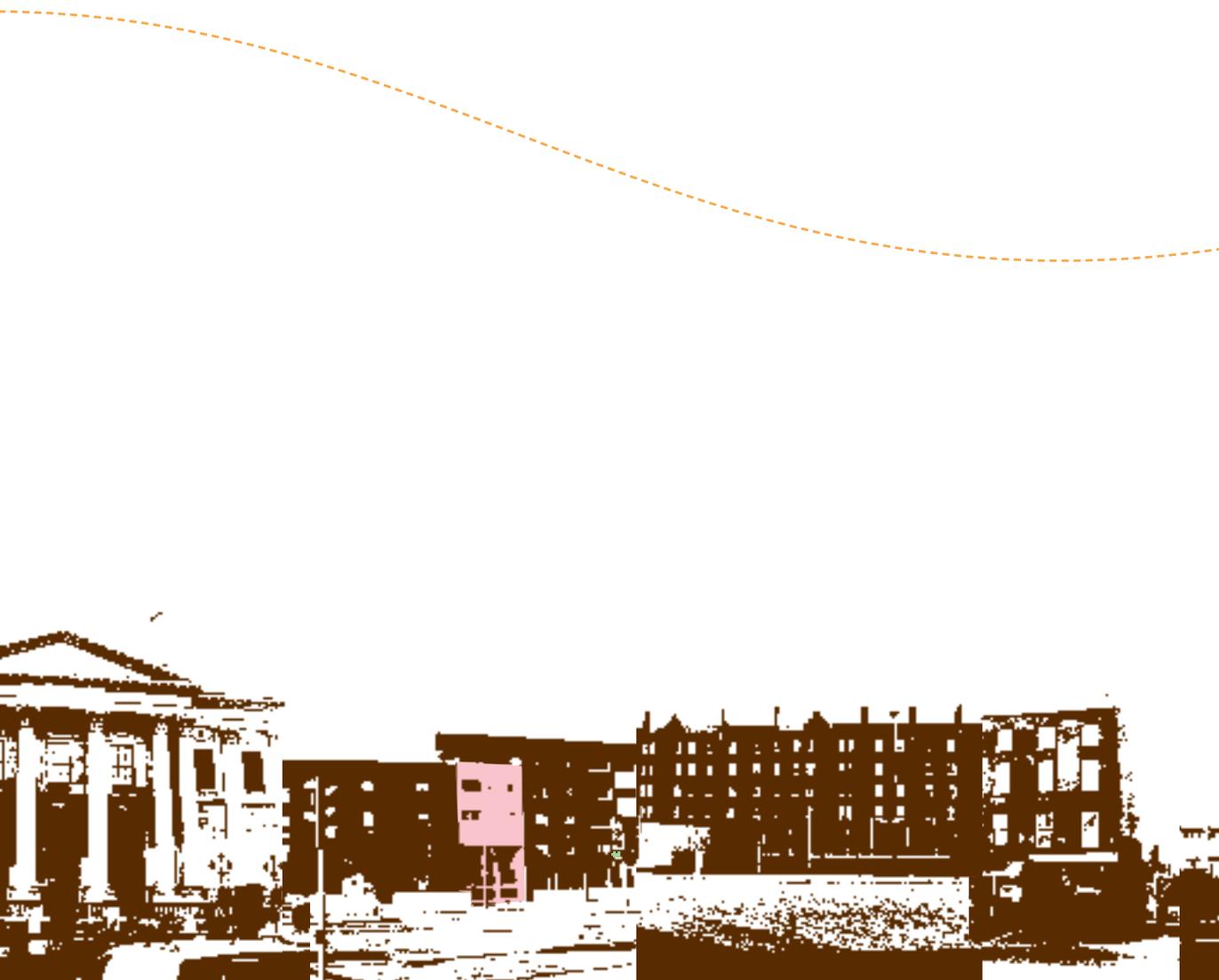
Ireland has developed a successful economy, but still has relatively high levels of poverty and social exclusion. While important advances have been made in improving the living standards of the poorest in society, the income gap between the better off and less well off has widened. Evidence shows that societies with a more equal distribution of income achieve more equal social outcomes which enable people to participate more successfully in society.

This requires addressing the structural causes of poverty and ensuring:

- ▶ that there is a fair distribution of income and jobs;
- ▶ that everyone has access to quality services; and
- ▶ that local and regional factors are recognised.

In our seventh Strategic Plan for the three year period 2005-2007, we focus on activities in line with our statutory functions which address the structural causes of poverty:

- ▶ Distribution of Income and Jobs;
- ▶ Access to Quality Services; and
- ▶ Local and Regional Responses to Poverty.



Combat Poverty is the sole national advisory agency with a remit to combat poverty in Ireland. Acting as a catalyst for change, we seek to influence public policy and elicit public support for action on poverty issues. Our effectiveness and credibility is rooted in our ability to speak authoritatively and with objectivity on poverty.

This Strategic Plan has been submitted to and approved by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. The preparation of a three year Strategic Plan is a requirement under the Combat Poverty Agency Act 1986.

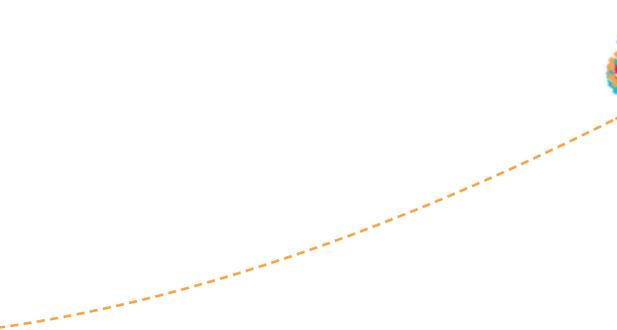
This Act sets out Combat Poverty's functions as: policy advice; research; project support, innovation and evaluation; and public education (see Appendix).

1.2 Our Vision »

Working for a poverty-free Ireland.

1.3 Our Mission »

We are a state advisory agency developing and promoting evidence-based proposals and measures to combat poverty in Ireland.



1.4 Principles »

In implementing our Strategic Plan, we will be guided by six key principles:

» Objectivity

Providing evidence-based independent advice on and solutions to tackling poverty is fundamental to our mission.

