



Foreword

Building an inclusive society is the key priority of the Government for our country. Ireland's economic progress in recent years has been outstanding. Our national income per head is now above the average for the European Union and we have reduced unemployment from 12% in 1996 to about 4% today.

These developments have brought significant improvements to living standards to the benefit of all groups in society. Over the period 1994-2000, the proportion of the population in consistent poverty fell from 15.1 per cent to 6.2 per cent. In practical terms, this means that 400,000 people have been lifted out of poverty, as defined in the first National Anti-Poverty Strategy. Some 1.8 million people are now at work as opposed to less than 1.4 million in 1996.

Despite these advances, tackling poverty and social exclusion remains one of the major challenges facing Irish society. The Government is committed to building on what has been achieved to date so as to move to a new phase in the development of a more inclusive society. This commitment is reflected in this Strategy which sets:

- **an objective of reducing, and ideally eliminating, poverty in Ireland**
- **a specific target of eliminating long-term unemployment**
- **a new benchmark for the lowest social welfare payments of €150 by 2007 (in 2002 terms).**

In addition, recognising the cross-cutting nature of poverty and exclusion, the Government has set targets in the areas of education, health and housing policy. The Strategy also sets out to address poverty and exclusion as it affects particularly vulnerable groups including vulnerable women, children and young people, older people, people with disabilities and migrants and ethnic minorities.

We believe that this Strategy, which now sets out Ireland's national contribution to the EU Initiative on Poverty and Social Exclusion, is the most ambitious possible plan to end poverty in our country.

We wish to pay tribute to the social partners and to all those who contributed to the review of the first Strategy, which greatly informed the Government's response. Working together we can make this a better country for all.



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Background

1. The shared aims of Government and the social partners, as expressed in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF), are to:

- **keep our economy competitive in a rapidly changing world;**
- **provide a strong basis for further economic prosperity;**
- **improve the quality of life and living standards for all; and**
- **bring about a fairer and more inclusive Ireland.**

Between 1997 and 2001, real GDP in Ireland rose at an average rate of 9.7 per cent per annum compared to an average of 2.6 per cent in the EU over the same period. This strong growth has facilitated a further improvement in Irish income levels relative to the EU average. In addition, income tax reform together with relatively high nominal wage increases and substantial real increases in social welfare payment rates have led to a significant improvement in real disposable income levels over the period.

Strong growth has also continued to pay dividends in the labour market, with total employment rising by 400,000 between 1997 and 2001. As a result, unemployment - traditionally the weakest point of the Irish economy - has continued to decline, from 10.3 per cent in 1997 to some 4 per cent last year. Perhaps most encouraging has been the evolution of long-term unemployment, which fell from 5.6 to 1.2 per cent over this period.

Within that context, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) has provided the policy focus within which substantial progress has been made in reducing consistent poverty. The focus has been enhanced by the emphasis in the National Development Plan (NDP) and the explicit commitments in the PPF on measures aimed at promoting social inclusion. The scale of the improvement has exceeded expectations but much remains to be achieved. This Strategy provides a coherent framework for actions to tackle exclusion and disadvantage into the future. The



objective is to ensure that economic progress benefits all in society, but in particular, that the most vulnerable have the opportunities and the skills to participate in economic and social progress.

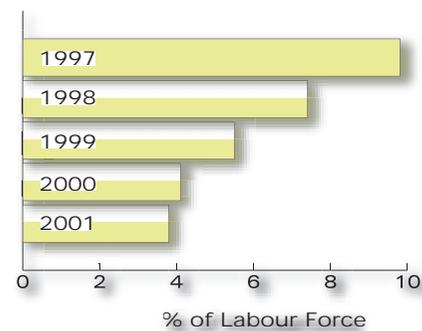
2. The Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy has been undertaken in accordance with the commitment given in the PPF. That agreement was to update the Strategy in consultation with the social partners, to review the underlying methodology, review and revise the existing targets where appropriate and consider new targets in the areas of child poverty, women's poverty, health, older people and housing/accommodation. The PPF also provided that the analysis would be updated to include emerging causes of poverty e.g. racism. Furthermore, the EU Commission has asked each Member State to prepare a national action plan against poverty and social exclusion (NAPincl), for the period 2001-2003. The Government submitted its plan in June 2001. The NAPincl has focussed on a number of themes that are relevant to NAPS. The NAPS and NAPincl processes will now merge and future plans submitted to the European Union will be consistent with the revised NAPS.
3. The review of the Strategy was undertaken with the social partners and the outcome of the consultative process is set out in *A Framework Document for a National Anti-Poverty Strategy* (available on www.welfare.ie). The clarity and understanding brought to the issues to be addressed through this process was influential in assisting the Government to formulate its response which is set out in this document.

