

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016

Report of Social Inclusion Forum 2013

‘Implementing the Social Dimension of Europe 2020’

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí

Department of Social Protection

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Social Inclusion Forum 2013

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Section 1

Introduction



Section 1: Introduction

This is the Report of the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) 2013. SIF was established by the Government as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate Ireland's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007- 2016 (NAPinclusion). The Department of Social Protection has been given the responsibility by the Government to convene the Social Inclusion Forum. The SIF 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 NAPinclusion. The 2013 Forum was organised with the assistance of the Community Workers' Co-operative (CWC) and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland.

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

- Review progress on the implementation of the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction;
- 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 theme of the 2013 Forum was **'Implementing the Social Dimension of Europe 2020'**.

This Social Inclusion Forum took place on Wednesday 26th March at the Croke Park Conference Centre, Dublin 3. It includes the main points raised by guest speakers, the discussions, questions and issues raised in the four parallel workshops. In addition, a number of overarching recommendations are highlighted for the attention of policy makers. The report will be submitted to the Senior Officials Group on Social Policy and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Section 2

Acknowledgements

Section 2: Acknowledgements

The Department of Social Protection acknowledges the support and assistance of the Community Workers' 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 Conference Rapporteur Aiden Llyod, the workshop facilitators and note-takers: John-Mark McCafferty, Frances Byrne, Oonagh Mc Ardle, Margaret O'Riada, Ciaran Diamond, Joanne Mulholland, Deirdre Bodkin and Caroline Corr. Their facilitation and diligent recording has contributed greatly to the compilation of this report on the outcomes of the 2013 Forum.

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



Section 3

Key recommendations for policy

Section 3: Key recommendations for policy

This is the first Forum to be convened in the aftermath of the Review of the National Poverty Target which sets down a new National Social Target for Poverty Reduction and frames this within the European Poverty Target, itself a crucial element of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The National Social Target for Poverty Reduction sets Ireland's poverty target within the recovery strategy to address the effects of the economic crisis which has had such a devastating impact on those at risk of or experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

This report captures many important issues identified and key points discussed within the themed workshops. All of these are vital for the achievement of better policy and service delivery as Ireland continues into a difficult period of economic recovery. A number of particularly important points pertinent to the successful achievement of both national and European objectives were identified by Forum participants for special consideration by policy, as follows:-

- The impact of direct provision on families awaiting decision on their application to remain in the state is becoming starker as families experience a sustained remove from the protections and civil liberties afforded citizens, including many of the social services that ensure an acceptable level of personal sustenance and human dignity. It was felt by some participants that this is creating a sub-level of structurally imposed poverty that impinges on the human rights of the families and individuals concerned. While acknowledging that the state has a duty to protect its borders there is also **a parallel moral responsibility to ensure that access to and standards of service equate with that available to Irish citizens.**
- There was concern expressed that the state is departing from the bottom-up approaches that are required to reverse the effects of the economic downturn. The community and voluntary sector has been disproportionately impacted by cuts to department and programme budgets since the onset of the economic crisis. Community organisations have a proven ability to act as a first-step response to unemployment and poverty and to enhance and augment the work of departments and agencies in meeting the needs of the most marginalised. Based on past performance and current context, **the partnership approach between the state and community sector needs to be re-established** through the introduction of a new anti-poverty initiative that includes sufficient resources to re-embed community development activity at local level. The proposed EU Social Investment Package provides an opportunity to implement this vital infrastructure.
- The successful implementation of activation strategies are a crucial part of Ireland's recovery plan. It is imperative that this is linked to anti-poverty strategies and the need to address the high numbers of jobless households by widening the focus beyond those on the Live Register. It is also important that activation is linked to the state's objective to re-engineer the economy towards the growth and development of smart and innovative employment.

The roll-out of Pathways to Work needs to be viewed as a learning model capable of being modified to meet both EU and national inclusion and employment priorities by widening the scope of attached training provision and linking progression plans to employment creation strategies at local level.

- There is some concern that age related dependency has begun to increase at the very time that services are struggling to respond adequately to a diverse range of needs. The challenges and opportunities arising from changes in the population structure provide an occasion to begin to plan and explore policy options for inclusion and future provision of services and supports for older people that will protect them from poverty and isolation. In addition, we need to recognise the current economic and social contribution of older people to their own and other's well-being. **It is imperative that the National Positive Ageing Strategy is brought to immediate completion** so that the needs of older people can be factored into key policy frameworks.¹
- The context and more detailed discussion that underpin these views are covered in Section 5 below.

¹National Positive Ageing Strategy was published in April 2013



Section 4

Opening section

Section 4: Opening section

Opening Remarks

Ms Kathleen Stack, Assistant Secretary, Department of Social Protection

and Chairperson for the proceedings opened the Forum by reminding people that this annual event, which was last held in November 2011, provided an opportunity when those responsible for policy making and its implementation and members of community and voluntary organisations that work at national and local level with people experiencing poverty get together to listen to each other, share information and to learn about the challenges and priorities in implementing the Nation Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

Kathleen said that following the 2011 event, the Social Inclusion Division of the Department carried out a review of SIF and one of the recommendations arising out of the review was to re-schedule the event from its November slot in the annual calendar to February or March each year. The reasons for this switch were:

- To bring about better alignment with EU SILC poverty data produced by the Central Statistics Office in November each year, to ensure the availability of current poverty statistics, etc;
- To provide a greater opportunity to advance implementation of the new National Social Target for Poverty Reduction, in particular, the completion of an annual monitoring report in advance of SIF using latest CSO data;
- This satisfied a recommendation from the report of the 2011 SIF that the event should be timed to allow such current information to be considered at the annual meeting;
- Better integration of the forum with the consultation and reporting around the EU semester process. Of particular advantage is the resulting opportunity to incorporate a strategic focus for the SIF by linking to stakeholder consultation requirements for the annual National Reform Programme Report and National Social Report; and
- The change also addresses participant and event partner feedback collected at the most recent SIF in 2011.

The change on SIF timing along these lines also explains why no SIF meeting took place in 2012, but the event has now reverted to the usual 12 month cycle.

The Social Inclusion Division, along with event partners, the Community Workers Co-operative (CWC) and the European Anti-Poverty Network, Ireland (EAPN) put together an interesting and challenging programme, which provides ample opportunity for meaningful discussions on the social inclusion policies that directly affect the lives of Irish people.

Setting the Context

Ms Kornelia Kozovska, European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion² outlined the European 2020 Strategy which aims to deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth through investment in education, research and innovation; moving decisively towards a low-carbon economy; and placing a strong emphasis on job creation and poverty reduction. The Strategy sets down five ambitious targets to achieve these aims by 2020:

- 75 per cent employment rate for the percentage of the population aged 20 - 64
- 3 per cent of EU Gross Domestic Product (GDP) invested in Research and Development (R&D)
- 20 per cent reduction in greenhouse gases³; raise the share of EU energy consumption from renewable sources to 20 per cent; and a 20 per cent improvement in EU energy efficiency
- Reduce early school leavers to 10 per cent and a minimum of 40 per cent holding a tertiary degree
- 20 million less people to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion

The EU Poverty Target is based on three EU social inclusion indicators:

- At risk of poverty
- Severe material deprivation
- Jobless households

Member States are free to choose the most appropriate indicator to set their national target in order to reflect the different characteristics of social exclusion in their country. Each member country will implement their national strategy jointly through the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion, which is the Flagship Initiative to oversee the implementation of the Poverty Target.

Part of the process of implementing the EU Strategy is the harmonisation of EU and national budgetary processes. The European semester is the six month period each year when Member State's budgetary, macro-economic and structural policies are coordinated to allow them take EU considerations into account at an early stage of their national budgetary processes and economic policymaking. The key stages in the European semester are:

² Policy Analyst, Secretariat of the Indicators Sub-group of the Social Protection Committee

³ From 1990 levels

November	Commission issues its Annual Growth Survey (AGS) setting out EU priorities to boost growth and job creation for the coming year
April	Member States submit their plans (National Reform Programmes) for sound public finances (Stability or Convergence Programmes) and reforms and measures to make progress towards smart, sustainable and inclusive growth
June	The Commission assesses these NRPs and provides country-specific recommendations (CSR) as appropriate. The Council discusses and European Council endorses the recommendations
End of June/early July	The Council formally adopts the country-specific recommendations

EU governments must produce two reports each year in April explaining what they are doing to move closer to the European 2020 national targets.