» Partnership

Proactively building strong partnerships with all levels of government, the social partners, those experiencing poverty and those working on poverty issues is essential to maximising support and action to tackle poverty.

» Participation and Empowerment

Involving and empowering individuals and communities affected by poverty is necessary to tackle poverty effectively.

» Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

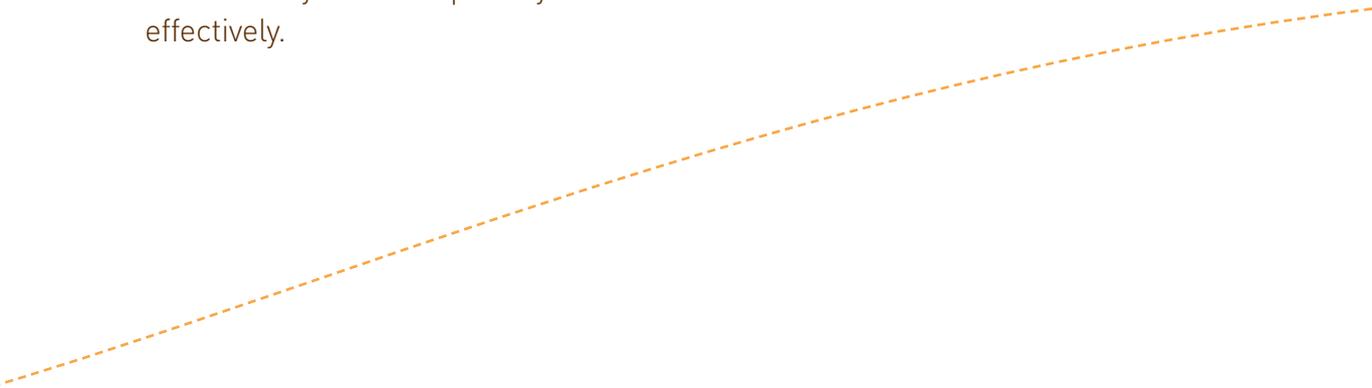
Combating poverty involves the recognition of economic, social and cultural rights, the eradication of discrimination and respect for diversity.

» Socio-economic Equality

Achieving a more equal distribution of resources and opportunities is essential in moving towards a poverty-free Ireland.

» Peace Building

Developing a just and inclusive society is an essential element in promoting a stable and peaceful society.



2 Context »



There are factors which will influence the development and implementation of our Strategy. These include the nature and extent of poverty in Ireland, economic and social factors, and the policy context for combating poverty over the next three years. These factors are briefly summarised.

2.1 External Context »

» Poverty

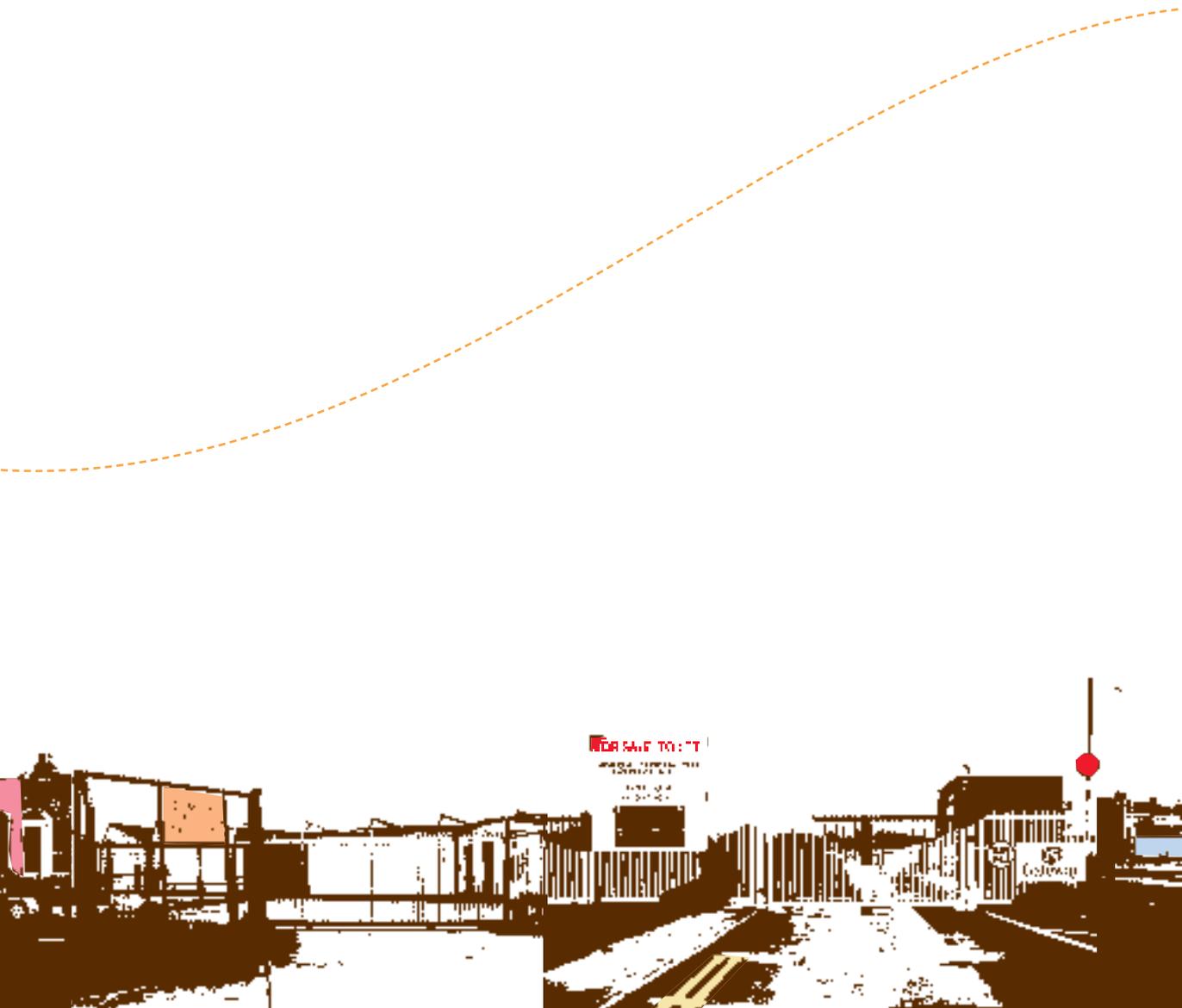
- ▶ Consistent poverty is 9.4% (2003)
- ▶ Relative income poverty is 22.7% (2003)
- ▶ Some people and groups in society are particularly vulnerable to poverty.