Economic Context

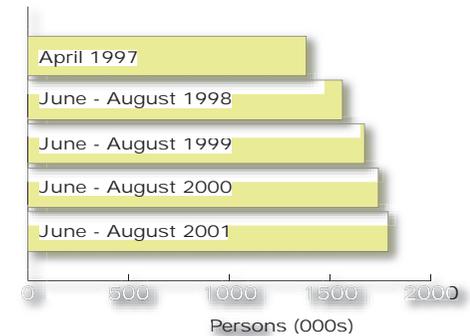
4. The Government is committed to tackling poverty and exclusion as a priority. The progress in recent years is real and measurable - employment increasing at an average annual rate of 4.5% over the last three years, historically low levels of unemployment - around 4% now compared with 10.3% in 1997, a real decrease in long term unemployment with the latest quarterly figures showing a rate of just 1.2% from 5.6% in 1997, and significantly

more people able to afford a better standard of living. Social welfare increases have outstripped inflation over the period between 1997 and 2001. The single most effective way of ensuring that the objectives of this Strategy can be achieved in the years ahead is through continuing sound economic and fiscal measures. It is the economic and fiscal policies of recent years which have made possible sustained and strong economic and social performance and, although there was bound to be a slowdown even without the particular difficulties of 2001, they are the basis of continuing progress. The Government is equally committed to working to protect Ireland's economic and fiscal situation as the key prerequisite to providing the resources needed to achieve the objectives of this Strategy. Given the emerging budgetary environment, it is clear that Government will have to consider carefully the allocation of resources to the Strategy, including the issues of prioritisation and phasing of measures and actions, and the potential to re-allocate and refocus existing resources wherever possible. In addition, a range of subsidiary targets were identified during the consultation process. Some of these could involve significant additional costs over the period of the Strategy and would have to proceed to implementation in the light of availability of resources.

Unemployment Rate



Level of Employment



Government's Strategy to Tackle Poverty and Social Exclusion

5. The definition of poverty underpinning this Strategy, as with the first NAPS, is:

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

6. The objective is to reduce substantially and, ideally, eliminate poverty in Ireland and to build a socially inclusive society. This Strategy sets out the overall objectives, overall targets within the key areas and the arrangements to mobilise actions. Supporting policy actions are set out in the *Framework Document*. Tackling poverty therefore involves a multi-policy approach. This can be achieved only through the combined effort of Government, social partners, communities and families working together to achieve the collective aim. The Government, for its part, commits to a wide-ranging and comprehensive approach to achieve this objective across the range of public services and programmes. It commits to new key targets in the areas of income adequacy, health, education, and housing and to associated actions targeted at vulnerable groups. It pledges sustained and vigorous action through appropriate economic and social policy measures to achieve the goals of this Strategy. In addition, the Government will be keeping under review the effects of other policies regarding tax changes, the minimum wage and measures to assist progression to better paid and higher skilled employment.

7. The overall policy approach is to:

- sustain economic growth and employment;
- provide levels of income support to those relying on social welfare sufficient to sustain dignity and avoid poverty, while facilitating participation in employment and escape from welfare dependency;
- address the needs of groups at high risk of poverty with specific needs;
- provide high-quality public services to all;
- tackle the causes of inter-generational transmission of poverty; and
- support disadvantaged communities.

8. It will be obvious that the best way of achieving these policy goals is to have a high employment, high value-added society, where individuals and households have the opportunity to engage in satisfying, well-rewarded work. Such a society will generate the resources to sustain, through equitable tax policies, the social protection systems and public services which provide adequate incomes and access to necessary support services for the whole population. The achievement of such a society will involve successful participation in lifelong learning to maintain and enhance skill levels. The Government's economic policy, based on partnership, is consistent with the social goals of this Strategy.

Within the overall approach, priority must attach to those who are weakest and most vulnerable in our society. As a minimum, those on low incomes need to be assured that, under the Strategy, their real incomes will continue to rise as they have, for example, in the case of social welfare recipients over the past five years. This is a core commitment of this Strategy.