Stability/convergence programmes are submitted before Member State Governments adopt their national budgets for the following year. The content must allow for meaningful discussion on public finances and fiscal policy.

National Reform Programmes (NRPs) are submitted simultaneously with the stability/convergence programmes, contain the elements necessary for monitoring progress towards the Europe 2020 national targets for smart sustainable and inclusive growth. Both reports should be fully integrated within the national budgetary procedure and the European semester, introduced to improve policy coordination throughout the EU. Regional/local authorities, social partners and other stakeholders must also be involved throughout the preparation in order to build broad-based support for the implementation of these policies.

The Social Investment Package (SIP) is introduced as the EU faces significant challenges arising from the economic and financial crisis that has resulted in high unemployment, youth inactivity and increased levels of poverty and social exclusion, as well as mitigating the effects of demographic changes (increased ageing and dependency ratios) and fiscal constraints (deficit reduction and budgetary pressures). The SIP aims to enhance people's capabilities to adapt to risks such as changing career patterns, new working conditions or an ageing population and enhance their opportunities to participate in society across the life course.

The EU instruments to implement the SIP are:

- Social Protection Committee and the Social Open Method of Coordination (OMC)
- The European Semester - Annual Growth Survey; National Reform Programmes; Country Specific Recommendations
- European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion - 64 Actions to combat poverty and social exclusion; annual convention
- EU Financial Instruments (European Social Fund (ESF) and European Social Investment Facility (ESIF))

[Note: see detail of Social Investment Package, key reference documents and web contacts for further information in Appendix 1]

Mr John Bohan, Principal Officer, Department of Social Protection summarised the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction which aims to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 and 2 per cent or less by 2020. This revised target includes an extended timeframe to take account of the recession and also brings the timing in line with EU reporting. Additional sub-targets for children and jobless households are also planned.

This target needs to be viewed as an integral part of European poverty reduction policy. Under the Europe 2020 target Ireland aims to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 (4.4 per cent) the population in 'combined poverty' - a new term that reflects the view that a reduction in poverty needs to go beyond income support systems.

The implementation of the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction is informed and tracked through the following mechanisms/processes⁴:

(a) Communicating with stakeholders

- The publication of reviews and supporting documentation
- A national roundtable with stakeholders (held in November 2012)
- The Social Inclusion Forum - which has been given a new slot to facilitate stronger engagement by NGOs in policy debates and reporting on poverty
- The Senior Officials Group on Social Policy, which feeds into the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy
- The European Commission

⁴This is diagrammatically represented in Appendix 2

(b) Better outcomes through analysis and research

- DSP/ESRI study published in December 2012 examining links between poverty and work which highlighted the problem of 'jobless households', including:
 - That it was a pre-existing structural problem worsened by the recession and affecting a quarter of the total population aged 0-59
 - This rate was 2.5 times the EU average
 - Identifying this group as carrying a high risk of poverty and social exclusion⁵

This research is also relevant in terms of setting the poverty sub-target on 'jobless households' and informing actions in the context of the roll-out of Pathways to Work and Intreo.

- The application of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) also brings greater awareness of policy impact on poverty
 - The Social Impact Assessment of Budget 2013, see http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/2013-03_SIABudget2013_Final.pdf
 - Work with other government departments to apply SIA is underway - e.g. the new health and wellbeing policy of the Department of Health
 - Other measures are being considered to make this SIA process more effective - suggestions may be forthcoming from the workshops

(c) Monitoring outcomes

- The Social Inclusion Monitor report outlines progress towards the Poverty Target in a transparent way
 - The Monitor report includes material on targets, supporting indicators and provides indicators on vulnerable groups and issues
 - The inaugural Monitor covers 2010- 2011, see <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/2013SIM2011FinalWeb.pdf>
 - The format and content will be kept under review

(d) Reporting on action and outcomes

- A new online format for the Annual Report on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion is being prepared
- A National Social Report will be prepared for the EU Social Protection Committee as part of the Social OMC
- Progress on the Poverty Target will also be reported through the National Reform Programme under the Europe 2020 Strategy

⁵ 75 per cent of the population experiencing Consistent Poverty - i.e. 5.1 per cent of the 6.9 per cent Consistent Poverty rate in 2011

Finally, Ireland's contribution to the EU 2020 Target (to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 [4.4 per cent] the population in 'combined poverty') will be reported through the National Reform Programme on the basis of the three national indicators:

1. At Risk of Poverty - where household income is below 60 per cent of the median income level
 2. Deprivation - where individuals are lacking 2 or more of 11 basic necessities⁶
 3. Consistent Poverty - the overlap of the two (1 and 2 above) component indicators
- These are broadly similar to the EU 'population at risk of poverty or social exclusion'. The reports on progress will use the developmental welfare state/active inclusion framework devised by NES⁷ (which is the focus of the workshops today):
 - Access to minimum income support (income adequacy and prevention of poverty)
 - Activation and employment (unemployed and jobless households)
 - Access to services (children, older people)

Mr Aedan Hall, Assistant Principal EU Division, Department of the Taoiseach

spoke about the European Semester and the EU 2020 Strategy. The European Semester is the annual cycle of European economic and fiscal policy coordination. From 2011 Member States were to align their national policies with shared EU goals of achieving:

- Sound public finances
- Fostering growth
- Preventing excessive imbalances

The National Reform Programmes agreed under EU 2020 and the Stability and Convergence Programmes agreed under the Stability and Growth Pact are now prepared together in April.

This is intended to bring stronger alignment on budget priorities, employment policies and structural reforms. Under this process, policy coordination shifts from being *ex-post* (after the fact) to *ex-ante* (before the event) which will result in enhanced economic governance from December 2011. The third European semester was managed under the Irish EU Presidency in the first half of 2013.

⁶ Individuals who experience two or more of the following 11 listed items are considered to be experiencing enforced deprivation. Two pairs of strong shoes, a warm waterproof overcoat, able to buy new (not second-hand) clothes, eat meal with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day, have a roast joint or its equivalent once a week, had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money, keep the home adequately warm, buy presents for family or friends at least once a year, replace any worn out furniture, have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month, have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight for entertainment.

⁷ National Economic and Social Council

Some additional qualifiers to the semester processes described by the previous speaker were outlined. Ireland is a Troika 'Programme Country' since the end of 2010, which means that regular European Semester participation has been effectively suspended. However, Ireland has continued to prepare a National Reform Programme in 2011 and to submit updates and a full Stability Programme Update even though priority accountability is to the agreed EU/IMF Programme. For that reason the Country Specific Recommendation (CSR) mentioned earlier is that Ireland must continue to implement the EU/IMF Programme. Ireland expects to be back within the full EU Semester process in 2014.

Aedan presented a series of graphs indicating current status, trends and forecasts relative to the EU 2020 headline targets on employment, investment in research and development, energy and climate change, improving education outcomes and poverty reduction. The 2013 Annual Growth Survey sets out five priorities designed to guide Member States through the crisis to renewed growth and this sets the framework of policy priorities for Ireland:

- Pursuing differentiated, growth-friendly fiscal consolidation
- Restoring normal lending to the economy
- Promoting growth and competitiveness
- Tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis
- Modernising public expenditure.

Mr Robin Hanan, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland summarised some of the feedback from the 154 participants in seven regional workshops organised prior to the SIF by the Community Workers Co-op and the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland. The participants themselves illustrated some of the key points from the feedback on placards, with the artistic help of Emma Jane Geraghty.

