

Social Inclusion Forum

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Conference Report



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
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Social Inclusion Forum

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Section 1

Introduction



1. Introduction

The Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) was established by the government as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate Ireland's *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007- 2016*. The Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Social Protection has been given the responsibility by the government to convene the Social Inclusion Forum, which is a key element of the government's commitment to consult with all relevant stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty and the groups that represent them in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The Forum provides an opportunity for engagement between officials from government departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty in relation to the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion*. The 2011 Forum was organised by the Social Inclusion Division in partnership with the Community Worker's Co-operative (CWC) and the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland (EAPN).

The purpose of the annual Social Inclusion Forum is to provide organisations and individuals, primarily within the community and voluntary sector, with the opportunity to:

- Input their views on key policies and implementation issues;
- Identify barriers and constraints to progress and how best these can be tackled; and
- Provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

The themes for discussion at the 2011 Forum were (1) the review of the National Poverty Target and (2) responding to the social impact of the economic crisis.

This report provides a summary of the eight meeting of the Forum which took place on Wednesday 9th November at the F2 Centre, 3 Reuben Plaza Rialto, Dublin 8. It includes a summary of the main points raised by guest speakers, the discussions in five parallel workshops and the questions and issues raised. In addition, seven overarching recommendations are highlighted for the attention of policy makers. This report will be submitted to the Senior Official's Group on Social Policy and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas.



Section 2

Acknowledgements

2. Acknowledgements

The Department of Social Protection acknowledges the support and assistance of the Community Worker's Co-operative and the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland in the organisation of the Social Inclusion Forum and for the preparatory workshops which they jointly organised to enable individuals experiencing poverty to consider their contribution to the work of the Forum. Sincere thanks and appreciation is also extended to all those who participated and contributed on the day.

Sincere thanks are also extended to the workshop note-takers: Ciaran Diamond, Joanne Mulholland, Deirdre Bodkin, Maeve O'Sullivan and David Logan. Their meticulous recording has contributed greatly to the compilation of this report on the outcomes of the Forum.



The views contained in this report reflect the views of the participants in the Forum and do not necessarily represent the views/policies/position of the Department of Social Protection.

Section 3

Seven Key Recommendations for Policy Makers

3. Seven key recommendations for policy makers

While there are many important issues and key points identified from the workshop outputs, all of which are vital and relative to the achievement of better policy and service delivery, there are a number of key points which are of such overarching importance to the success of the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* to warrant special attention. These are outlined below:

- Acknowledging the economic downturn, high unemployment and the pressures on the public finances as presiding difficulties, there is a consensus that **existing poverty targets should be held** as a baseline measure to protect the most vulnerable in society. While the economic downturn is generally negative it does present an opportunity to address residual inequalities by holding a social floor.
- Disaggregating and **sub-setting targets to encompass particular social groups and regional/spatial factors** would help to fine-tune interventions to address varied needs and circumstances, such as education access, affordable childcare, health service provision, urban disadvantage, border county issues and rural infrastructure deficits.
- Efforts to achieve joined-up approaches to poverty eradication could be enhanced if there was **better coordination across national strategies**. This would help to alleviate the silo effects that naturally arise from departmental responsibility and would bring a much greater level of coherence to anti-poverty policies.
- Services are a crucial ingredient in addressing poverty, promoting independent living for people with a disability and supporting family resilience. Department and agency mechanisms such as *activation*, needs-assessed care/support packages and coordinated delivery at local level, if developed in conjunction with communities, can be an important means of ensuring effective and efficient services, but only if there is **an overarching policing apparatus to encourage excellence and force home good practice**. The creation of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has brought about a transformation in healthcare services and practice and a similar body, with a social services brief, could have an equally transformative impact for service users.
- Targets are of themselves only as useful as the policy implementation process that puts them into play. **A robust use of poverty impact assessment mechanisms** to ensure that all policy measures are assessed for their impact on poverty would contribute greatly to achieving the ambitious goals set in the *NAPinclusion*.
- *The NAPinclusion* regards regular monitoring and evaluation of progress against social inclusion targets as essential and the Social Inclusion Forum is a key element of the structures to monitor and evaluate the Plan. **A more vigorous and effective monitoring and evaluation process** could be undertaken if the *Annual Report on Social Inclusion* and the end of year SILC report was available for the SIF meeting
- Finally, the impact of the government's annual Budget can have an enormous impact on poverty and on the attainment of the goals set in the *NAPinclusion*. The Social Inclusion Division carries out an analysis of the impact of the Budget on poverty. In the changing context whereby there is greater transparency and openness regarding Budget measures it would be useful if **a poverty impact assessment process was applied to the Budget proposals**. This would inform government regarding the possible impacts on poverty of measures that are being proposed or contemplated therefore minimising policy contradictions.

Section 4

Opening Remarks and Presentations

4. Opening Remarks and Presentations

4.1 Dr. Orlaigh Quinn, Assistant Secretary, Department of Social Protection and Chairperson for the proceedings opened the Forum. In welcoming participants, Dr. Quinn stressed the importance of the Social Inclusion Forum as an opportunity for a wide range of community and voluntary organisations, and the people they represent or whose voice they carry, to meet with policy makers to discuss current issues and to identify challenges in the area of poverty and social exclusion.