Table 1: Real increases in SW payments

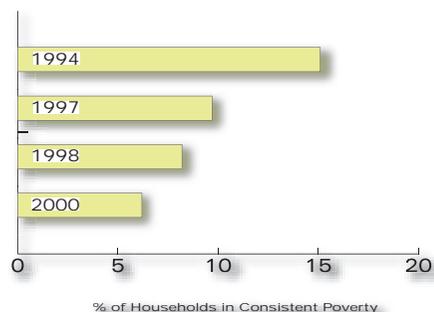
SW Payment	Real increase 1997 - 2002	Real increase 1987 - 2002
Short-term UA	20.4%	74.7%
Old Age (Con) Pension	26.4%	39.2%
Disability Benefit	16.6%	45.1%

9. This overall approach will be guided by the key objectives of this Strategy which are to:

- reduce, and ideally eliminate, consistent poverty;
- build an inclusive society; and
- develop social capital - particularly for disadvantaged communities.

Consistent Poverty

10. Consistent poverty is defined as being below 50%-60% of average disposable income and experiencing enforced basic deprivation. Basic deprivation refers to a set of eight indicators, which were regarded as necessities and possessed by a majority of those in the Living in Ireland Survey conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). Consistent poverty was chosen as the global target under the first NAPS because the inclusion of deprivation, as well as income, gave a better guide than income alone to changes in the extent and nature of exclusion arising from inadequate resources. Consistent poverty has fallen from 15.1% in 1994 to 6.2% in 2000.



In practical terms, this means that a significantly higher proportion of people (c. 400,000) are now able to afford a standard of living acceptable in our society. The quality of life of children improved significantly with consistent poverty among children being reduced from 24.8 % in 1987 to 8% in 2000.

Key target

A key target in this Strategy is to:

- reduce the numbers of those who are 'consistently poor' below 2% and, if possible, eliminate consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty. Specific attention will be paid to particular vulnerable groups in the pursuit of this objective.

Income Adequacy

11. A central element of the Government's Strategy is to ensure that the net effect of all policies in impacting on income levels in the community (e.g. employment, tax, social welfare, pensions) is such as to provide sufficient income for a person to move out of poverty and live in a manner compatible with human dignity. Significant real increases in social welfare payments in recent years have made much progress towards this aim. The Benchmarking and Indexation Group established under the PPF has given detailed consideration to the questions of a benchmark for adequacy of social welfare payments having regard to incomes in society generally. The Group's report has been carefully considered. The exact rate of social welfare payment in any year is a matter for Government, but the target will be to achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare to be met by 2007 and the appropriate equivalence level of basic child income support (i.e. Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances combined) to be set at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate. The Government will continue to pursue a strategy of increasing



social welfare payments as resources permit, so that people will have an income level to sustain an acceptable standard of living. The policy approach underlying targets for social welfare will be combined with an active social policy, the objective of which will be enabling individuals to support themselves and their families.

Key Target

- To achieve a rate of **€150 per week in 2002** terms for the lowest rates of social welfare to be met by 2007 and the appropriate equivalence level of basic child income support (i.e. Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances combined) to be set at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate.

12. Relative income is defined by reference to an income threshold set at a particular percentage of average median income, adjusted for family size and composition using equivalence scales. A wide range of factors influences the levels of income poverty at any given point in time. They include earnings levels, patterns of household formation, the direction of tax and welfare policies, employment and unemployment levels, employment structures and the level of recourse to welfare supports generally. These interact in a highly dynamic environment and the relative impacts will inevitably change at different points of the economic cycle. It is important to develop a greater level of understanding of the extent to which the various causal factors will influence the levels of relative income poverty. While budgetary decisions in the areas of tax and welfare policy are obviously key influential factors, there are other factors which are not amenable to direct intervention by the State. Progress in relation to the proportion of the population falling below relative income lines, particularly for a sustained period, will be monitored over the lifetime of the Strategy and in line with the indicators agreed in the EU Joint Report on Social Inclusion.

Employment and Unemployment

13. If consistent poverty is to be eliminated and the risk of poverty reduced, policies must address the patterns of risk and incidence that underlie poverty processes. This is especially important in the case of persistent poverty, which gives rise to the erosion of resources and a qualitatively different experience of deprivation. Persistent poverty¹ in Ireland is particularly associated with unemployment and thus with particularly low levels of education or skill. Accordingly, an objective is to provide maximum opportunity for the most vulnerable members of society to gain employment and to progress to better-paid and more fulfilling employment. It will involve providing a range of life-long learning options designed specifically to assist people currently in low paying jobs to acquire the skills which will lift them out of poverty.

Key Targets

- To eliminate long-term unemployment as soon as circumstances permit but in any event not later than 2007.
- To reduce the level of unemployment experienced by vulnerable groups towards the national average by 2007.
- To achieve the objectives set out in the National Employment Action Plan to increase employment rates.