Robin thanked the Social Inclusion Division for the organisation of the forum, for supporting the preparatory workshops and for the information distributed, which can form the basis of a very concrete discussion on government policy to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

While much of the feedback from the regional meetings is critical of government policies, it is important to recognise the work done by the Social Inclusion Division and social inclusion officers across national and local government in keeping the fight against poverty on the agenda in very difficult times.

The first message from the local meetings was that people are being pushed beyond their limits. This is known from the recent CSO-SILC figures, which show a quarter of the population and a third of children suffering from deprivation. Remember that deprivation is a very basic measure, asking whether people cannot afford two items from a list of such things as a warm coat or heating their home. However, it is one thing to know this from statistics and another to hear from all over the country of the way people are trying to survive. One of the placards is a quote from one participant: *"I had to choose between feeding my children and heating my home".*

It is also known that, while new groups are falling into poverty, many of the worst conditions are faced by people who did not benefit so much from the Celtic Tiger, such as lone parents, large families, Travellers, long-term unemployed and older people. Women are now significantly worse affected than men and the habitual residency condition is creating new layers of poverty among migrants.

The clear message coming through is that the burden of austerity is not being borne equally. Even if the burden was spread evenly, this would be completely unacceptable, since people threatened with poverty cannot afford any more cuts to solve problems which they did not create.



The second message coming through very strongly is the need for a commitment to fight poverty from all of society and all of government, all the way to the top.

All areas of government need to take the ending of poverty seriously. In addition, the messages sent out are important in creating a public mood. Travellers and migrants reported on the fear created by racist messages and the need for positive messages from the top. Public messages about welfare and about vulnerable groups like lone parents have contributed to a climate of fear.

The third message coming through is the need for a shared vision and a programme to realise it. It is worth remembering the ideas that Ireland previously contributed to the fight against poverty across Europe. Ireland is known for two big initiatives in previous recessions: the European Poverty Programmes, initiated by Irish Minister, Frank Cluskey and Irish Commissioner Patrick Hillery in the 1970s, and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy of the 1990s. Both were models for action right across Europe.

The Poverty Programmes started from the idea that communities should be resourced to find solutions to their own issues. This concept is now being undermined as the community sector is hit by cuts and community-run initiatives are giving way to top-down services. One of the messages from local meetings is that community development is essential and that empowering people can provide the best value for money in fighting poverty.

NAPinclusion gave us the idea of an all-government approach to poverty and the central idea of poverty proofing. It is government policy that every important initiative, including legislation, plans and the annual budget, must be assessed to ensure that it either reduces poverty or at least doesn't increase it. It is clear that, while a lot of good work is going on in the Department of Social Protection to promote poverty proofing, it is not being taken seriously at the top and is not influencing policy budget-line by budget-line as it should.

Poverty proofing would mean that the cuts in supports in education and health, which have saved relatively little money in the context of overall government finance but which have a devastating effect on people's lives, would be considered more carefully.

One blatant example of policy creating poverty and social exclusion is 'direct provision' for asylum seekers. People can spend years, not allowed to work or study or even to cook for their families while waiting for the government to decide on their asylum application. Several participants in different regional workshops saw this as a hidden scandal, like the Magdalene Laundries in the past.

We also need a strategy for decent jobs. The casualisation of work and the cut-backs on training on CE and other FÁS schemes means that many people at work are now suffering poverty and insecurity, with 15 per cent of those at work experiencing deprivation in the latest CSO statistics. We need a programme of quality job creation and we need a serious training programme which cannot be seen as just providing cheap or free labour. We need to address poverty traps and re-build the virtuous triangle of decent work, quality services and support and adequate income which is referred to across Europe as 'active inclusion'.

While recognising that we are living in a time of crisis for people's lives and a time of choices for the future of our country, we must not accept the argument that we need to wait until the economy recovers before we address social issues. There are not many examples of an important social initiative taken in times of prosperity. The British National Health Service was built in the 1940s when the country was on rationing. The Nordic social models, which helped them survive the current crisis, were built as they came out of the great recession. Most continental European social systems were developed after the Second World War, when the continent was starving. The time to make big decisions about what kind of social system we want to build is now, when the choices are starkest.

We must not just look outside this room for leadership. This conference today brings together 200 people who are serious about the fight against poverty. People affected directly by poverty, community workers, local and national government officials and academics who feel strongly about poverty. If we don't give a lead to put poverty at the top of the agenda, no one will. This is the task we need to bring into the workshops today as we share ideas and strategies to build an inclusive Ireland.



Section 5

Workshop proceedings

Section 5: Workshop proceedings

Forum participants divided into four parallel workshops to discuss key issues under a set of themes reflecting the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction and the social inclusion and employment targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The four workshop themes were Children and Young People; Unemployment and Jobless Households; Older People and Access to Services; Income Adequacy and Prevention of Poverty.

Participants were asked to consider the following questions in their discussions:

- **What are the main issues for people/communities experiencing poverty, social exclusion & inequalities in relation to the theme?**
- **How will the policies/implementation impact on people experiencing poverty, social exclusion and inequality?**
- **What are the key issues that need to be taken into account in the NRP in relation to the workshop theme?**
- **How could the EU do more to address the issues at the workshop?**

Presentations were made in each workshop to set off discussion on the key questions relative to the specific theme. The initial findings from each workshop were presented to the final plenary session by the Forum rapporteur. The presenters and facilitators of the workshops are outlined below:

- **Children and Young People** facilitated by John-Mark McCafferty, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Presentation by Dr Stella Owens, Centre for Effective Services.
- **Unemployment and Jobless households** facilitated by Oonagh McArdle, NUIM. Presentations by Frank Heffernan, Dept Social Protection SW Division and Brid O'Brien, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed.
- **Older People and Access to Services** facilitated by Margaret O'Riada, Galway Traveller Movement. Presentations by Ronan Toomey, Office for Older People, Dept of Health and Dr. Kieran Walsh, Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, NUIG.
- **Income Adequacy and Prevention of Poverty** facilitated by Frances Byrne, OPEN. Presentations by Jim Walsh, Social Inclusion Division Dept Social Protection and Dr. Bernadette McMahon, Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice.

5.1 Workshop on Children

Presentations

Dr Stella Owens, Centre for Effective Services provided an overview of the different levels of interagency working to improve outcomes, which ranged from co-operation between service providers to integration - i.e. where different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery.

There is evidence to suggest that interagency working has a positive impact on outcomes, however the evidence is limited for interagency working on children and young people. In terms of interagency planning for children's service, international experience suggests that the common features of such structures include being organised around a framework of pre-identified high level outcomes with a focus on strategic planning rather than individual case management. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that interagency working takes times to become established. In this regard the challenges to interagency working include; changes in the political climate; differing remits, policies, procedures and systems amongst agencies; and differing levels of commitment/buy in amongst agencies.

Dr Owens outlined a case study of interagency working in action through the example of Children's Services Committees (CSCs). These provide a structure for bringing together a diverse group of agencies in local authority areas in joint planning and co-ordination of services for children, with the overall purpose of securing developmental outcomes for children. While CSCs are not allocated specific funding, the Committees aim to have current resources used effectively. To this end, the CSCs seek to eliminate fragmentation and duplication of services by ensuring more effective collaboration between children, young people and family services and also by influencing the allocation of resources.

Since 2007, CSCs have been rolled out to 19 local authority areas. Each CSC is required to produce a three year plan which sets out the socio-demographic profile of the area, provides an audit of child related services and identifies the priorities for the area. Each CSC is chaired by a representative of the HSE or Child and Family Resource Agency and includes representatives from the local authority, education, probation service, Gardaí and community and voluntary sector. At a national level the work of the CSCs is overseen by the Children's Services Committees Steering Group and at Government Department level by the National Children's Strategy Implementation Group (NCSIG).

What has been learnt from the process is that it takes time for the committees to bed down and that advocates are needed to champion the work. There is also a need for common approaches and standardisation of procedures, which has resulted in the putting together of a toolkit for CSCs. The issue of data availability at a local level has also been identified and further work is required on developing data sets at this level, which can be used to inform policy. In terms of next steps, the setting up of the Child and Family Support Agency and the reform of local government will have an important bearing on the work of the CSCs. In addition, the rolling out of CSCs to all local authorities nationally will be a major step.