» Economic Context

- ▶ Expected annual growth of 5%
- ▶ Anticipated inflation of 2-3%
- ▶ Growth in labour supply.

» Social Context

- ▶ Unemployment expected to remain below 5%
- ▶ Increase in "working poor"
- ▶ Importance of social protection and access to quality services
- ▶ Increase in lone parenthood, older people living alone and care needs
- ▶ Increase in immigration.



» Policy Context

- ▶ National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) 2002-2007
- ▶ National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/incl)
- ▶ **Sustaining Progress**, including the 10 "Special Initiatives"
- ▶ National Development Plan
- ▶ National Health Strategy
- ▶ Local Government Reform
- ▶ Peace Process
- ▶ White Paper **Supporting Voluntary Activity**.

2.2 External Challenges »

The external environment sets a number of challenges which we will address through our Strategy over the next three years in working for a poverty-free Ireland. In addressing these challenges we will seek to:

▶ **Highlight awareness of the existence of poverty and social exclusion.**

In a successful economy people may believe that poverty no longer exists. In this context there is a need to highlight the extent, nature and causes of poverty, social exclusion and inequality.

▶ **Ensure economic success supports greater social inclusion.**

Ireland has developed a very successful economy, and we need to ensure that this economic success supports greater social inclusion.



▶ **Promote anti-poverty action and social inclusion in national policies.**

A range of national policies impact on people in poverty. There is a need to ensure that such policies promote anti-poverty action and social inclusion.

▶ **Support local responses to tackle poverty.**

To complement national policies, local responses are required to tackle poverty. In this context, community development has a critical role in addressing poverty in disadvantaged communities.

▶ **Identify new causes of poverty and solutions to address these.**

There are emerging causes of poverty, such as poverty issues for ethnic communities and exclusion from new technologies. There are also some people in severe poverty. Anti-poverty policy needs to recognise and address these issues.

▶ **Learn from European and international experience.**

We can learn from how other countries combat poverty and we can share our experiences with them. We can also draw on European funding and European lessons to promote social inclusion in Ireland.

▶ **Highlight the need to combat poverty in areas affected by the Northern Ireland conflict.**

There is a need to better understand the complex relationship between poverty and conflict and ensure that anti-poverty policy addresses conflict and post-conflict issues.



3 Strategy »



2 » Access to Quality Services

To develop and promote policy proposals for people in poverty to have access to quality health and education services.

People in poverty often experience unequal access to essential services. Thus, the provision of affordable and accessible services, such as health and education, is critical in working for a poverty-free society. Combat Poverty, in collaboration with health and education stakeholders, will work towards developing equitable access to quality services for people in poverty.

3 » Local and Regional Responses to Poverty

To support local and regional responses to poverty, including border areas affected by the Northern Ireland conflict.

A poverty-free society requires that co-ordinated action is taken at local, regional, national and European levels and with particular groups at risk of poverty. Combat Poverty, in collaboration with others, will support the development of local anti-poverty strategies and link these to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.



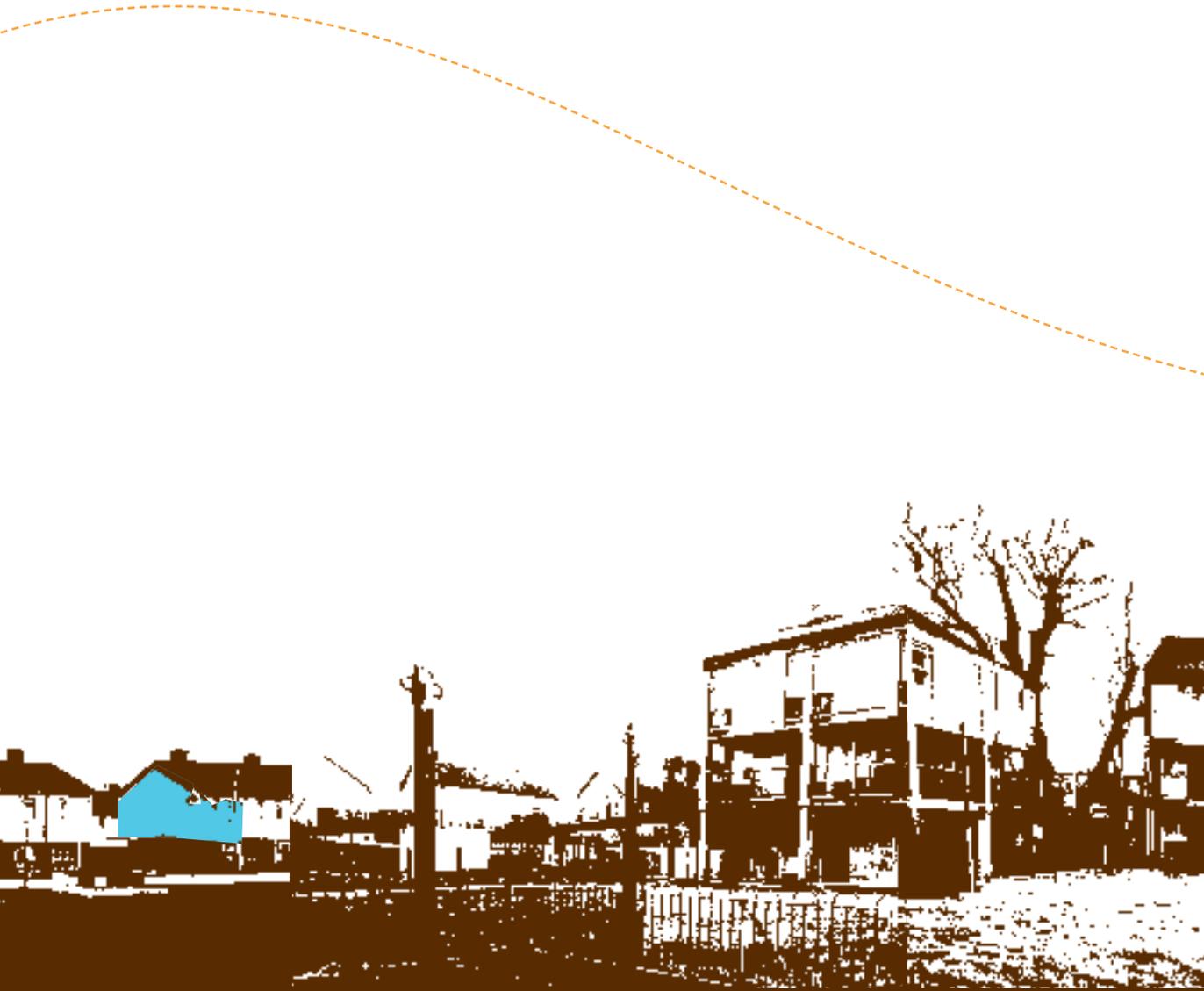
3.2 Combat Poverty Agency's Strategy »