Education

14. The objective is to ensure that all young people leave the educational system with an adequate education and related qualifications to support their full participation in the economy, in employment and in society. In addition all those who have already left school must have the opportunity to address any lack of educational experience and related qualifications that

1. Persistent poverty measures the share of the population living below a particular income poverty line over an extended period.



militates against their ability to participate fully in the economy, in employment and in society.

Key Targets

- To halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006.
- To reduce the proportion of the population aged 16-64 with restricted literacy to below 10 to 20 per cent by 2007 (restricted literacy being defined as falling below 200-225 on the IALS scale or equivalent).
- To reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 85 per cent by 2003 and 90 per cent by 2006.

Health

15. The overall objective is to reduce the inequalities that exist in the health of the population by making health and health inequalities central to public policy, by acting on the social factors influencing health, by improving access to health and personal social services for people who are poor or socially excluded, and by improving the information and research base in relation to health status and service access for these groups.

Key Target

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

Housing and Accommodation

16. The overall objective is to enable households experiencing poverty and disadvantage to have available to them housing or accommodation, which is affordable, accessible, of good quality, suitable to their needs, culturally acceptable, located in a sustainable community and, as far as possible, in a secure tenure of their choice.

Key Targets

- To ensure that housing supply is brought more into line with demand and that the housing requirements set out in the NDP (500,000 new units between 2000-2010) are achieved in a planned and coherent way.
- To deliver 41,500 local authority housing unit starts (including acquisitions) between 2000 and 2006.
- To deliver an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures which meets the needs of different types of households.
- To analyse the information gathered in the next statutory assessment of housing needs (to take place in March 2002) and to establish appropriate targets in relation to access to housing.
- By end 2004, sufficient and appropriate emergency accommodation to be available to rough sleepers, in conjunction with appropriate outreach services to enable them to access it. This target is to apply to each local authority and health board area. At end 2003, progress in meeting the target will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised mechanisms put in place to achieve it.

Given the absence of up to date baseline data it would not be credible to establish quantitative targets on access to



accommodation at this stage. Local authorities have already put in place housing strategies under the Planning and Development Act 2000. These will be reviewed in the light of information gathered in the next statutory assessment of housing needs, to take place in March 2002, and the full range of affordable social housing measures available. This would allow for the establishment of appropriate targets in relation to access to housing and any necessary reallocation and refocusing of existing resources required to meet those targets.

Vulnerable Groups

Children and Young People

17. The overall objective, in line with the National Children's Strategy (November, 2000) is to eliminate child poverty and to move to a situation of greater equality for all children in terms of access to appropriate education, health and housing, thus breaking the cycle of disadvantage and exclusion experienced by certain children in society.

Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the numbers of children who are 'consistently poor' below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.
- The Strategy will aim at reducing the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest and highest socio-economic group by 10 per cent from the current level, by 2007.²

2. Reducing the gap in low birth weight rates between different socio-economic groups depends on wide social, economic and environmental action as well as the provision of accessible public services. Action is required across the full range of NAPS health targets outlined in the Framework Document.

Women

18. The overall objective is to eliminate consistent poverty for women and to improve access for women to appropriate health care, education and employment, thus reducing the risk of poverty for such women and their families.

Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the numbers of women who are 'consistently poor' below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.
- The Strategy will aim at increasing the employment participation rate of women to an average of more than 60 per cent in 2010, as envisaged under the National Employment Action Plan 2001.

Older People

19. The overall objective is to eliminate consistent poverty for older people and to improve their access to appropriate health, care and housing supports, and to support older people to live independent and fulfilling lives.

Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the numbers of older people who are 'consistently poor' below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.
- By 2003, national guidelines will be put in place for the provision of respite care services to carers of older people.
- Access to orthopaedic services will be improved so that no one is waiting longer than 12 months for a hip replacement. This is



an initial short-term action to improve quality of life for older people and it will be reviewed in 2003.

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

Travellers

20. The overall objective is to improve the life experience of Travellers through the provision of appropriate education, health and housing services and to remove any remaining barriers to the full participation of members of the Traveller community in the work and social life of the country.

Key Targets

- The gap in life expectancy between the Traveller Community and the whole population will be reduced by at least 10 per cent by 2007.
- Age appropriate placement of all Travellers in primary school will be achieved by 2003.
- The transfer rate of Travellers to post-primary schools will be increased to 95% by 2004.
- Each third-level institution will double the participation by mature disadvantaged students, including Travellers and Refugees by 2006 (within the 15 per cent quota).
- All Travellers' families identified in the local authority five-year Traveller accommodation programme process as being in need of accommodation will be appropriately accommodated by end 2004.