Views from Participants

Many participants felt that broadening out evidence-based approaches to include the experience of people on the ground would bring valuable insights to the process. Reference was made to socially excluded groups such as children of asylum seekers, those in Direct Provision and carers who are unlikely to participate in consultation events without being specifically targeted.

With regard to audits, which inform the CSCs' three year plans, there was a view that this needs to link practice with policy and research. Audits should also encompass consultation and the participation of local communities of interest.

The need to persist when developing interagency collaborations was emphasised in noting the huge amount of work required to achieve a good process. Furthermore, both management and policy makers need to see collaboration with other agencies as part of their job - a commitment to developing productive relationships and trust being central in this regard. Reference was made to the legislation for the Child and Family Support Agency which needs to include a 'duty to co-operate' clause.

A question was raised as to what happens if a need is identified but there is a lack of resources for extra services? It was pointed out that although CSCs provide for co-operation at a local level this does not preclude a CSC making a case for additional investment where it is supported by the evidence.

A question was raised regarding evidence that inter-agency approaches result in better outcomes for children (or other target groups) as distinct from efficiencies for agencies. Respondents indicated that there did not appear to be any firm conclusions on target group outcomes.

The issue of supporting the transition from primary to post-primary education was identified as an area that would merit collaboration on an inter-agency basis. With regard to children and young people it was noted that youth supports should not end when a person reaches 18 years of age.

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Access to services for marginalised groups, such as Travellers, was identified as an issue of concern. The need to promote access to support services through information campaigns etc., was highlighted - the increased incidence of suicide among young male Travellers being a particular concern. However, it was acknowledged that some people do not engage with service providers and they might be dealt with more effectively through community responses and family networks.

The issue of young homeless people was identified especially in a context where specific services tailored for young people aged 18 to 25 are being cut back, despite research showing the need for such services. In this regard research was not really informing policy and there would appear to be a disconnection between the evidence and the policy decisions being made. However, it was noted that decisions often do not sit with those commissioning research.

The need to keep young mothers in education was also highlighted. This is an issue which many felt has been pushed from one Government department to another. For that very reason, the structures at national level should be better co-ordinated and this coordination should be mirrored at a local level. In this regard, it was noted, that while there is a cross-governmental group (National Children's Strategy Implementation Group), co-ordination at national level still needs to be enhanced.

The provision of mental health services was identified as an issue, particularly the gap in out-of-hours services for young people. Poverty and social exclusion are factors that erode people's mental health, therefore, a supportive environment is needed to promote the well-being and general health of young people. Many people felt that developing life skills and providing personal development opportunities for young people is beneficial and would contribute to a positive approach to life. An interagency approach is also needed to tackle this issue.

On developments at EU level it was noted that the Europe 2020 strategy contains two important social inclusion targets, one relating to the employment rate, the other relating to poverty reduction. Furthermore, the Social Investment Package contains a recommendation titled *Investing in Children: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage*, which is a significant development at EU level. One aspect of this approach is promoting an interagency response to improving access to services.

The implementation of the Youth Guarantee, which requires member states to ensure under-25s are offered employment, education or training opportunities within four months of becoming unemployed, was discussed. It was noted that the implementation of a Youth Guarantee requires the involvement of a broad range of agencies (with adequate resources) and these should be encouraged to adopt an interagency approach to avoid duplication. This will require employment services to co-operate with youth work services, something that has not happened to any great extent before.

The problem whereby service providers may be restricted by resource constraints, or the impositions of targets etc, illustrates the need to find bottom-up solutions. Community and voluntary groups could play a vital role in this respect.

Key points:

- The importance of an effective interagency approach, including community and voluntary organisations, as a key method for delivering services and policy frameworks was endorsed. In this regard the issue of health and well-being (including mental health) and the issue of local information provision were also noted as appropriate to this inter-agency approach.
- The need for marginalised groups to be facilitated in consultation processes and to participate in inter-agency processes was identified.
- The importance of a well-integrated and well-resourced Youth Guarantee was cited. This will require strong links between employment services and youth services and should include a strong element of personal development and empowerment. However, it was considered that this approach may need to start before the age of 18.

5.2 Workshop on Older People

Presentations

Mr. Ronan Toomey, Assistant Principal, Office for Older People, Dept of Health

outlined government policy in relation to older people, which is to support people to live at home and when necessary, to support access to quality residential care. Keeping people healthy and ensuring they are empowered and equitably treated through efficient patient-centered services is the aim of the Department of Health and the HSE.

Current policy developments include the piloting of a Single Assessment Tool (SAT) for care planning, a review of the Fair Deal nursing home support scheme and a National Carers Strategy setting out government's vision in relation to carers. Future developments include the roll-out of Healthy Ireland, an action framework to reduce the risks posed to future generations, a National Positive Ageing Strategy and a Dementia Strategy. Regulation of the Home Care sector is also being considered.

Like many other countries in Europe, Ireland's population aged 65 or over is increasing and this will have implications in terms of demand and expectation into the future. Active ageing is complex and multi-dimensional and will require policy planning and management of employment and retirement, life-long learning, health and personal social services, carers and caring, transport, housing etc. All of which will have significant social and economic implications.

Dr. Kieran Walsh, Deputy Director, Irish Centre for Social Gerontology, National University of Ireland Galway described social exclusion of older people as a complex set of processes that involves the lack of or denial of resources, relationships, rights and opportunities in all areas of life, and which impacts on individuals, groups and communities. Social participation and social relationships are subject to change and this can result in loneliness and isolation. Interfaces with services also change, both in terms of daily life and health and social care introducing a vulnerability to austerity cuts. Transport and mobility become increasingly important in maintaining independence, social connections and service access affecting lifestyle, autonomy and self-worth. Safety, security and crime assume a greater importance, bringing fear, which in turn impacts on participation and a sense of inclusion.



How these areas of social exclusion impact are dependent on place of residence - urban, rural, deprived area etc., - and individual diversity factors such as age, sex, disability, ethnic minority, risk factors and differences in how social exclusion is constructed. Key messages are: 1) social exclusion involves not just individual factors (e.g. behaviours, health status or resources), but also institutional factors (e.g. lack of state supports and protections, inadequate policy) and social factors (e.g. societal norms, values and beliefs toward older people. (2) need to move towards a full-model of participation for older people recognising that age-related social exclusion is not just about services or health care but about all aspects of life; (3) need to acknowledge the diversity of people, and the places that they live, both in terms of practice and policy; (4) must involve older people at all levels in combating age-related exclusion (e.g. research, practice, policy) - older people are not passive recipients.

Views from Participants

The need to link poverty statistics to the lives of the people behind the data was called for. The point was also made that policy makers need to demonstrate that they are picking up and responding to poverty issues.

Poor local community representation in key decision-making fora was raised as a live issue. Some people felt that the local Community & Voluntary Fora need a statutory basis if they are to have a capability to impact on local service decisions. The vacuum created by the demise of the Social Inclusion Measures (SIM) Committee and the lack of progress in creating the new Socio-Economic Committees to replace the City/ County Development Boards was also highlighted.

The question was raised as to whether current anti-poverty measures for older people underestimate the extent of poverty and deprivation among the aged. Does this happen because methods of research and measurement are inadequate or inappropriate? For instance, the affordability of services relevant to older people is a key issue that does not appear to be reflected in policy responses. Clearly, better measurement of poverty amongst older people would enable a more coherent link between need and response.

There was agreement about the need to secure both income and public services for older people in the face of a continuing deterioration in provision.

The need to review how access to goods and services by older people is measured was called for. A pertinent query was: would the new EU directive on Goods and Services, if transposed and applied by government, improve access to services for the aged? Others wondered whether the introduction of regulation, such as that

brought about to enforce the Employment Equality Act, would act as an incentive to improve access and reduce inequalities on age grounds?

The shortage of suitable purpose-built housing for the elderly was highlighted. This reflects the lack of joined-up thinking on housing, health and transport policy between departments.