The strategy for Combat Poverty is described in terms of Strategic Objectives, Goals, Key Performance Indicators and Impact Indicators.

The Goals support the Strategic Objectives and, in line with the statutory functions of Combat Poverty, describe the work we will focus on in addressing these objectives.

Key performance indicators and impact indicators measure the achievement of the Strategic Objectives and Goals.

The detailed tasks, assigned responsibilities and timeframes are described in the Implementation Plan which supports the delivery of the Strategy.



Strategic Objective One »

3.2.1 Distribution of Income and Jobs »

To promote a fairer distribution of income and employment by providing evidence-based advice on tax, welfare and employment policies.

Goals »

- ▶ **Poverty Trends**
To analyse national and European trends and policy developments with regard to poverty and access to resources, in collaboration with national and European interests.
- ▶ **Access to Quality Employment**
To propose policies which support the transition from welfare to good quality work.
- ▶ **Tax and Welfare Policies**
To develop tax and welfare policy proposals aimed at raising the incomes and living standards of those at risk of poverty.

Key Performance Indicators »

- ▶ **Poverty Trends**
- ▶ Two reports published and promoted on poverty trends
- ▶ Study published on movements in and out of child poverty and proposals promoted on reducing child poverty
- ▶ Recommendations made to the European Commission and Irish government on how to promote and evaluate the mainstreaming of social inclusion
- ▶ Consultations, analyses and submissions made on key issues for next NAPs/incl/NAPS.



» Access to Quality Employment

- ▶ Publication and promotion of strategies for low income families in making the transition from welfare to quality work.

» Tax and Welfare Proposals

- ▶ Anti-poverty community and voluntary sector groups supported in tax and welfare policy work to inform budget and other submissions
- ▶ Book published and promoted on new directions for welfare reform.

Impact Indicators »

- ▶ Policy advice on tax, welfare and employment taken on board, in whole or in part, by the Government
- ▶ Positive usage made of advice by political parties, the social partners and the community and voluntary sector
- ▶ Greater awareness and understanding of the nature of poverty in Ireland.



Strategic Objective Two »

3.2.2 Access to Quality Services » Key Performance Indicators »

To develop and promote policy proposals for people in poverty to have access to quality health and education services.

Goals »

▶ Health Services

To inform health services' planning and policy to meet NAPS objectives

▶ Healthier Communities

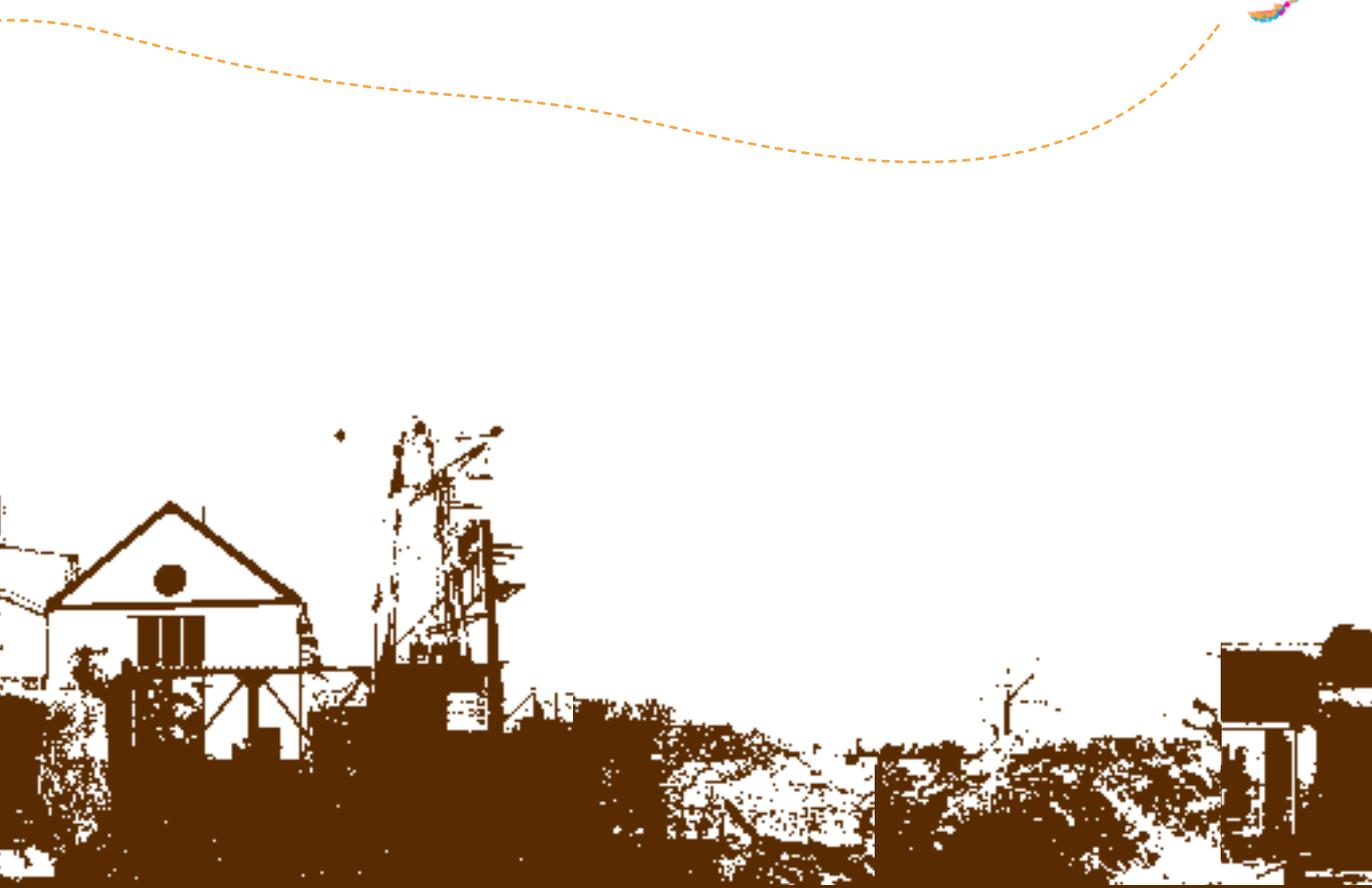
To support disadvantaged communities to improve health outcomes, using community development principles and practice