People with Disabilities

21. The overall objective is to increase the participation of people with disabilities in work and in society generally and to support people with a disability, and their families, to lead full and independent lives.

Key Targets

Few specific targets have been set at this time for people with disabilities. This is largely because of the lack of available baseline data for this group. A key objective therefore over the period of the NAPS will be to develop appropriate data as part of the Data Strategy emanating from the NAPS Review. Once this is available, consideration will be given to the development of a range of appropriate measures for this group.

Meanwhile the following specific targets have been set:

- The Strategy will aim at increasing participation by students with disabilities at third-level to 1.35 per cent by 2003 and 1.8 per cent by 2006.
- The Strategy will aim at improving access to planned respite care for carers of disabled people by 2003.

Migrants and Members of Ethnic Minority Groups

22. The overall objective in relation to migrants and members of ethnic minority groups is to ensure that members of ethnic minority groups resident in Ireland are not more likely to experience poverty than majority group members.



Key targets

Very little quantitative information is available about the socio-economic situation of foreign-born residents in Ireland. It is not possible, therefore, to define specific targets for this group as a whole or for a particular ethnic group at this stage.

Overall policy approach

The overall policy approach is to tackle barriers to the integration of ethnic minority residents, and in particular:

- tackling racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance;
- developing a new immigration legislative framework within which fair and sensible immigration policies to meet the changing needs of Irish society can be developed and implemented. Such legislation will be developed following widespread consultation and will be based on best practice elsewhere;
- providing the resources for an efficient, fair, independent and transparent procedure for processing asylum applications with the target of deciding on applications within 6 months; and
- commitment by the State, An Garda Síochána, statutory organisations and the social partners to ensuring the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation and to accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality irrespective of race, religion or belief, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins.

- reducing the harm caused through drug misuse and the incidence of crime;
- improving family support services;
- increasing youth participation in education and training; and
- ensuring that State services are delivered in an integrated way.

Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the number of urban dwellers who are 'consistently poor' below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.
- The Strategy will aim at significantly reducing the harm caused to individuals and the community by the misuse of illicit drugs through a concerted focus on supply reduction, prevention, treatment, and research.
- The Strategy will aim at fostering public safety and preventing crime through better detection, use of approved youth diversion programmes and restorative schemes, optimum use of community-based sanctions and reducing the level of re-offending.
- The Strategy will aim at ensuring that the basic needs of all families, especially young parents, lone parents, older people, and ethnic minorities are met through enhanced and better co-ordinated State support services.

Urban Poverty

23. The overall objective is to tackle social exclusion in urban areas in a comprehensive and sustained manner by ensuring the provision of adequate income and by building viable and sustainable communities, through improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged urban areas and building social capital and community ownership of strategies. There will be a particular focus on:

Rural Disadvantage

24. The overall objective is to tackle social exclusion in rural areas in a comprehensive and sustained manner by ensuring the provision of an adequate income, through employment and income support, access to adequate services and infrastructure on a timely basis, and co-ordination of responses and empowerment of local people and communities.



Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the number of farm and non-farm rural dwellers who are 'consistently poor' below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.
- The Strategy will aim at improving transport services to rural dwellers through a combination of State support and community-based provision.
- The Strategy will aim at improving access to employment, health, education and housing services for rural dwellers.

Access to Services

25. Citizenship rights encompass not only the core civil and political rights and obligations but also social, economic and cultural rights and obligations that underpin equality of opportunity and policies on access to education, employment, health, housing and social services.

A wide range of social rights is specifically provided for in the Irish Constitution and in international conventions ratified by Ireland. In addition, legislation including, most recently, the Employment Equality Act, Equal Status Act and the Education (Welfare) Act are strengthening the rights available to the citizen. The Government is also committed to developing a strong infrastructure to promote and protect a range of rights and has established and resourced several institutions in this area including the Equality Authority, National Disability Authority, Cómhairle and the Human Rights Commission.

In accordance with the Strategy, detailed standards in relation to access to services will be set out. The Strategy will develop

indicators to monitor these standards and will establish accessible, transparent and effective mechanisms for ensuring the implementation of and adherence to these standards. The Strategy is based on this approach to the provision of quality services.