4.2 John Bohan, Principal Officer, Department of Social Protection provided an update on the preparation of the 3rd Annual Report on Social Inclusion, which outlines progress in implementing the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016*. The Progress Report is in line with the commitment in the social partnership agreement Towards 2016¹. The Progress Report will cover the two-year period from January 2009 to December 2010.²

The report will focus on the high level goals and targets (aligned with the lifecycle stages) contained in the *NAPinclusion*, using indicators and material provided from other government departments. It will include an assessment of progress against the set targets and the effectiveness of the individual actions to meet the targets. The Report will also identify new issues arising and will comment on other cross-cutting issues which might benefit from a more co-ordinated approach.

The completion of the report is at an advanced stage and will move to finalisation with the upcoming publication by the Central Statistics Office of the 2010 Statistics from the *Survey of Income and Living Conditions (SILC)*. The report will be finalised early in 2012 and will be made publicly available as soon as possible after that. The department is currently looking at the timing of the completion of the Annual Report and the possibilities of coordinating its availability with the Social Inclusion Forum event.

4.3 Jim Walsh, Social Inclusion Division, Department of Social Protection outlined the separate consultation process undertaken as part of a review of the national poverty target. The purpose of the review is to enable government to adopt appropriate and achievable national poverty targets to meet Ireland's contribution to the *Europe 2020 Strategy* and the commitments in the programme for government (*Government for National Recovery 2011-2016*). The review is being prepared by the Social Inclusion Division in the Department of Social Protection and will be submitted to the Minister for Social Protection and the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy.

The review process included:

- Local workshops for community representatives and people experiencing poverty held in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Monaghan;
- An online survey to ascertain the views of individuals and organisations on the review of the poverty target;
- A technical workshop for experts in poverty research from government departments and agencies, the social partners, academics and research organisations;
- Bilateral meetings with the Community and Voluntary Pillar and other social partners.

¹ *Towards 2016* (see page 75: Developing the Lifecycle Approach)

² No annual report was prepared in 2009 due to the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, which put in place a comprehensive programme of actions and events at national regional and local levels, at which awareness of poverty and social exclusion was raised.

This Social Inclusion Forum provided a further opportunity to consider the key issues arising in the consultation and to input into the review process itself.

The national poverty target as set out in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016* is to reduce the rate of consistent poverty to between 2-4 per cent by 2012 and to eliminate it by 2016, from a baseline rate of 7 per cent in 2005. The rate of consistent poverty was 5.5 per cent in 2009³. In addition, the EU has agreed a European poverty target as part of the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, which is to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020. In support of this target, member states are obliged to set a national poverty target which will contribute to the European target. Based on its national poverty target, Ireland's contribution to the European target is to lift at least 186,000 people out of consistent poverty by 2016. In 2009, the target figure had risen to 245,000.



³ The annual Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU SILC) report November 2011 released subsequent to the Social Inclusion Forum shows an increase in consistent poverty to 6.2% in 2010. http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/silc/2010/prelimsilc_2010.pdf

Section 5

Workshops

5. Workshops

Forum participants divided into five parallel workshops in order to consider key issues under a number of themes reflecting the *lifecycle approach* used in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016*. The key lifecycle groups are Children, People of Working Age, Older People, People with Disabilities and Communities. In addition, as part of the consultation process for the review of the national poverty target, a workshop on this matter was included in the Forum.

In considering the topics participants were asked to consider the following questions:

- Does having a specific strategy on a theme/target group work better for that theme/target group?
- What are the social impacts of the current economic situation?
- Are these experienced differently by different communities or groups of people? How?
- How are these issues best addressed? Should there be an overall poverty target or one that is specific to communities/groups?

A presentation was given in each workshop on a key policy issue/good practice area related to the specific topic and the findings of each workshop were presented to the final plenary session by the Forum rapporteur. A summary of the key workshop presentation and facilitators is outlined below.

- **Children** facilitated by Anne Costello, Galway Traveller's Support Group. Presentation: Developments at a National Level, Albert O'Donoghue, National Children's Strategy Unit, Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
- **People of Working Age** facilitated by Catherine Lynch, European Network Against Racism. Presentation: National Employment and Entitlements Service, Lucy Fallon-Byrne, Department of Social Protection.
- **Older People** facilitated by Robin Hanan, Independent Consultant. Presentation: The Need to Protect the Most Vulnerable in Challenging Times, Michael Murchan, Department of Health.
- **People with Disabilities** facilitated by Rachel Doyle, National Women's Council Ireland. Presentation: National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities, Jim Comiskey, Margaret Tumbleton & Tessa Van Keeken, Clondalkin Citizens Information Services
- **Review of the National Poverty Target** facilitated by Jim Walsh, Social Inclusion Division, Department of Social Protection. Presentations: Paul Ginnell, European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland (EAPN) & Dorothy Watson, The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) .

• 5.1 Workshop on Children

Albert O'Donoghue of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs presented a synopsis of the work of the department, which has responsibility for a wide policy remit, including areas such as child welfare and protection, youth justice, early years' education, the National Education Welfare Board and the Family Support Agency. The department is leading the development of the National Children's Strategy and maintains a particular focus on research and innovation through involvement in significant multi-location learning projects that include early year's development and in *Growing Up in Ireland*, the longitudinal study of children. It also has responsibility for the proposed constitutional referendum on children's rights, in coordinating responses to various international instruments, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the establishment of the new Child and Family Support Agency. The Department is currently in the process of finalising its Statement of Strategy. Finally, Albert underlined the importance of collaboration between departments in meeting the needs of children.