▶ Educational Disadvantage

To identify and promote effective policy proposals towards more equitable education outcomes.

» Health Services

- ▶ Policies and programmes analysed for their impact on achieving a NAPS health target and suggestions made for improvement
- ▶ Collaborative initiatives taken with the Department of Health and Children and relevant stakeholders to work towards NAPS health outcomes
- ▶ Recommendations made on improving access to quality health services for people on low income.



» **Healthier Communities**

- ▶ Policy recommendations made on implementing community development approaches to tackle health inequalities
- ▶ Training support in place for community development and statutory health workers to undertake partnership approaches to promote better health outcomes.

» **Educational Disadvantage**

- ▶ Policy proposals published and promoted on the provision of universal early education, from an anti-poverty perspective
- ▶ Policy proposals published and promoted on enhancing the participation of people on low income in education.

Impact Indicators »

- ▶ Increased awareness of equal access issues by management and staff of health and education services working with Combat Poverty on these issues
- ▶ Positive actions implemented by health and education services working with Combat Poverty on access issues
- ▶ Increased capacity of local communities to contribute to improved health outcomes.



Strategic Objective Three »

3.2.3 Local and Regional Responses to Poverty »

To support local and regional responses to poverty, including border areas affected by the Northern Ireland conflict.

Goals »

- ▶ **Local Government**
To secure long-term support to embed social inclusion within local government and to support the development of anti-poverty strategies with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.
- ▶ **Peace Programme**
To put social inclusion at the centre of the extended Peace II programme and any future Peace programme, and to make more explicit and widely understood the link between peace building and social inclusion.
- ▶ **National Development Plan (NDP)**
To strengthen the focus on social inclusion in the National Development Plan and in the next round of Structural Funds.
- ▶ **National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)**
To better understand the spatial distribution of poverty and in this context ensure effective links between local and national anti-poverty strategies.



Key Performance Indicators »

» Local Government

- ▶ Model of a Local Anti-Poverty Strategy (LAPS) adopted by at least half of local authorities and development of links to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)
- ▶ An evidence base provided and promoted on the role of community development in tackling poverty.

» Peace Programme

- ▶ ADM/CPA measures of Peace II and Peace II+ successfully implemented, with learning drawn from projects to inform relevant policies.

» National Development Plan (NDP)

- ▶ Policy paper published to inform a stronger anti-poverty and social inclusion focus in the next round of Structural Funding.

» National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS)

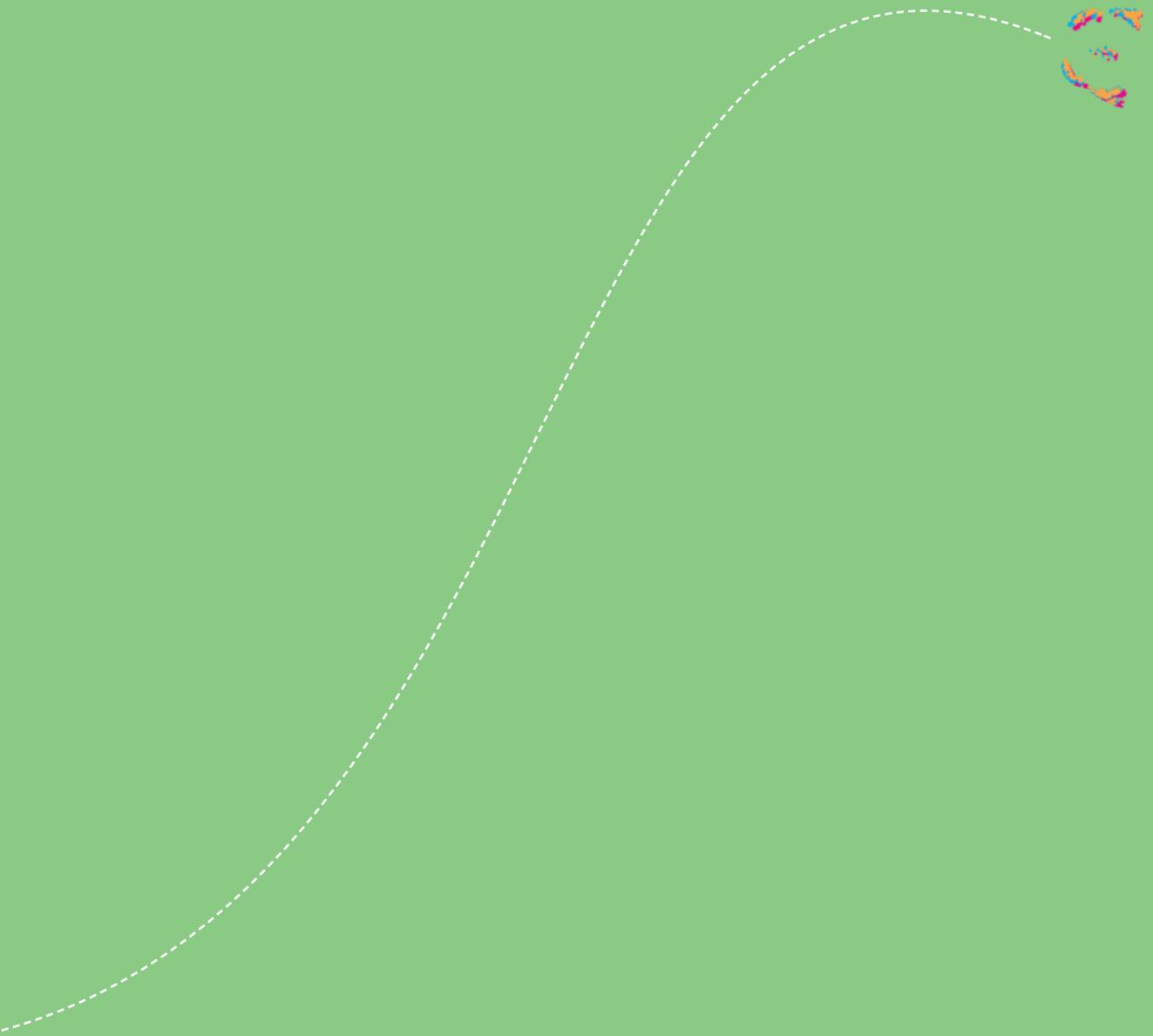
- ▶ Study published and promoted on the spatial distribution of poverty
- ▶ Study published and promoted on the impact of policies on living conditions in disadvantaged areas.