In the context of this Strategy there is a commitment to:

- a move towards a more formal expression of entitlements across the range of public services and to setting standards and guidelines regarding the standard of service delivery which can be expected by the customer;
- monitor, by means of indicators, access to services of a given standard and to work to improve performance over time;
- continue to pursue a much greater focus on effective outcomes and indicators to monitor outcomes, particularly in relation to the drive for integrated approaches to the problems of disadvantage at local level; and
- drive forward in a comprehensive way the range of proofing mechanisms necessary to ensure that policies and programmes are developed in such a way as to achieve the maximum impact in reducing and eliminating poverty and social exclusion.

The National Office for Social Inclusion (see para. 32) will be mandated to ensure that access to public services and specified services standards is developed, as part of SMI, as a key strategy within NAPS. The National Office will explore with relevant Departments and agencies how these bodies might be involved in further strengthening the NAPS. Finally, the principles set out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international human rights instruments adopted by Ireland will inform the future development of social inclusion policy.



Mobilising All Actors

Volunteering

26. The National Committee on Volunteering, established in 1999 to mark the International Year of the Volunteer, will continue with the role of strengthening volunteering and supporting volunteers. Proposals emerging from that Committee and those emerging from the Implementation and Advisory Group arising from the White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity will form the basis for a renewed emphasis on the capacity of the voluntary and community sector to develop social capital in our communities.

Corporate Social Responsibility

27. The Foundation for Investing in Communities was established in November 1998 in response to a challenge from the Minister for Social, Community & Family Affairs to provide increased recognition for businesses who are making Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) an essential part of their business practice.

A unique feature of the Foundation is the building of an Endowment Fund to help disadvantaged groups/communities with a particular focus on children's needs. The Foundation encourages philanthropy, offers donor services and is building an independent civic permanent endowment fund to serve the Irish community. This fund is being raised through the Community Foundation for Ireland and The National Children's Trust.

Through Business in the Community, the Foundation also aims to support Irish business to place corporate social responsibility in the mainstream of their business practice. Its board is business led at CEO level and members are actively involved through the membership of task forces set up to lead the key areas comprising CSR Policy & Practice, Employer Supported

Volunteering, the Schools Business Partnership and the Linkage Programme. Business in the Community is targeting the top 100 companies in Ireland to harness and develop best practice and to draw on their experience to inspire business nationally.

Over the period of the Strategy, the objective is that the capacity of the Foundation to be a key player in reflecting corporate sector involvement in promoting social inclusion will develop significantly.

Family Policy

28. The Action Programme for the Millennium underlined the need for a 'families first' policy focus designed to make families central to policy making, and committed to protecting the family through political, economic, social and other measures. Through measures such as the establishment of the Family Support Agency - which brings together a number of pro-family services introduced by the Government in recent years - a supportive community environment for families at local level will be fostered.

Implementation

Institutional Framework

29. Implementation of this Strategy will require a mobilisation of resources across a range of Departments and agencies. The Government recognises that new institutional arrangements are needed. The new structures for NAPS will comprise the following elements:³

³ A number of these structures, such as the Cabinet Committee and the Senior Officials Group have a wider brief than NAPS.



- A Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach;
- A Senior Officials Group to support the Cabinet Committee;
- A National Office for Social Inclusion reporting to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs;
- Social Inclusion Units in all key Government Departments and, on a phased basis, in local authorities;
- A Social Inclusion Consultative Group and Forum;
- The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) in a supportive role; and
- The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), in its role of monitoring the social inclusion element of Partnership Agreements.

30. The Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs will present regular progress reports to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs and occasional reports to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs.
31. A new **Social Inclusion Consultative Group** involving the social partners and anti-poverty experts will meet twice a year to offer its advice and observations on the process as it develops. This will strengthen the involvement of the social partners. However, it is also considered vital that individual members and representatives of the community and voluntary and other sectors have an opportunity to contribute to the process. Accordingly, the NESF will convene an annual **Social Inclusion Forum**. Progress in relation to NAPS will be reported to this Forum.
32. The **National Office for Social Inclusion**, reporting to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs, will take over the functions of the NAPS Unit. The Director of the Office will be a high level appointment and it will be staffed by experts seconded from relevant Departments and agencies, as well as by specialist staff. The work of the National Office will be overseen by a management group of Assistant Secretaries drawn from the relevant Departments, including the Department of the Taoiseach. These institutional arrangements will take over the

roles previously undertaken by the NAPS Unit and the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee.