There was a broad consensus that the economic crisis brought home the reality that children can neither flourish nor escape the effects of poverty and inequality when the model of development prioritises economic development over social considerations. Models of development in other countries, particularly the integrated approach of many European countries where there is greater balance between economic and social objectives, has brought better outcomes for children and families. The importance of universality, as in child benefit payments, was underlined in promoting social solidarity while addressing individual and family needs. The connection between values, vision and outcomes is thus a central determining point in the development of the required political will to address child poverty and generational disadvantage.

It is an historical fact that recessions impact most profoundly on weaker sections of society. The disproportionate effects of the economic crisis on particular children/families illustrate this. Children in care or in direct-provision centres, Traveller children and teenage parents, and those children living in lower socio-economic households are particularly affected. For these very reasons government needs to bolster the resilience of more vulnerable families through a set of integrated income supports, responsive services and access/participation support measures. This means greater coherence between and across policies requiring departments to work closely together and coordinate their activities with local community sector activity and community-based provision, such as schools, healthcare teams etc. In defining and measuring child poverty, family resilience needs to be kept uppermost – especially in selecting the range of determining factors such as income, access to services and the opportunities afforded to partake in the life chances provided through school, leisure and community participation.

Housing/accommodation presents particular issues related to child poverty. Teenage mothers are not regarded as being in need of housing if they are living in their parent's home, despite the inherent tensions that multi-family occupancy generates. This is compounded by reductions in Jobseeker allowances for young men, which make family formation and viability practically impossible for those who are unemployed and/or welfare dependent, thus creating the conditions for accumulative poverty. Shifting investment towards public housing provision rather than supplementing the private rental market would bring both an economic saving and a better social outcome for children.

While there is a general acceptance of the adverse budgetary situation that government finds itself in, a focus also needs to be held on the significantly greater costs that will be borne in the not too distant future by cutting services and supports to vulnerable children/families at this time. Early childhood education is a point in respect of the false economy of spending cuts and the relativities of interventions at points in the life cycle. Clearly, the importance of early childhood intervention has been identified by the Department of Education and Skills in the universal application of the pre-school education initiative. An additional protection against poverty could be attained by targeting disadvantage and achieving better alignment with the primary school system.

The absence of poverty related data for particular categories of children is a concern. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that children in care are more at risk of early school leaving, early pregnancy and homelessness. Too little is known about the effects of direct provision on migrant children and the combination of deficits in income, transport and social isolation on children in rural areas.

The specificity of gender was an overarching factor that required focus. To a greater proportion, it is women who undertake the care and development of children. Frequently, this role is coupled with employment, elder care and, for the most marginalised, the management of frugal household budgets and maintenance of basic comforts such as shelter, food, heat and clothing. Flexible childcare and income supports such as Child Benefit, which are focused on women, is therefore vital to successfully address child poverty and underpin the importance of supporting family resilience.

Finally, in terms of reviewing and resetting poverty targets, a need for some further exploration was advised. Specific concerns related to ensuring child poverty targets are linked to overall poverty targets. The need for a common definition of child poverty that widens the perspective beyond income supports to include statutory services and access to the normal range of developmental opportunities, such as school outings, leisure and sports activities etc., was also required.



5.2 Workshop on People of Working Age

The decision of government to establish the National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES) by integrating services previously provided through Foras Áiseanna Saothair, the Health Service Executive and Department of Social Protection into a single organisational structure was outlined. The process of transitioning the component parts into a remodelled service will be completed within the next 2 years. The NEES will provide a tailored, personalised service covering entitlements and employment, and advising on education and training supports. The service will operate in a proactive fashion using online, telephone, post and face-to-face contact. There will be strong links to the training and education sector and the integrated nature of the service will facilitate a more efficient collation of the data required to inform the development of the service. For a variety of budgetary and demand reasons, the staff-client ratio required to deliver a high quality, efficient case management service will not be available initially. However, as the new business model develops, the department expects it will deliver greater benefits over time as it gains experience from implementation and networking. In the short-term, at an administrative level, every effort will be made to process applications for supports as quickly as possible.

Discussion in this workshop focused on the National Employment and Entitlements Service (NEES), encompassing as it does the government's commitment to an *activation* approach to unemployment – i.e. a coordinated package of income, skilling and employment measures tailored to the individual. The challenge involved in mainstreaming the NEES was recognised. Overcoming the negative connotations implicit in *activation* in relation to certain vulnerable categories of people presented a particular challenge and underlined the need for a partnership approach with the community-voluntary sector. At present that partnership is not in place and there is a much reduced capacity on foot of the decimation of the sector following severe pruning of programmes and funding cutbacks.

Ultimately, the success of employment services and the underpinning policy decisions determining these services are reliant on a joined-up approach to policy implementation at political and departmental levels. A wider engagement of end-users and community organisations is also vital to success. In this respect, the need for an improved consultation and community planning process was an existing deficit.

Suggestions aimed at enhancing the implementation of employment strategies included addressing the disparities in access to employment services in rural areas, ensuring person-centred approaches by providing appropriate training to staff, and making greater use of the Citizens Information Service to inform people, especially those experiencing first time unemployment, about rights and entitlements. The apparent poor take-up of appropriately focused schemes such as Family Income Supplement and One Parent Family Payment illustrate the need for better information on entitlements. A more holistic approach that takes account of mental health, indebtedness and other family difficulties would also assist implementation. The need to ensure that NEES implementation design is cognisant of existing operational problems and inclusive of good practice learning from local models was stressed – indications of better job outcomes for those who did not register with FÁS was cited as an example of the need for in-depth consideration.