Impact Indicators »

- ▶ Local government mainstream providers address issues of poverty and social inclusion as part of their ongoing work
- ▶ The impact of the Northern Ireland conflict is acknowledged in anti-poverty policies and programmes
- ▶ Local and regional responses to poverty have informed national anti-poverty policies.



4 Organisational Capacity »



The capacity of the organisation to support the implementation of the Strategy is crucial. We will support the implementation of our Strategic Plan by strengthening and developing our organisational capacity. To do this we will require adequate monetary and human resources. We will pay attention to:

» **Communication and Promotion**

We will communicate our messages on combating poverty clearly to our key stakeholders. We will also communicate our mission and functions and objectives to external and internal audiences. For this purpose a range of communication channels will be used.

» **Partnership Working**

We will work in partnership with key stakeholders in working towards a poverty-free Ireland. We are also committed to working in partnership with the trade unions to maximise the effectiveness of Combat Poverty.

» **Information Technology and e-Government**

We will continue to develop our information technology systems to optimise the management of information, both internally and to our external stakeholders.

» **Staff Training and Development**

Our skilled staff team is our key resource. We will continue to invest in training and development for our staff through the implementation of our Performance Management and Development Process.

» **Corporate Governance**

Through the Board, Director and Management Team we will fulfil our obligations under corporate governance requirements to ensure effective management, accountability and direction.

» **Financial Resources and Value for Money**

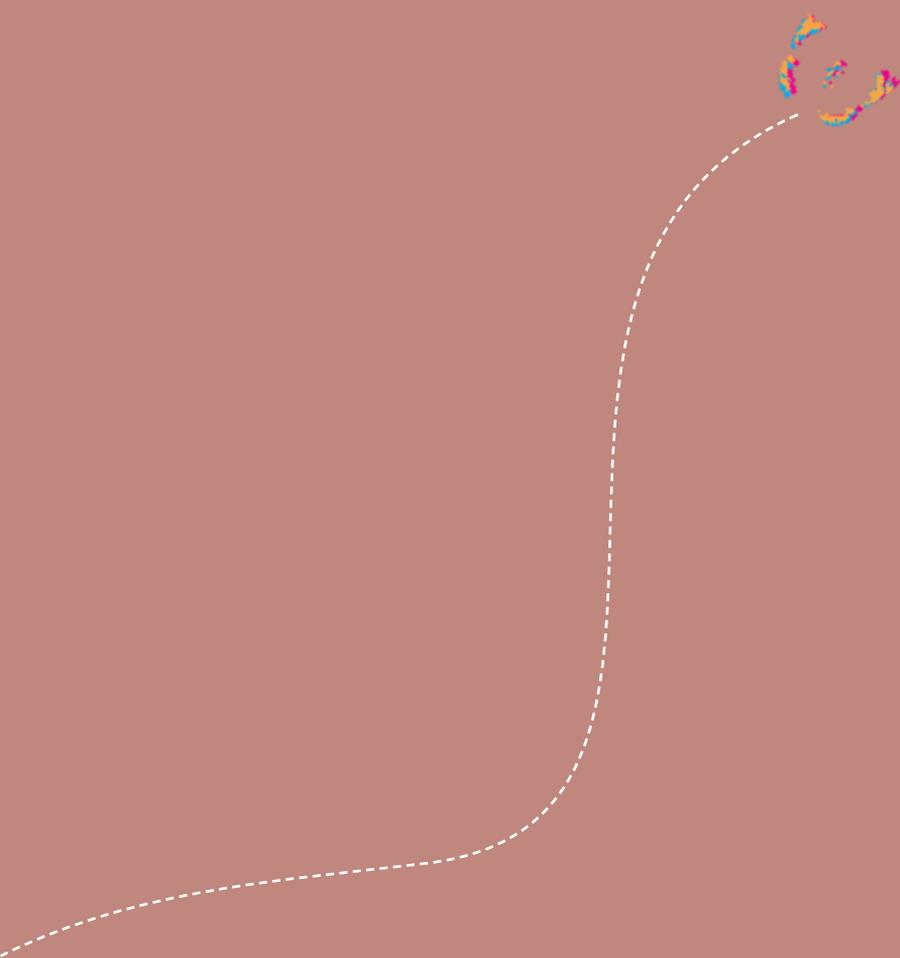
We will seek adequate Government funding to deliver on our strategic objectives. We will deploy our financial resources to best effect to ensure value for money.

» **Monitoring and Evaluation**

We are committed to monitoring and evaluating our performance through ongoing monitoring on the implementation of this plan and the commissioning of an external evaluation, which will include feedback from our key stakeholders.