33. The implementation of the Strategy in the public service will be further strengthened by the establishment, where they do not already exist, of **Social Inclusion Units** in the Departments that have prime responsibility for implementing the actions now being adopted. **NAPS Liaison Officers** will continue to operate in other Departments. NAPS Liaison Officers will be offered training support to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their briefs.

Local authorities

34. The key remit now given to County and City Development Boards in relation to the preparation of county and city strategies will lead to a key role for local authorities in the setting of strategic development objectives across the full range of public services. The setting of these strategic development objectives will take account of the principles, targets and objectives set out in the NAPS and, over time, local authorities will develop appropriate social inclusion strategies at local level which will underpin and strengthen the national actions being taken. A key step in this regard is the establishment of pilot social inclusion units in nine local authority areas in tandem with the RAPID programme.

Poverty Proofing

35. The National Office for Social Inclusion will be resourced to develop a more effective poverty proofing process and to ensure that it is appropriately operationalised in all relevant Government Departments. In doing so, it will take full account of the conclusions and recommendations of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in its review of the poverty proofing process. Rural and gender proofing procedures are also in place, and have a role to play in promoting social inclusion. Increased co-ordination of these proofing measures will be developed.



Data Strategy and Research Requirements

36. The European Community Household Panel is to be replaced with a new survey to be known as EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions). This will now be a cornerstone of data collection under the Strategy. However, the successful implementation of the Strategy will require a broader data collection effort to gather data on those not in households, such as Travellers and homeless people, and data on specific population groups, such as people with disabilities. The data collected will be disaggregated so that information on the vulnerable groups that have been identified within the Strategy including women and children will be forthcoming. (In this regard, the proposed Longitudinal Study on Children, envisaged under the National Children's Strategy and the Commission on the Family, will be a particularly valuable source of information.) Spatially based data will also be developed to inform the Strategy at local and regional levels.
37. The National Office for Social Inclusion will be resourced to develop the Data Strategy and will be supported by a **Technical Advisory Group**, which will meet at least every six months. This group will be made up of specialists in data collection and research, including the CSO and the ESRI, as well as Departmental and agency representatives. In addition, a formal and separately budgeted **Research Programme** will be adopted and administered by the National Office for Social Inclusion to integrate current research activities and budgets. The research will focus on the key themes identified in NAPS and on the related vulnerable groups.
38. The **Combat Poverty Agency** has an important role to play in fulfilment of its statutory advisory function, and in supporting the data and research effort. The Agency will work closely with the National Office and it is envisaged that it will undertake specific tasks reflecting, in particular, its research strengths and interests, as set out in the Framework Document.

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

39. Effective monitoring and evaluation systems are a key element of the Strategy. The systems put in place should be compatible with the monitoring and evaluation requirements of the EU National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPsincl). These plans are to operate on a two-year cycle, with the first plans covering the period 2001–2003. The National Office will undertake formal evaluation of the Strategy at two-yearly intervals, to feed into the NAPsincl process. In doing so, it will take account of the opinions of the NESF on the Strategy. The National Office will also produce an Annual Report for Government.
40. The EU Social Protection Committee is charged with the monitoring of the NAPsincl plans. The National Office will be required to ensure that the information needed to meet the monitoring and evaluation needs of that Committee will be made available.
41. Social indicators agreed at EU level will be utilised to monitor progress in relation to the targets set out in this Strategy.

Communications

42. A strong communications strategy is required to ensure that there is widespread knowledge and related information on what the NAPS is set up to do, both within and outside the public sector. This will require the development and implementation by the National Office for Social Inclusion of an internal and an external communications plan on NAPS. This communications plan should address the following issues:

- Improving knowledge and awareness within the public sector.
- Promoting NAPS in the local authorities.
- Keeping the social partners informed of progress.



- Providing information to communities doing anti-poverty work.
- Informing the public generally.

43. The success of NAPS will undoubtedly depend on the various actors in the process embracing the cross-cutting nature of the Strategy and forsaking a narrow view of their responsibilities. Communications policy will have a vital role to play in engendering such an approach and promoting multi-agency co-operation in implementing NAPS.

Conclusion

44. To become a true national strategy, all sectors of Irish society – social partners, communities and families – must play their role in ending poverty. The Government, for its part, undertakes to continue the focus on eliminating poverty and social exclusion as a priority and to mobilise the resources necessary to achieve this aim.