A significant issue relates to the health work that the community sector is engaged in, particularly in peer-led programmes, in a context where the sector has been decimated by cuts. The lack of certainty about funding limits project lifespan, the opportunity to further develop the social investment made and curtails the transfer of knowledge that is possible.

There was a widespread concern about the privatisation of public services. Like other areas of provision, such as private health insurance and household waste, there are a plethora of packages for older people being marketed which are not necessarily suited to particular needs. This could be addressed by providing an opportunity for older people in the community to be trained to become information brokers.

The privatisation of services in the context of regional variations in access to services was a particular concern. Private contractors tend to deliver services in a cost effective way that may result in fewer service centres. This could lead to more isolation as older people living in rural communities do not have adequate access to transport services. Social enterprise models could be useful in this respect but they are underused by statutory providers and there are issues about how their effectiveness is evaluated.

There were calls for a new health plan to integrate Travellers more comprehensively into the healthcare system - for instance, the home care arrangements for older people are not suited to Traveller living arrangements. The Single Assessment Tool (SAT), which is needs-based, will only address the health issues of many marginalised groups if it reflects cultural diversity.

There was a view that the National Carers Strategy needs to be broadened out in order to address issues of isolation and poverty traps. Recent budgetary cuts do not reflect any great awareness of the extra costs of caring in the home – e.g. the need for more heat. Water charges will also have a poverty impact. Most carers are themselves elderly people caring for an older partner or disabled adult children. When a carer dies, the range of public support options are limited and residential care becomes the principal response.

Any depiction of the aged as a burden on society rather than projecting the value and contribution of older people ignores the reality that there is great diversity and a demonstrable capacity among older people which should be factored into planning for an aging population. This presents both an opportunity and a challenge in targeting different service needs at different stages of the ageing cycle.

Responding to the question of what the EU can do to address issues affecting older people, many people were of the view that the issue is how Ireland uses the supports available from the EU through the new Social Investment Fund.

Key points:

- There is a need to recognise the value and contribution of the elderly and to identify how to exchange knowledge, empathy and appreciation between generations.
- There needs to be adequate investment and prioritisation of older people's needs. The population of Ireland (and Europe) is aging rapidly – the numbers will treble to 1.4m by 2041 raising the need for considerations about how public services will be provided for older people in the future. The cost of services and how this can be met is clearly a huge factor.
- Indicators used to measure poverty among the elderly need to be reviewed as there is a concern that poverty is underestimated and therefore under-allocated within current provision.
- Finally, there is a continuing need to challenge age-based discrimination.

5.3 Workshop on Unemployment and Jobless Households

Presentations

Mr. Frank Heffernan, Department Social Protection (DSP), South-West Division drew attention to a recent ESRI report finding that 22 per cent of the Irish population is living in jobless households, exposing them to risk of poverty. The report also pointed to the importance of welfare payments as the most effective way of reducing poverty while advocating labour market activation as a longer term solution. The report findings are important in light of the dismal Live Register figures showing 438,800 individuals signing on, 43 per cent of whom are on the Live Register for a year or more - a doubling of numbers over the past two years.

The DSP has two main channels of support for unemployed and jobless households:

1. Welfare - providing income and other supports
2. Activation and Pathways to Work - enabling people to stay engaged and compete for jobs

Activation involves moving people from welfare to work and there are financial

penalties for non-compliance, but it also ensures that unemployed people are given opportunities to acquire suitable skills and/or educational qualifications. This is complemented by improved engagement between the DSP and employers.

Intreo is the mechanism being rolled out by DSP to deliver the service to unemployed people. Intreo provides client profiling, individual and group engagement sessions, career guidance and job seeking support, advice on employment incentives and supports, information and access to training and education programmes, referral to the Local Employment Service (LES). Flanking supports include Community Employment (CE), Back to Work Enterprise Allowance (BTWEA), JobBridge Internship, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and Family Income Support (FIS).

Ms. Brid O'Brien, Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed described the high rate of jobless households in Ireland as a structural problem because the influencing factors - intergeneration unemployment, low skills and educational attainment, disability and parenting alone - were not adequately addressed during the period of strong economic growth.

Some questions were raised about the policy responses put in place by government. Addressing jobless households is not the same as addressing unemployment, and can it be assumed that labour market activation is a means of exiting poverty in the long-term when there is lots of income poverty within the labour market. Addressing poverty and unemployment in a sustainable way means adopting a broader definition of unemployment, investing in local communities experiencing high levels of unemployment (rather than cutting meagre budgets) and ensuring a smoother welfare-to-work journey through social transfers.

Government policy to address unemployment will be delivered by the DSP, encompassing Employment and Community Services, previously delivered by FÁS and the Supplementary Welfare system. It will be comprised of Pathways to Work, the roll-out of the Intreo model and a review of employment support schemes. Pathways to Work has four goals:

1. That 75,000 of those currently long-term unemployed will be off the Live Register by 2015
2. The average duration of new unemployed on Jobseeker payments will be 12 months (presently 21+ months)
3. An increasing proportion of vacancies (40 per cent) will be filled through DSP Employment Services from the Live Register
4. This will contribute to the DSP meeting its target of achieving savings on welfare expenditure

Brid concluded by highlighting a number of presenting issues:

- The changes outlined in government policy are focused on the Live Register - how transferrable and adaptable will the model be in reducing jobless households?
- Undoubtedly work has a role to play in addressing poverty and social exclusion but it must be decent work.
- Activation will only succeed if the service is people-centred and seeks to meet their needs. In that sense equality and social inclusion principles are critical.

Views from Participants

Questions were raised about the conflicting objectives governing activation policy - i.e. attempting to deal with unemployment levels while trying to reduce costs in the welfare system. There was an opinion that this conflict is already visible in supports for activation.

There was a view that employment strategies and targets are focused on those on the Live Register while ignoring those on Disability Allowance. A particular fear related to Partial Capacity Benefit, as the removal of the exemption is a deterrent for people with a disability.

Jobless adults such as lone parents and adults with low literacy levels also have a variety of requirements and support needs that should be taken into consideration when offering activation measures.

There were claims that JobBridge is being used by employers to fill full-time jobs. Some of the implementation practices should be reviewed and proper monitoring of JobBridge introduced.

Many people asked why there is a lack of engagement of unemployed with DSP/ Intreo and activation initiatives. Some felt that waiting lists are too long, others were concerned that some men were experiencing mental health issues such as depression and risk of suicide because of their vulnerability. Lack of job opportunities, the need for work experience for new entrants to the labour market and jobs/skills mismatch were some of the problems identified.

The roll-out of activation indicates information/communication issues and a general deficiency of direction for people. Some of this appears to be arising from uneven learning/training for DSP staff. All of this needs to set alongside people's vulnerability when unemployed.

There was a view that opportunities to engage with Intreo/activation measures are unequal between people in rural and urban areas. Rural areas require additional supports to engage with activation measures.

Given time constraints and pressures involved in the roll-out of Intreo/Pathways to Work, it was felt that consideration should be given to outsourcing some of DSP's activation responsibilities. This would provide communities/Community Development Projects (CDPs) with an opportunity to engage with mainstream activation programmes. However, outsourcing also introduces a risk. Taking the UK experience as an example where contracts were outsourced to big private contractors resulting in people being temporarily removed from the labour market but being no better off at the end of the experience.

In terms of outsourced training, many people expressed a need to change the focus from payment for set outcomes, on the basis that it is not realistic to expect activation programmes to deliver the same outcome for different clients. Clients have different needs and start from different places. Putting outcome specific limitations on programmes such as Momentum can affect the organisations willing to participate – smaller companies may be reluctant to involve themselves, resulting in less innovative courses being offered.

Many people were of the view that activation would be more effective if it was a voluntary engagement and they advanced the opinion that pilot activation measures using TÚS or CE should include some license to self-design courses to address client needs.

The need for discussion on the type of jobs being created for the future was identified as a matter strongly linked to remedying the jobs/skills mismatch already happening under activation. Such a discussion would provide an opportunity to take on board learning from international experiences and begin to search out different strategies such as public-private partnership possibilities.