There was a particular concern about the unequal treatment afforded to some social groups such as migrants and asylum seekers, who often had a very profound experience of poverty and deprivation. The employment and social protection conditions affecting such groups are significantly different in terms of access to work, the regulation of working conditions and in some cases the restrictions imposed on employment take-up. Problems associated with fairness and the Habitual Residency Condition were also raised, especially in relation to the state's duty to protect children.

Undoubtedly, the social impact of the recession has been significant – the poor have become poorer and this has been clouded by the widespread impact on the general population. Government's responsibility is to create jobs but maintaining existing employment, particularly vulnerable employment, will also mean supporting people to access job training and skills/education enhancement, therefore a degree of forward thinking needs to be part of government employment strategies. For this and other reasons, policy needs to be informed by a social impact assessment process and a tailoring of employment services towards the needs and circumstances of different social categories in order to ensure best outcomes. Social impact assessment would help to identify the most appropriate and efficient intervention point by taking into account the eventual social and economic cost of unemployment.

Turning to targets and indicators, the collation of data on unemployment was raised as an issue needing consideration. Reliance on the live register was thought to be somewhat flawed in terms of underemployment, those disbarred from registering, and the exclusion of the self-employed entrepreneur. The linking of employment and poverty targets, as suggested by the European Commission framework, whereby poverty is defined through a combination of income relativity, material deprivation and employment vulnerability, was considered positive in this respect. Finally, the setting of targets was considered to be pretty vacuous unless accompanied by the application of a poverty impact assessment process within departments and agencies.

5.3 Workshop on Older People

Michael Murchan of the Office for Older People, Department of Health provided an update on community-based services, long/short term residential care, including the *Nursing Home Support Scheme* and the *National Positive Ageing Strategy*. Michael outlined government policy, which is to support older people to remain in their homes and communities, with planning and delivery of services orchestrated within a framework of equity, access and person centred principles. In 2011 an extra €8M was provided for home care packages – which is a crucial care strategy that relieves pressures on the acute hospital, and long term residential care systems. New guidelines on home care services are in the process of being prepared or implemented by the HSE, and a scoping paper on the possible regulation of community-based services for older people has been prepared in the context of determining legislative priorities for the Social Care area overall.

While the primary concern is to maintain people in their homes and community, a secondary focus, based on the reality that home care may not always be possible, is to support access to quality, long-term residential care. A review will be undertaken in 2012 on the nursing home support scheme. An issue that arose earlier this year regarding funding difficulties for the scheme, resulting in a backlog in some areas, was resolved by shifting monies across HSE sub areas. HIQA inspections have also improved the enforcement of standards in many nursing homes.

Work is progressing through an inter-departmental group in advancing the *National Positive Ageing Strategy*, which is due to be published in early 2012 – this was delayed due to the change in government, and subsequent further review in formulating the proposed Strategy. Consideration is also being given within the department to the impact of changing demographics, including reviewing public capacity against future demands.

While these are challenging times, government has prioritised the protection of older people – funding issues affecting older people were much less than that experienced by other social groups in the last 3-4 years. Nonetheless, this department has been subject to a comprehensive expenditure review and in the present difficult circumstances there are questions about how government will deliver *Programme for Government* commitments.

A widespread awareness that the concerns of older people become particularly acute in a period of recession and budgetary cutbacks dominated the discussion. Older people are conscious of their dependence on statutory services, their exposure to price increases and the vulnerability of their situation in terms of safety and social contact. Reduced population numbers and a subsequent decline in service usage is also part of a negative cycle in many rural areas. For these reasons, there is a growing sense of uncertainty and anxiety amongst older people about cuts to services and income supports. An additional fear relates to the widespread social upheaval that unemployment and forced emigration may bring – i.e. the loss of existing levels of social contact and protection afforded by family members and friends.

For people on low income, health costs, debt and having to go without basic necessities in order to cover increased fuel costs – as demonstrated in recent research by Dublin Institute of Technology - increases vulnerability, reduces the quality of life and negatively affects the health of this group in very real and immediate ways. Therefore, the centrality of the general practitioner relationship for older people needs to be kept uppermost in any budgetary proposals related to the medical card. *The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA)* report on ageing in Ireland pointed to 50% of those aged 75+ being on five or more medications, illustrating the interrelationship between age and health.

Promoting and facilitating social participation and combating isolation must be central to the policies of government, statutory agencies and voluntary providers. Living alone or with a disability and/or living in isolated rural (and sometime urban) areas compounds the problem of isolation. Overcoming the natural reluctance of older people to seek assistance/supports, improving access to transport in rural areas and compensating for the increased fears and isolation brought about by the closure of Garda stations and post offices were regarded as particular priorities. Improving communication and information services by lessening the use of online and automatic telephone services by service providers and promoting personal contact would also improve the uptake of vital supports and services.

The adoption of a standardised holistic needs assessment would address the gap between home care provision and the needs of the person. As things stand, a significant proportion of impaired older people are not receiving adequate or appropriate supports, and many may not be in receipt of any supports (TILDA points to 12% of significantly impaired older people receiving no support). Regular reviews of home care policies to bring about a better match between needs and services are necessary to bring efficiencies and improved effectiveness. Better targeting of resources and the use of generic drugs, presently less than 15% according to TILDA, would also bring enhanced outcomes and improved savings.