5 Implementation of the Strategy »



Combat Poverty has developed a detailed Implementation Plan to support the delivery of the Strategy over 2005-2007. The Implementation Plan takes as its points of reference the Strategic Objectives, Goals, Key Performance Indicators and Impact Indicators set out in this Strategy.

While the Strategy presents the strategic direction of Combat Poverty over the next three years, the Implementation Plan describes more detailed activities, assigned responsibilities and timeframes required to achieve the ambitions of the Strategic Plan, in line with the statutory functions of Combat Poverty.

We will monitor and evaluate progress measured against the activities set out in our Implementation Plan. Regular monitoring of progress will enable us to plan for any changes in either the external environment or within our own organisation.

The Implementation Plan also includes actions which continue to develop our organisational capacity.

The Implementation Plan is published on-line on www.combatpoverty.ie



Appendix: Statutory Functions »



The functions of the Combat Poverty Agency are set out under the Combat Poverty Agency Act 1986, Section 4.

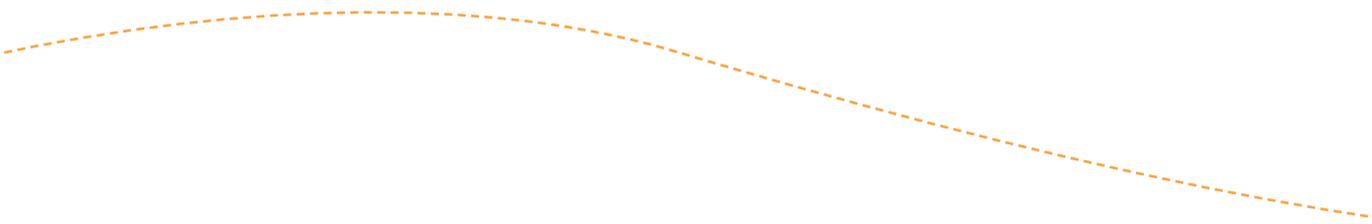
[1] The Agency shall have the following general functions:

[a] advising and making recommendations to the Minister on all aspects of economic and social planning in relation to poverty in the State;

[b] the initiation of measures aimed at overcoming poverty in the State and the evaluation of such measures;

[c] the examination of the nature, causes and extent of poverty in the State and for that purpose the promotion, commission and interpretation of research;

[d] the promotion of greater public understanding of the nature, causes and extent of poverty in the State and the measures necessary to overcome such poverty.



[2] Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) of this section, the Agency shall also have the following functions:

- [a] evaluating, and advising and making recommendations to the Minister in relation to, policies and programmes of the State and of statutory and other bodies and voluntary agencies in so far as such policies and programmes affect groups or classes of persons afflicted or likely to be afflicted by poverty;
- [b] the identification of possible new policies and programmes for the purpose of overcoming poverty and, in consultation with the Minister, the testing or assisting in the testing of their effectiveness on an experimental basis;
- [c] the collection and dissemination of information on poverty and community development and acting as a centre for counselling and training in relation to, and for assisting, encouraging and the giving of information on, community development as a means of overcoming poverty;
- [d] in consultation with the Minister, fostering and assisting (whether by means of the provision of financial or material aid or otherwise) projects of community development and activities to overcome poverty;



- [e] establishing and maintaining contact with such Departments of State, statutory and other bodies and voluntary agencies as seem appropriate to the Agency to enable it to perform its other functions;
- [f] the evaluation of the activities of the Agency;
- [g] the publication of an annual report and such other reports as the Agency may from time to time consider appropriate; and
- [h] the performance of such special tasks for, and the submission of such reports to, the Minister as s/he may from time to time request.



Glossary of Terms »



Border region » The six border counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo.

Community development » The long-term process whereby people who are marginalised or living in poverty work together to identify their needs, create change, exert more influence in the decisions which affect their lives and work to improve the quality of their lives, the communities in which they live, and the society of which they are part.

Consistent poverty » A person is said to be in consistent poverty when he or she has both a low income and lacks at least one of a number of specified basic necessities such as warm clothes, adequate food and heating.

Economic, social and cultural rights » Refers to the rights of all persons to live a fully human life which meets their physical, emotional, intellectual and social needs. Being deprived of these rights is often symptomatic of living in poverty.

Empowerment » The process of transferring decision-making power from influential sectors to poor communities and individuals who have traditionally been excluded from it.

LAPS » Local Anti-Poverty Strategy, drawn up by local authorities to address poverty issues in a local area.



Local government » Local and regional administrative structures, including County Councils, City Councils (previously Corporations), Urban District Councils and Town Councils. They are responsible for providing services to local communities and operate under the supervision of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Local government reform »

A programme to modernise local government. This includes the integration of local government and local development systems through the establishment of County and City Development Boards.

Mainstreaming » A term used to describe the integration of the issues of poverty and social inclusion, including an equality perspective, into all areas and levels of public policy and which is promoted through participation of public bodies, social partners, NGOs and other parties involved.

National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPs/incl) »

These are the Irish Plans, prepared as part of an EU process, to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010. Each EU Member State is required to draw up such plans. The current Irish Plan (2003-2005) was developed from the NAPS (see below), and was based on an extensive consultation process. A further Plan for the period 2006-2009 will be developed during the course of this Strategic Plan.



National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) 2002-2007 » The five year plan of the Irish Government aimed at eliminating consistent poverty, through setting poverty reduction targets across a number of Government departments and for a number of population groups at risk of poverty.

National Development Plan » The Irish Government's plan for allocating EU Structural Funds and other public monies for the period 2000–2006 aimed at promoting economic, social and regional development.

National Health Strategy » The current government plan for developing the health system over the period 2001 to 2011. Four principles guide the Strategy: equity, people-centredness, quality and accountability.

Persistent poverty » People in long-term poverty, that is, in relative income poverty (falling below 60% median income) in the current year and in at least two of the preceding three years.

NGO » Non-governmental organisation. Anti-poverty groups and community and voluntary sector organisations are non-governmental organisations.



Peace process » The ongoing discussions and developments to bring about peace, based on the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. This includes the establishment of governance structures and institutions and support for groups on the ground.