There was a view that self-employment as a job option was severely affected by the prevailing economic climate. Because of their own precarious financial position, people cannot afford to take the risks involved in setting up new companies. This is not helped by the lack of access to social welfare schemes and the failure to address issues associated with social insurance (FIS and the high rate of PRSI) that could support self-employment.

Many people felt that cuts to particular grants are also impacting on job opportunities. For example, retaining/or bolstering SEAI grant amounts could have led to alternate jobs for former construction workers. In addition, the capacity of CDPs to be an innovative driver of alternative employment through the social economy has been restricted on foot of the wide-ranging cuts to their budgets. Many felt that the social economy offered job creation possibilities but there was no sign of any policy to develop this particular jobs sector.

The importance of keeping jobseekers active while they are out of work was stressed. For that reason the department needs to look at opportunities in local communities and through provision of ring-fenced places on schemes such as TÚS. Issues such as mental health should be addressed prior to participation on activation programmes but this will only happen if there is a policy framework to support it.

There was a view that changes to CE schemes has introduced a negative factor, as services and supports currently provided within such schemes are cut or reduced. The need to learn from the application of existing schemes was stressed, for example despite initial concerns the roll-out of TÚS has been more positive than expected.

Key points:

- The Activation/Pathways to Work policy is in place but on-going changes in the delivering institutions is making roll-out and implementation difficult and there are inconsistencies of application that need to be remedied.
- Intreo is focused on people on the Live Register but marginalised groups such as those on disability and others in jobless households need to be included.
- Clear and precise information by properly skilled staff capable of forming respectful relationship is a fundamental requirement for the service.
- Communications between departments/Intreo and the community sector, which is capable of delivering many of the required soft supports, should be strengthened.
- Choice should be an operational principle for progression for clients engaged in activation.

5.4 Workshop on income adequacy and prevention of poverty

Presentations

Mr. Jim Walsh, Department of Social Protection provided an overview of income adequacy and poverty policy framed within the recommendations of the Commission on Social Welfare, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and its successors, and the EU Recommendations on minimum income.

The period between 2000 and 2009 had brought significant improvements in minimum welfare rates and child income support bringing respective increases of 110 per cent and 120 per cent during a period when prices/wages increased by 30-50 per cent. This had brought about a rise in the value of the 60 per cent median poverty line and a convergence with the minimum adult income level. Unfortunately, there had been some reversal of progress since 2010 because of the fiscal position.

The impact of social transfers continues to be considerably greater in Ireland than other European countries and this has lifted many people out of poverty - the effect being to raise 60 per cent of those at risk of poverty above the 'at risk' level. Thus the welfare system has been an automatic stabiliser in the face of the economic crisis. Despite the requirement for a reduction in the welfare budget to help address the fiscal deficit the overall welfare budget has increased since 2008.

The European policy framework on unemployment/joblessness places income adequacy alongside services and activation in a 'rights and responsibilities' approach and this is reflected in the integration of FÁS and the Community Welfare Service and the reorganisation of the DSP.

Sr. Bernadette McMahon, Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ)

set out the twin aims of the VPSJ to tackle poverty and exclusion through voter participation and developing a Minimum Essential Budget Standard for household types in Ireland based on expenditure and income. The information on expenditure establishes the benchmark of what households need and this is measured against the household income. The Minimum Essential Budget Standard data details the minimum expenditure needs of different household types, providing a benchmark against which to measure the adequacy of income from social welfare supports and low income employment.

Comparing the 2012 expenditure/income situation with projected expenditure and changes to income for 2013 under the last Budget shows that shortfalls in income against expenditure have increased significantly, especially for families with older children (age 10 and 15).

Households that have consistently demonstrated a shortfall are:

- Welfare dependent households with children
- Unemployed single adults
- Pensioners living alone

By producing this evidence-based policy research, VPSJ can demonstrate how the minimum income standard can change on foot of alterations to services and income supports and taxation changes, thus identifying poverty traps and gaps/frailties in social welfare provision.

Key policy issues arising from this work include:

- Child Income Supports do not change adequately over the course of childhood
- Access to quality affordable services (childcare, health, education etc.) could significantly reduce the cost of a minimum essential standard of living
- Pensioners living alone do not receive adequate income from the state pension and Living Alone Allowance

VPSJ intend building and elaborating on this work focusing on the concept of a Living Wage, an examination of 'poverty traps' and 'low wage traps', tracking changes over time and engaging in the development of Minimum Income Standards at European level.

Views from Participants

People spoke of the growing disconnect between rich and poor. They did acknowledge that average-income families are also affected by many of the same issues as those on a low income but the impact is quite different for those operating on or just above the poverty line. Despite the significant welfare increases that took place over a period of time, poverty levels have increased, indicating that poverty impact assessment needs to be carried out before policy decisions are made.

Material poverty is a particular problem that is worsening with recession. Fuel poverty, food poverty and financial exclusion are driving up the costs for people on a low income. This is having a negative impact on health, including mental health. Housing is also an issue. For instance, changes to rent supplement have resulted in people moving areas/counties. Another cause for concern is that media coverage of poverty issues often takes a racist slant.

The point was made that the 'at risk of poverty' indicator only tells part of the story when measuring poverty. When consumption is factored in (i.e. deprivation) poverty levels increase, indicating the need for a range of measures to comprehensively capture poverty. The consumer price index underestimates the cost of living for people on low income. People on a low income spend more on food, so they are disproportionately impacted by cuts to income and price rises.

There was broad agreement that at risk of poverty levels are reduced significantly by cash transfers. However, other EU countries have better service provision, for example strong universal health care. In Ireland, accessible and affordable services are more limited, particularly in relation to childcare.

There was a strong view that more recent budgets have been very regressive and many community and voluntary organisations that prioritise poverty and exclusion are suffering from a reduction in funding and this is having a negative impact on their work.

Some participants from community and voluntary organisations have noticed a reduction in eligibility for different payments, illustrating the need for an urgent assessment of eligibility criteria. This is happening at a time when people are relying more and more on the social networks created by community development activity, especially when making social welfare appeals. Some people said this is indicative of a general lack of co-ordination at government level to address income adequacy issues.

The adequacy of the Irish social insurance system and the sustainability of the welfare system were raised by some people - the breakdown in social insurance provision is especially visible in the curtailment of dental and optical services. The question was asked whether the public would be willing to contribute more to social insurance for better services.

The need for initiatives focused on entrepreneurship and creativity to support people to escape from poverty was raised. The implementation of activation policy does not rationally connect to the poor availability of jobs on the ground and this may be contributing to a fear of activation among some social welfare recipients. There are a number of barriers to work which also need to be addressed – these include literacy difficulties, a limited range of supports for the individual, lack of funding for training etc. Furthermore, measures that focus on personal outcomes such as increased self-esteem are not measured. There was also a general concern that activation policy is not focusing on people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups indicating that the National Disability Strategy need to be fully integrated with other policies, especially labour market measures.

In terms of what can the EU can do, there was a strong view that EU policy on the privatisation of services is having a negative effect on vulnerable households by introducing a profit factor to public utilities. Many felt that the EU should continue to promote the use of research for minimum essential budgets (termed reference budgets in the EU Social Investment Package). While most people acknowledge the important role of the EU in addressing poverty they also felt that the Irish government should be held accountable for the failure to vigorously implement policy on fundamental rights for migrants and people with a disability.

Key points:

- A strong cross-cutting theme was the need for accountability structures to be put in place which include consultation with people experiencing poverty.
- All government policies need to be poverty proofed and equality proofed ex ante with a particular focus on low-income groups and different vulnerable groups.
- There is a need for innovation in job creation focused on the provision of meaningful occupations. Fear and negativity around activation should be addressed.
- The need to define an acceptable and adequate standard of living which no one should fall below.

Section 6

Concluding section

Section 6: Concluding section

Report of Conference Rapporteur

Mr. Aiden Lloyd, Conference Rapporteur, presented a flavour of the discussion in the workshops, highlighting some of the issues, priorities and suggestions emerging.