APPENDIX

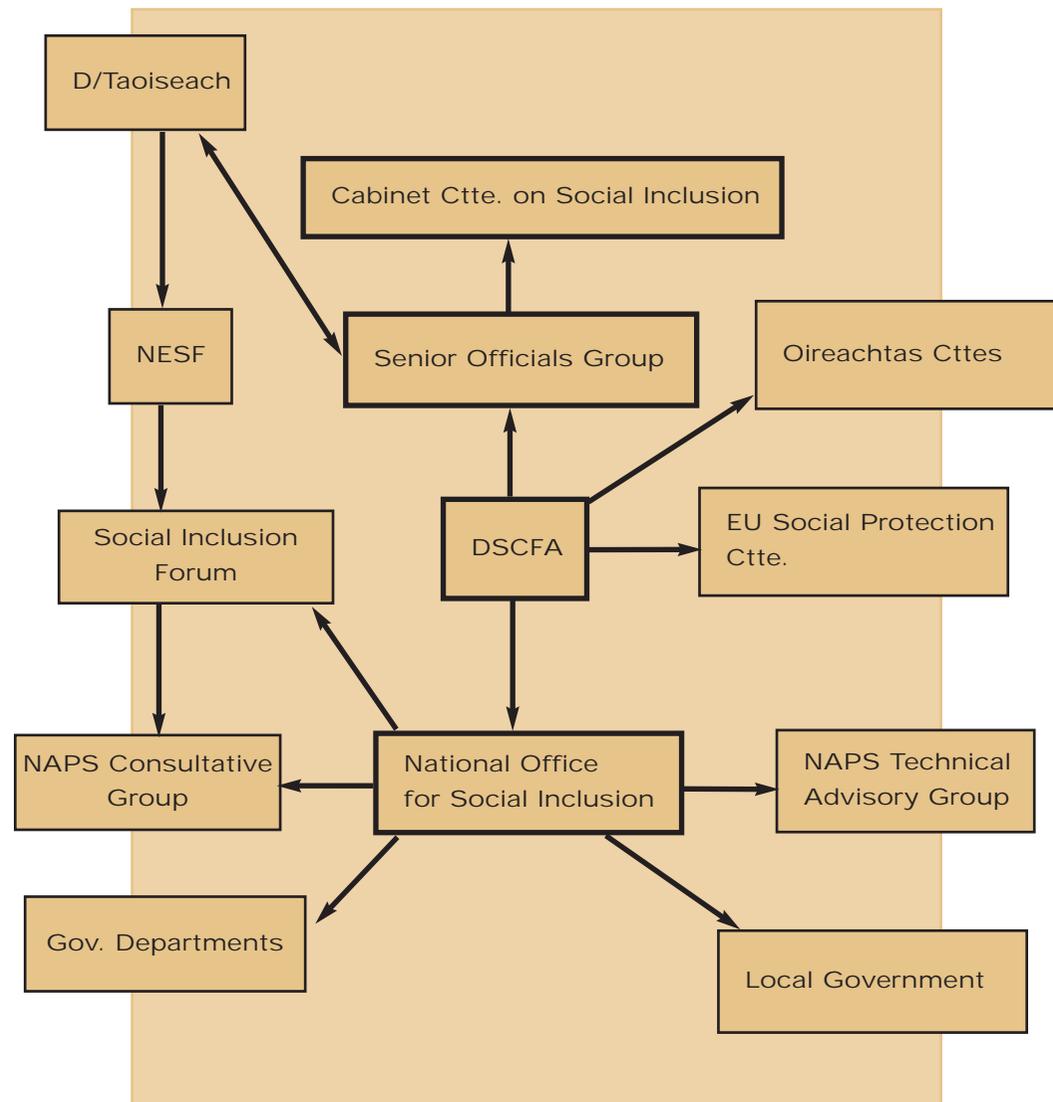


Table 2 identifies the major institutions involved and their roles.

Table 2: NAPS Institutions and their Roles

Institution	Role
Cabinet Committee	Overall direction of the Strategy
Senior Officials Group	Support to the Cabinet Committee
Oireachtas Committees	Monitoring of NAPS at political level
EU Social Protection Committee	Monitoring of NAPS at EU level
Department of the Taoiseach	Support to Senior Officials Group Active engagement in guiding the work of the National Office
Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs	Overall responsibility for and leadership of the NAPS
National Office for Social Inclusion	Implementation of NAPS, research and data development, monitoring of progress.
National Economic and Social Forum	Consultation with the wider social partner sector through an annual Social Inclusion Forum
Social Inclusion Consultative Group	Advice to National Office on development of NAPS
Technical Advisory Group	Technical advice to National Office on data and research issues
Social Inclusion Units	Key Departments and local authorities

NAPS Institutional Structures



Notes