The adequacy of the housing stock, in terms of insulation and draft proofing, and the affordability of heat/fuel is a particular issue for older people with low incomes. The importance of the Department of Social Protection negotiating better arrangements with electricity and gas providers and the need to fast track and improve the retrofitting of homes was stressed. Re-examining building and planning regulations is also important in terms of a longer term outcome.

In terms of making progress in tackling the poverty experienced by some older people, many would like to see a closer engagement between researchers, advocacy groups and the Department of Health and other relevant departments to interrogate the findings from the TILDA research and to convert the learning into policy and delivery options.

Finally, there were some concerns about communicating the targets relative to older people - in terms of understanding the rationale/concept of consistent poverty and how it relates to older people experiencing poverty through the set targets.

5.4 Workshop on People with Disabilities

Jim Comiskey, Margaret Tumbleton and Tessa Van Keeken began the workshop by presenting an outline of the work of the National Advocacy Service for People with Disabilities (NAS), including principles, the role of advocates and the referral process. The NAS has been introduced as a national service following a five year pilot programme. It is delivered on a regional basis through the Citizens Information Service, an agency of the Department of Social Protection with responsibility for supporting the provision of information, advice and advocacy on a wide range of social and civil services.

NAS provides independent, representative advocacy services for vulnerable people with disabilities. The service gives a voice to those who are isolated in the community or who live in residential institutions and who cannot represent themselves. The NAS protects their rights, helps them gain their entitlements and make positive changes in their quality of life. Feedback from advocates can facilitate change within services, raising expectations, giving people with disabilities more choice, improving their social skills and supporting them to self-advocate.

Trained advocates support people with disabilities to access social welfare, housing and improved living conditions. They can help people reintegrate into the community on leaving residential institutions by linking them with local support services.

In many ways the state is still struggling with the shift from institutional care to independent living with supports and services. Support services are vital to independent living but, where such services are inadequate, people with disabilities may remain marginalised and often impoverished. Independence is of course relative, as there is always a degree of dependence for those with a disability, but this shouldn't be allowed to hinder the attainment of greater levels of independence. For that to happen there should be an emphasis on the empowerment of people with disabilities— both at an individual level and a collective level. If there were changes to reflect this principle in the policies of providers, people could begin to determine their own life choices. In that sense, utilising long-term disability allowance schemes maintains dependency. While there was acknowledgement of the difficulties of suggesting innovative approaches in a climate of cuts, implementing activation strategies in a sensitive and appropriate fashion would shift things towards empowerment.

The lack of coordination of services and strategies presents particular difficulties for people with disabilities, with the resultant fragmentation making the framework of supports needlessly complicated. Services should be both linked and complementary, and if not, measures should be introduced to eliminate duplication and bring efficiencies - a starting point being information sharing across departments and providers. Moving the Community Welfare Service to the Department of Social Protection and locating advocacy services in Citizens Information Centres is a positive development in this respect. The need for all government strategies, such as the *National Women's Strategy* and the *National Disability Strategy* to be joined up would bring a better sense of coherence to disability services and to overall national anti-poverty strategies.

Well planned structural change has the capacity to bring about vast improvements in outcomes. The expansion of HIQA (a mechanism that has brought huge improvements in the delivery of health services) into vocational and educational services for people with disabilities would also have a follow-through impact on poverty.

People are greatly concerned of what will emerge from the series of budget cuts forced by the terms of the Troika agreement. It is estimated that €700M will be cut from health services in the upcoming Budget. This will be difficult for people with disabilities and particularly harsh for those with mental health issues. A continuing increase in the numbers applying for Disability Allowance is already underway - and will increase as the population ages. Cutbacks also mean that local authorities are not implementing their access strategies.

Recognising the operational reality that people with disabilities are not able to access information on the same basis as others - even though their needs may be just as great - is an important starting point in developing better information on entitlements. The fact that there are lots of rejections for Disability Allowance⁴ is stressful for people, especially since many are overturned on appeal. Such a process implies an element of waste that points towards false economy, if the perception that the department is trying to cut back on numbers is true. In addition, there is a consensus that Disability Allowance application forms are not fit for purpose. A more detailed form would prevent the rejection/appeal cycle and save both monies and needless distress. A similar situation arises with ancillary benefits (travel and medical card). A further problem is that Deciding Officers do not appear to be familiar either with disabilities or issues of disability and need to be properly trained. Further streamlining could be achieved if appeals were acknowledged within a 21 day timeframe.

Poverty is a huge concern for people with disabilities and this should be taken into account in setting targets. Addressing issues such as the reality that people with disabilities cannot get equal access to education and training should be a focus in setting targets. A combined poverty and social inclusion target with sub-sets for disability across key policy areas would cover all eventualities.

5.5 Workshop on Review of the National Poverty Target

The overarching question for this workshop centred on how the government can set out different levels of ambition for poverty reduction having regard to the economic circumstances, the likely economic and fiscal scenario for the immediate years ahead and European Union/European Central Bank/International Monetary Fund Troika agreement. Discussion was framed by the following considerations:

- Should the national poverty target be adjusted to take account of the economic downturn and the new fiscal reality?
- How can the situation of vulnerable groups, with higher poverty rates, be reflected in the national poverty target?
- Should there be a differentiated approach to national poverty targets using a range of indicators?
- Should the focus be on short, medium and long-term poverty targets to reflect current and future economic realities, including the policy priority to protect the most vulnerable from economic and fiscal adjustments?