The workshop on **Children and Young People** emphasised the importance of effective inter-agency approaches that include community and voluntary sector organisations in the delivery of services and in the policy processes that decide the service content and how it will be delivered.

The engagement of users/community representation was also a topic of discussion, with a strong view that the participation of marginalised recipients of services needs to be facilitated on the basis of evidence that bottom-up involvement works best.

The importance of a well-resourced and fully integrated Youth Guarantee to address youth unemployment and alienation was advocated in this workshop. The need to incorporate the application of developmental youth work, personal development and empowerment in this Guarantee was stressed, with many believing that this set of measures should begin to be applied before 18 years.

The workshop on **Unemployment and Jobless Households** spent some time discussing the case management approach to activation, which is likely to face a difficult task in meeting very diverse needs unless staff-client ratios make for workable case loads. There was also a reminder that many people in jobless households are not on the Live Register.

Information gaps between departments, and the need for respectful relationships between departments and community organisations were also emphasised in the development of a successful model of practice for Intreo.

Some concerns were raised about the possible outsourcing of elements of activation. Evidence from the UK suggested that outsourcing to private companies did not succeed in keeping people close to the labour market. There were suggestions that partnerships with private companies and greater use of social economy mechanisms might bring better outcomes.

The fact that Ireland has a rapidly ageing population, which presents both challenges and opportunities, was an important item of discussion in the workshop on **Older People and Access to Services**. Questions were raised about how future service

needs are funded and by whom. There was a strong view that now is the time to raise the issue at European level - Ireland is not the only country experiencing a similar population change - and to make adequate investment at national level.

There was also considerable emphasis on the contribution of older people - supporting family childcare and adult children's income deficits/debts - something many felt was a considerable help in the context of expensive childcare and the difficulties arising for many families in the present economic climate.

Accountability and consultation were cross-cutting issues for the **Income Adequacy and Prevention of Poverty** workshop, which also underlined the need for poverty proofing and equality proofing of all policy deliberations, especially those that impact on low income and other vulnerable groups.

The need to overcome fears about the activation process was emphasised - e.g. concerns about displacement, short-term work and low pay. This could be addressed by being innovative about the types of training being provided and the job creation areas being focused on.

Finally, the importance of defining an acceptable standard of living was conveyed in light of the important work carried out by the Vincentian Partnership on minimum essential budget standards. The need to maintain a social floor that is underpinned by an adequate income, especially at a time of increasing poverty and employment fragility, was emphasised.

Address by Minister for Social Protection

Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton T.D. viewed the projects participating in the Social Inclusion Innovations Showcase on arrival. (See Appendix 3)

In her presentation to the Forum, The Minister recognised that this was the ninth meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum, which was established as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate Ireland's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. Since its inception in 2003, the Forum has ensured that people who are directly affected by poverty and social exclusion - and those who work with them - have a voice in the development of the policies that directly affect them.

Role of Forum

The Minister acknowledged the move of the Forum from the annual November slot. This was in line with a recommendation from the 2011 SIF report that a more effective evaluation process could be undertaken if current information, such as

the end-of-year SILC report, was available for consideration at the Forum. On foot of this recommendation, the Minister decided to move the Forum from its traditional November timing to an early year slot. This also provides better integration of the Forum with the consultation and reporting around the EU Semester process. The Minister said that the views of participants are hugely important to Government and to the officials directly involved in policy making and its implementation.

The Minister thanked everyone for attending. She said that the feedback from the workshops suggested that the discussions had been as fruitful as in previous years and trusted that people found the day a worthwhile and interesting experience.

The Minister outlined the importance of the Forum whereby people had an opportunity to relate their experience of:

- the policies central to the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion
- the challenges that arise, and
- the priorities that need to be adopted to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The challenges facing the country are very different to when the current National Action Plan was drawn up in 2007. However, reducing and ultimately eliminating poverty remains a fundamental aspiration of Irish society and the Government. This is why the Government revised and enhanced the national social target for poverty reduction.

The revised target is to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 and to 2 per cent or less by 2020 – with sub-targets for addressing poverty among children and jobless households.

Progress towards the national social target for poverty reduction

The Minister said that in order to support the implementation of the target, the Government agreed to her proposal to put in place systematic arrangements for monitoring progress. Having open and transparent monitoring of the target is good practice in both the economic and the social policy sphere. To facilitate this process, her department has drawn up a Social Inclusion Monitor to track progress on indicators on an on-going basis. All stakeholders concerned with issues of poverty and social inclusion can read the Monitor as part of this monitoring process and the Minister welcomed the fact that it can provide a valuable input to the work of the Forum.

The Minister acknowledged that given the economic times that we live in, it is hardly surprising that the indicators reflect the impact of the worst economic and fiscal crisis for a generation. But it is very welcome to see the strong performance of social transfers in protecting those on the lowest incomes. This remains a key part of the Government's approach to protecting citizens from the worst effects of the crisis. She said that is why she had fought so hard in successive Budgets to protect core weekly welfare rates.

The most recent Survey on Income and Living Conditions underlines the crucial importance of social welfare in protecting the most vulnerable. In 2011, social transfers to working-age persons and their families reduced the at-risk-of poverty rate from 40 per cent to 16 per cent. This represented a poverty reduction effect of 60 per cent, rising to 68 per cent for the whole population when pensions are included.

Social transfers - the cash receipts paid from social welfare schemes to individuals or households - play a critical role in preventing poverty, providing pensions for retired people and assisting with the costs of childrearing. Since the onset of the economic crisis, social transfers have assumed an additional role in cushioning the social impact of the crisis. They also contribute to a significant reduction in income inequality between high and low income households. Non-cash social benefits, such as medical cards and GP visit cards, also help to reduce income inequality.

Compared to other EU countries, Ireland's system of social transfers is the most effective in reducing poverty. And it is far superior to that of other countries most affected by the crisis, such as Estonia, Greece, Portugal, Spain and Britain. In 2011, the average poverty reduction effect of social transfers in these countries was 29 per cent, just half the Irish performance.

The Minister said that a particular issue that her Department and the ESRI have recently highlighted as a key risk factor for poverty and social exclusion in Ireland is jobless households. Jobless households, where effectively no adult works, have a high risk of poverty, despite being in receipt of significant welfare payments. In Ireland, jobless households are far more prevalent than in any other EU member state. They contain 24 per cent of the Irish population between the ages of 0 and 59, including a quarter of all children.

While the problem of jobless households has been aggravated by the economic recession, it is clearly a structural problem as, prior to the crisis, they already contained 15 per cent of the population. In fact – astonishing as it may seem – during

the peak period of the boom, the percentage of jobless households actually rose. This highlights the marked failure of successive governments to address the problem.

The Minister said she is determined that this Government will be different. A priority in the Programme for Government is “making sure that economic recovery does not bypass jobless households, by enhancing the Pathways to Work strategy to ensure jobs go to people on the Live Register”.

Jobless households clearly demonstrate that welfare support is not a solution to poverty. Structural reform of the welfare system is needed to enable all working age adults to access the labour market and to ensure that a large segment of the population is not permanently cast aside and consigned to a lifetime out of work.

Europe 2020 strategy

The Minister referred to the Europe 2020 Strategy, under which the EU adopted, for the first time, a European poverty target. This target is to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020. In support of this, each member state is obliged to set its own national poverty target which will contribute to the overall European target.

Ireland's target is to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in consistent poverty, at-risk-of-poverty or basic deprivation. The Minister strongly believes that the fiscal and economic crisis in Europe must not distract us from the equally important social challenge, which is to improve the living conditions and life chances of all citizens. In this context, she welcomed the Commission's recent proposal for a Social Investment Package. This package seeks to build growth and cohesion in the EU beyond the current crisis.

A well designed and administered social policy is an important and integral part of Europe 2020, and the response of the Irish Presidency reflects this. The Minister said she was working with the Commission to organise a conference in Leuven, Belgium to be held during the Irish Presidency on the subject of the Social Investment Package, and particularly on how it can be implemented in practice. Arrangements for this conference were being agreed with the Commission.