Peace II programme » The EU funded Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland, which runs from 2000–2004 (now extended to 2006).

People at risk of poverty » People with a particular risk of poverty, as identified in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy include: women, children and young people, older people, people with disabilities, Travellers, migrants and minority ethnic groups, prisoners and ex-prisoners. People living in disadvantaged urban and rural areas also have a high risk of poverty. Particularly vulnerable groups are people in severe poverty, such as people who are homeless.

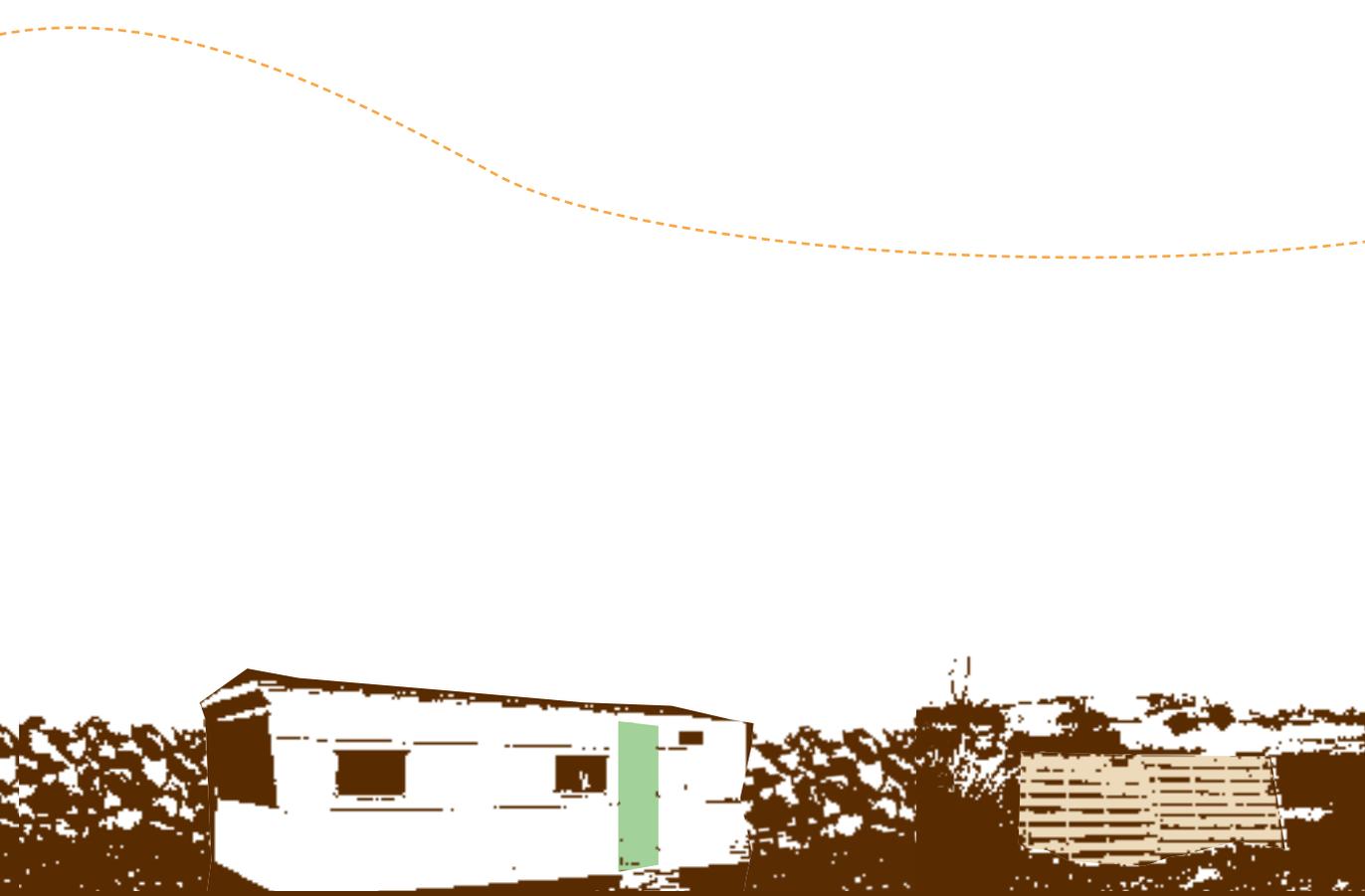


Poverty » People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of their inadequate income and other resources people may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

Relative income poverty » People who are living below a particular income threshold. The standard threshold, adopted by the European Union, is below 60% of median income. Median income is the middle point of the income distribution ie. the middle point if all incomes were lined up, from the lowest income to the highest income.

Risk of poverty » A European Union term to describe the proportion of the population living in relative income poverty, that is below 60% of median income.

Severe poverty » People who are living on very low incomes, in poor conditions and who are marginalised by society, such as people who are homeless, some Travellers, people with acute mental ill health and disability for whom no appropriate service is available, and older people in poor accommodation.



Social exclusion » The process whereby certain groups are shut out from society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, discrimination, inadequate education or lifeskills. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and they have little access to power and decision-making bodies.

Social inclusion » A process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights.

Spatial distribution of poverty » Describes the geographical location of poverty across the country.

Structural poverty » Refers to the kind of deprivation which is reinforced by administrative, economic and social barriers preventing access to new life skills, adequate income, employment opportunities, improved health care and better housing.

Sustaining Progress » This is the sixth "national agreement" drawn up between the Government and the social partners (employers, trade unions, farmers, community and voluntary sector). It runs from 2003-2005. It sets out parameters for economic and social progress over this period, including a pay agreement.



Ten special initiatives » These are contained in **Sustaining Progress**. The initiatives include "Ending Child Poverty", "Tackling Educational Disadvantage", "Long-Term Unemployed" and "Care". They are to receive special attention and each is being progressed by a Committee set up for this purpose.

Working poor » People who are in low paid work and whose household's standard of living is below the poverty line.

White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity » A Government White Paper published in 2000 which sets out a policy for supporting voluntary activity and for developing the relationship between the State and the community and voluntary sector.





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Combat Poverty
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