⁴ Percentage of Disability Allowance claims disallowed was 54.27 in October 2011

The workshop began with a synopsis of the initial outcomes of the separate consultation process on the national poverty target⁵ followed by presentations by Paul Ginnell of the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland, and Dorothy Watson of the Economic and Social Research Institute. Mr.Ginnell looked at the different risks for different target groups, outlining EAPN's preference for high level targets with sub-targets for these high risk groups, and advocating the introduction of *poverty impact assessment* and a more robust engagement with organisations representing the needs of people experiencing poverty. Ms.Watson focused on determining good methods for poverty measurement, using a checklist comprised of: accurately identifying those who are poor; ensuring the reliability of the component measurement mechanisms; valid in terms of the key aspects of people's lives; generally applicable to different groups; non-technical and easy to communicate. She suggested that *anchored income poverty thresholds* – i.e. based on the percentage rise or fall in income against an 'anchored' year might be useful to consider.

While the difficulties of holding onto poverty targets against a backdrop of sluggish economic activity, high unemployment and budgetary cuts was acknowledged, the overall consensus was that the current target of eliminating consistent poverty⁶ by 2016 should be held. The process leading to the setting of these poverty targets had been a long and arduous one and any dilution of targets would be difficult to reverse in what is likely to be a difficult economic period over the coming years.

Suggestions that persistent poverty⁷ might be a better indicator for measuring poverty was set against the difficulties involved (mainly relating to sample size) in gathering the appropriate data. There was also a concern about the effectiveness of the data gathering process arising from the reluctance of those surveyed to convey their difficulties – a problem arising as more people have their first experience of poverty.

The need to reflect the higher poverty rates of particularly vulnerable groups within poverty targets was discussed, with a particular focus on disaggregating the overall targets into sub-targets for women, long-term unemployed, children, Travellers, older people, people in isolated rural areas and disadvantaged urban areas. Developing the poverty indicator matrix to facilitate the setting of group-appropriate poverty targets would enable the development and monitoring of focused policy actions. There a strong sense that this would also enable the development of finely tuned interventions for people with disabilities, mental health and literacy problems.

Developing such a comprehensive set of indicators and targets is not without its difficulties. For instance, it may be difficult to identify and formulate a target for every group. Overall it was felt that the best approach might be to retain an overall national target with a series of sub-sets relative to each target group. Progress on the sub-targets could then be measured against the overall target. This approach would avoid the complexity of cross referencing while strengthening the monitoring of the overall target by providing a reference point against which to measure sub-targets.

Another issue related to the disparities between regions, both in terms of service infrastructure and socio-economic development. Services are a key element in determining effective responses to poverty, therefore differentials in provision need to be factored into the indicator/target matrix. The border region was cited as an extreme example of the way that regional

⁵ Consultation Report on the Review of the National Poverty Target

⁶ The percentage of people with an income below a certain threshold (less than 60% of median income) who are deprived of one or more goods or services considered essential for a basic standard of living (*National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016*)

⁷ The percentage of people below the 'at risk of poverty' threshold in the current year and in two of the last three years.

factors can skew the national baseline assumption: in border regions the effects of two facing economies subject to different administrative and fiscal governance means that enterprise development and levels of employment can fluctuate dramatically.

Migrant communities were considered to be a very vulnerable social group, particularly those whose status is unresolved, who are in direct provision, but also those who may become undocumented for various reasons. Such circumstances can result in the omission of some people from the poverty statistics – by virtue of not being in households for the purposes of the *Survey on Income and Living Conditions*.

A suggestion was made that Ireland's poverty indicators should be more closely aligned with the 27 indicators used to monitor the *European Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*. Although not all the European indicators relate directly to poverty, many do, and poverty is intrinsically linked to both social protection and social inclusion.

The damaging impact of intergenerational poverty was also raised as an issue that needs to be incorporated into targets. The cycle of embedded poverty makes it very difficult for families to access the education, skills and networking opportunities that provide pathways to employment and an adequate income. Activation should be useful in this respect but the use of education, training and childcare access poverty indicators would also contribute to addressing intergenerational poverty. Long term targets are most useful in breaking the cycle but there is also a need for a short term strategy to protect the most vulnerable and to prevent more people falling into a long-term poverty cycle.

Finally, the commitment of government to protect the most vulnerable needs to be related to tangible checking mechanisms such as poverty targets if intent is to be matched by action.



Section 6

Later Presentations

6. Later Presentations

6.1 Fintan Farrell, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network Europe outlined the common European framework, comprised of the EU's ten year strategy for development and growth, the process of implementation and the underlying fundamentals that inform or drive the choices that have been made in developing the Strategy. The *Europe 2020 Strategy* aims to achieve growth that is *Smart* (driven by new technologies), *Sustainable* (taking account of climate change and declining fossil fuels) and *Inclusive* (socially cohesive and equitable). The strategy is fortified by a number of principles, guidelines, targets and associated measures including:

- The setting of five key targets including a commitment to take 20 million people out of poverty or risk of poverty across the EU within the ten year timeframe⁸
- The adoption of ten Guidelines to support implementation of the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, including Guideline 10 which clusters anti-poverty policies with employment policies, meaning that implementation and progress will be reported within the European Employment Strategy and may be the subject of country-specific recommendations.
- Recital 16, requiring the participation of all actors, including community, in the development of National Reform Programmes under the *Europe 2020 Strategy*.
- The creation of a Platform Against Poverty as one of seven key flagship projects to advance the 2020 Strategy. The Platform Against Poverty will have both a European and national application and aims to draw together all of the key stakeholders, including representation from the NGO sector and people experiencing poverty, to mobilise existing and new measures and tools to achieve the 2020 Poverty Target.
- A re-enforced Open Method of Coordination⁹ (OMC) on social protection and social exclusion. This is the method through which some EU policy is implemented - rather than by directives, which force compliance on member countries. It relies on the dynamics of the peer process i.e. that member states will wish to be compliant, innovative and energetic in profiling their good practice.

A key instrument in delivering this *Europe 2020 Strategy* is the National Reform Programme (NRP) process, through which national governments are obliged to set out plans in line with the ten Guidelines mentioned above. In terms of the process of implementation of the 2020 Strategy, it is intended that progress will be measured through the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) and mutual learning and exchange through the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Country specific recommendations will be key to setting national priorities.

However, all this is now overshadowed by the current financial crisis. In fact the *Europe 2020 Strategy* is no longer acting as a driver of EU policies and actions: the only driver is fiscal consolidation and the only approach is austerity measures. This will result in greater levels of poverty and is already generating major distrust of the European institutions, which in turn is undermining our confidence in democratic institutions. The economic governance model driving the attempt to achieve fiscal consolidation is a neo-liberal one, despite the recent and obvious failures associated with this approach. Continuing to impose austerity measures will

⁸ The four other targets are: **Employment** - 75% of 20-64 year-olds to be employed; **Innovation** - 3% of EU GDP invested in research & development; **Climate change/energy** - reduction of greenhouse gases by 20-30% of 1990 levels, 20% increase in energy efficiency, 20% of energy from renewables; **Education** – school drop-out rate below 10%, 40% of 30-34 years-olds completing 3rd level.

⁹ The Open Method of Coordination is a 'soft law' mechanism comprised of guidelines, indicators, benchmarking and sharing of best practice. It is applied in policy areas that remain the responsibility of national governments.



prevent the growth required to enable a surge out of recession.

There are, of course, always competing objectives within big institutions and we can see the value of a more balanced approach in the *Europe 2020 Strategy* through (1) ensuring greater mainstreaming of social inclusion across other Directorates General (DG's)¹⁰; (2) developing new proposals on Structural Funds (2014 to 2020) demonstrating a determination to take seriously the 2020 poverty reduction target; and (3) increasing demands from citizens and civil society groups for policies that protect the poor and spread the burden more evenly.

Poverty and social inclusion needs to be given central importance in the forthcoming AGS if the pattern of non-fulfilment of poverty objectives is to be broken. The EAPN survey assessment of member state's National Reform Programmes is disappointing in terms of the inadequacy of the targets set, which should be at least in line with the agreed EU target, and the establishment of policy responses¹¹. In light of the weak results to date, EAPN have listed five priorities for action:

- **The prioritisation of inclusive growth over austerity through poverty reduction** – this would give meaning and expression to the poverty target. Austerity has not worked and is driving more and more people into poverty, increasing the insecurity of families and communities and threatening the European Social Model. A more systematic social impact assessment of the policy responses to the crisis needs to be undertaken prior to setting measures to realise the 2020 poverty target, primary among which should be a common percentage reduction of all 3 agreed indicators (consistent poverty,

10 Areas of responsibility or departments of the European Commission

11 Delivering Inclusive Growth – put the heart back into Europe: EAPN analysis of the 2011 National Reform Programmes in Europe (EAPN November 2011)

deprivation and at risk of poverty) with specific sub-targets for key priority groups.

- **A new deal based on a social investment stimulus package.** This would restore consumer confidence in the economy and public confidence in the EU and the member states. In order to enable this initiative, social protection and welfare systems need to be valued as economic stabilisers, especially through minimum income measures that will provide a social floor. Investing in welfare and protection systems bolsters the incomes of poorer people and, because they have to spend more on basic goods, generates domestic demand. Using the social economy to meet environmental and social objectives will create additional jobs, as will the development of public services in transport, caring, health, housing and energy.
- **Closing the inequality gap** by capturing the wealth through taxation systems, in particular tackling tax evasion and avoidance. It is grossly inequitable that low and middle-income earners bear a disproportionate share of the austerity burden. Working towards a more equal society would reduce social and health costs and would therefore benefit everybody. Taxation systems are an effective mechanism to bring about the redistribution required to achieve this, if there is the will to do so. The introduction of a transaction tax to be used primarily to combat poverty and social exclusion would also help to address fundamental inequalities.
- **Use EU central funds to reduce poverty** by ring-fencing 20% of the budget for social inclusion. The latest *Eurobarometer* survey confirms that 79% of people in the EU believe that Europe 2020 should be grading poverty and social exclusion as the number one priority required to exit the crisis¹². Cutting the Cohesion Funds by 5% is not helpful in this regard, whereas the ring-fencing of 20% of the ESF for tackling poverty and social inclusion, if accompanied by clear Commission guidelines and effective evaluation systems, would make a significant impact on poverty levels. Making ESF funding available to small grass roots organisations to develop bottom up initiatives would have a leveraging effect on the development of poverty policies in member states.
- **Get serious about improving democratic accountability** and participation both in the European 2020 Strategy and in civil society approaches through meaningful engagement of stakeholders beyond minimum levels. This means operationalising Recital 16 obligations by embedding Non-Governmental Organisation participation in all stages of the NRP and in the national strategic reports on social protection and social inclusion. Using European and national funds to support the development of national anti-poverty platforms and forums that enable the engagement of anti-poverty NGOs would also give substance to Recital 16. The AGS and key recommendations of Europe 2020 should be subject to democratic debate in national and European parliaments, with a yearly debate on progress, including the poverty target and the contribution of the overall Strategy to inclusive growth. The outcomes of the Annual Convention under the *European Platform Against Poverty* should contribute to this debate.

6.2 Aiden Lloyd, Conference Rapporteur, summarised some of the issues, priorities and suggestions from the workshops and fed these back to the wider plenary.

People were unanimous that the social impact of the recession has been significant and that the poor have got poorer, but this has been somewhat clouded by the general impact of the recession on the population. Overall, it was felt that the current ambitious poverty target should remain, although some consideration should be given to adopting new measurements such as persistent poverty¹³. There was a strong call for a disaggregation of the targets, with sub-targets being set for women and other categories. It was also felt that a range of short-term and longer-term targets would better address both the immediate need for social protection and the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

¹² Eurobarometer 75: European's perceptions on the state of the economy (p16)

¹³ Persistent poverty refers to the percentage of people below the 'at risk of poverty' threshold in the current year and in two of the last three years.

There was strong belief that the fragmentation in policy and delivery for people with disabilities needs to be addressed through improved coordination and better interface of national strategies. In addition, these national policies should be driven by a commitment to empowering people with disabilities, so they can change their conditions and ultimately change their lives.

The expansion of a HIQA type structure into vocational and education settings was something that many felt would greatly enhance the opportunities for people with disabilities. Granting statutory powers to the NAS could be a means of providing this push factor.

On the theme of unemployment it was agreed that it is government's responsibility to create jobs while also maintaining the stability of existing employment by supporting people to access jobs, training and education. In that vein, it was felt that employment services need to be person-centred, as envisaged in the NEES, and joined up at department/political level; however, this comes with a caveat that this will only happen through consultation with communities, and communities must be resourced to play their role in moving people closer to services.

For older people there is great uncertainty regarding budget cuts, with concerns about being able to afford heat/fuel. This general concern is related to the condition and thermal qualities of housing, which could be addressed through retro fitting, better design, improved standards and regulation. In addition, there is a fear that isolation, crime and social isolation will also increase as recession results in greater stress to the social fabric of society.

Finally, in terms of care for older people, there was a call for a holistic needs assessment, which should be mirrored by a more seamless delivery of services.

6.3 Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton T.D joined proceedings prior to the feedback from the workshops. The Minister welcomed the opportunity to be present during the feedback summary from the rapporteur in order to hear people's views and concerns. The Minister spoke of the challenges for government being very different to those faced when the current *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* was drawn up in 2007. Since the targets were set, the economic context has changed greatly: unemployment has increased, incomes have fallen and the revenue available to government to fund public services has decreased. On top of this, a greater increase in unemployment than was anticipated has put an additional cost on the department's budget in the current year.

Within Europe there is a concern to get a common benefit, through the imposition of a financial transactions tax, from the financial capitalism which is such a dominant force in the global economy. Such a tax would enable the *Europe 2020 Strategy* to achieve the social aims outlined in the Strategy, including lifting 20 million people out of poverty within the ten year time frame.

On the domestic front we will have to find creative and cost effective ways to stimulate employment and make better use of the limited budgets that we have. For instance, there are some €74 billion in Irish pension funds. About 5% of this is invested in hedge funds, which would provide a better return if invested in communities. Moving from cash transfers to services would, in some instances, also bring savings and better outcomes for people – for instance the provision of school books should be an integral part of the school system.

The Minister spoke of the importance of the *National Action Plan* in maintaining social cohesion in these challenging times. Despite these altered circumstances, the government



remains committed to the goals of the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* and to building a socially inclusive and fair society. “The services provided by my department impact on the lives of almost every person in the State and I am well aware that the vast majority of people who turn to my department for support played no role in causing this financial crisis. In making very difficult decisions, within the tough budgetary constraints forced upon us, the government is determined to do its utmost to protect the most vulnerable people in Irish society”.

The Minister concluded by thanking people for their contributions, paying particular attention to the key points as outlined by the rapporteur. In that light she wished to convey her assurance that these matters would receive the most diligent attention within the department, and through the high level officials group on social policy. She would ensure that her colleagues in Cabinet and in the Oireachtas are made aware of the report of today’s proceedings, together with the key suggestions and recommendations contained within the report.

6.4 Dr. Orlaigh Quinn, Assistant Secretary, Department of Social Protection, brought the proceedings to a close by thanking all of those who participated in both the preparatory meetings and the Forum itself. She offered a special thanks to the Fatima community for the use of the f2 facility, which was brought about through a tremendous piece of community endeavour, and which provided an ideal venue for the Forum. She thanked all the speakers, facilitators, note-takers, the Forum rapporteur and especially the participants and wished everyone a safe journey home.

Social Inclusion Division
Department of Social Protection
Gandon House, Floor 1
Amiens Street
Dublin 1