Central to strengthening the social dimension is to make progress on other Europe 2020 targets in relation to employment, social inclusion and education. Many countries including Ireland are struggling to make progress towards these headline targets in the face of the economic recession and the requirement for fiscal consolidation. In particular, there is a need to reinforce active inclusion policies for addressing employment and social challenges.

Despite the fiscal constraints imposed as a programme country, Ireland is engaged in significant reforms related to active inclusion. This includes:

- more active labour market policies for the unemployed, including jobless households
- improved access to services, including childcare, and
- more employment-friendly income supports for people of working age

Initiatives within the Department of Social Protection

The Minister said that her department provides a wide range of income supports through the social protection system to those who are in need. The importance of these supports is underlined by the fact that in 2013 over €20 billion will be spent on social protection.

The design of income supports is important. A key challenge in instituting reform is how to achieve a greater degree of targeting of income supports while improving poverty outcomes and employment incentives. To this end, an Advisory Group on Tax and Social Welfare was established to address a number of specific issues around the interaction of the tax and social protection systems. The Group was also asked to recommend cost-effective solutions as to how employment incentives can be improved and better poverty outcomes achieved.

The Government published the Advisory Group's report on reform of child and family income supports last month. This report will provide a valuable contribution to the debate as to how reform in this area could be progressed.

The social welfare reforms currently in train will contribute to efforts to reduce poverty, by supporting activation measures to enable access to employment. Developing an inclusive society will require a joined-up policy approach, linking together income support, inclusive labour markets and access to services. The Department of Social Protection has a central role to play in this.

The overriding objective for the Government is to increase employment, build real and sustainable economic growth and to protect those who are most vulnerable in our society. Broader social welfare reforms to support these objectives will have an impact on poverty reduction.

The Pathways to Work strategy provided for the establishment of Intreo as an integrated employment and income support service with an intensified activation focus. Intreo is effectively a one-stop shop service for the unemployed which provides not only income supports, but labour market activation, skills training and education measures. This new service delivery model is aimed at increasing social and economic participation.

In some cases, the successful outcome will be full-time employment without any further social welfare support. In other cases, where people are quite distant from the labour market, measures will support people on social welfare payments to take up other options, such as training and education to enhance their employability.

Concluding remarks by Minister

The Minister emphasised again the importance of participants' voice at the Forum. She said there remains a great task for government and for the country in general to meet the challenge of building an inclusive society.

The Government is committed to growing the economy and to creating jobs. At the same time, they have to ensure that the most vulnerable in society are enabled to benefit from economic recovery through activation programmes and services. Targeting policies and resources at the social groups which carry the greatest burden of poverty, notably jobless households and children, is therefore a policy priority.

The Minister was confident that the delivery of targeted policies across government departments, boosted by the resources and commitment of the social partners and civil society will lead to future progress on the national social target for poverty reduction.

Minister Burton concluded by saying she looked forward to reading the report on the proceedings and on hearing how efforts to achieve greater social inclusion can be enhanced. She thanked the Chairperson and the staff of her Department who helped to organise today's event. She acknowledged much credit goes also to the European Anti-Poverty Network and the Community Workers' Co-operative who provided support and expertise towards the Social Inclusion Forum process.



Concluding remarks by Chair

Ms. Kathleen Stack, Assistant Secretary, Department of Social Protection, brought the proceedings to a close by thanking all of those contributing through the regional workshops prior to the Forum and by attending the Forum today. Special thanks were extended to all those who travelled some distance to attend. She reminded people that the report of the day's proceedings will be written up and presented to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy. She thanked all the speakers, facilitators, note-takers, the Forum rapporteur and wished everyone a safe journey home.

Glossary

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016 (NAPinclusion)

The 10 year plan of the Irish Government aimed at tackling poverty.

Social Inclusion

Ensuring marginalised people and those living in poverty have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives.

Social Partnership

Agreements between government, employers, trade unions, farmers and the community and voluntary sector on economic and social policies over an agreed time frame.

Life Cycle Approach

This approach places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery by taking into account the risks facing him/her and the supports available at each life cycle stage (children, people of working age, older people and people with disabilities). It offers a comprehensive framework for implementing a streamlined, crosscutting and visible approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion. By adopting the life cycle approach, the *NAPinclusion* supports the development of a more joined up and multidisciplinary approach to policy making, with coordinated inputs from a wide range of actors.

Social Inclusion Division (SID)

The role of the Social Inclusion Division is to support the Minister and Government in developing and implementing Government strategies for preventing, reducing and ultimately eliminating poverty and social exclusion. The Division also promotes greater social inclusion and social cohesion in collaboration with other stakeholders including, in particular, people experiencing poverty.

The European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland (EAPN Ireland)

The European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland is a network of groups and individuals working against poverty. EAPN Ireland is the Irish link to the European Anti-Poverty Network which brings together civil society organisations from all over the European Union in order to put the fight against poverty at the top of the EU, national and local agenda.

The Community Worker's Co-operative (CWC)

Established in 1981, the Community Worker's Co-operative is a national membership organisation that seeks to promote quality community work as a means of addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and contributing to the creation of a more just, sustainable and equal society.

Appendix 1: The Social Investment Package

1. The Social Investment Package framework, which was formally adopted by EP-SCO on 20th June 2013⁸, will increase the sustainability and adequacy of social systems through simplification and better targeting:
 - Better targeting policies on benefits/services that yield higher returns
 - Simplify administration for benefits/services to facilitate user access and reduce administrative burdens
 - Increase efforts to reduce fraud and error
 - Identify good practices on how efficiency of social spending can be raised
2. Pursue activating and enabling policies through targeted, conditional and more effective support:
 - Help prepare for (re)entry into the labour market
 - Create incentives and remove disincentives for labour market participation
 - Promote inclusive labour markets
 - Provide adequate income support
3. Social investment throughout the individual's life, targeting policies to the various risks that people face during different stages of their lives, which often compound over time. Investing as early as possible is the best way to break inter-generational cycles of disadvantage and ensure that people live up to their full potential:
 - Policies to address child poverty, including child education and care
 - Youth guarantee schemes, lifelong learning and active ageing
 - Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion - including implementing the ESF2014 - 2020 (COMM)
 - Evidence on Demographic and Social Trends - Social Policies' Contribution to Inclusion, employment and the Economy (SWD)
 - Investing in Children - Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage (REC)
 - Follow-up on the implementation by Member States of the 2008 European Commission Recommendations on Active Inclusion of People Excluded from the Labour Market (SWD)
 - 3rd Biannual report on Social Services of General Interest (SWD)
 - Long Term Care in Ageing Societies - Challenges and Policy Options SWD)
 - Confronting Homelessness in the EU (SWD)
 - Investing in Health (SWD)
 - Social Investment through the European Social Fund (SWD)

⁸ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/137545.pdf

Further information:

- Europe 2020 strategy: <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020>
- European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/>
- Communication for Social Investment package (SIP): <http://ec.europa.eu/social/>
- Social Europe - Current challenges and the way forward - Annual Report of the Social Protection Committee (2012): <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=7405&type=2&furtherPubs=yes>

Appendix 2: Working Towards a New national Calendar -An Overview



Appendix 3: The Social Inclusion Innovations Showcase

The Social Inclusion Innovations Showcase took place in the mezzanine area of the Conference Centre. The showcase element provided an opportunity for groups to host a stand and promote their organisation and the projects they are involved with. Projects were invited to bring along and display any literature and material relating to their project.

List of Projects

1. Mount Street Trust Employment Initiative
2. Dún Laoghaire VEC Step-UP Education Programme for Homeless Service Users
3. Healthy Food for All (HFfA)
4. National Women's Council of Ireland - Y Factor Project
5. Pavee Point - Our Geels- All Ireland Traveller Health Study: For, With and By Travellers
6. Mayo Children's Initiative (MCI) Ireland
7. Irish Penal Reform Trust
8. An Cosán and NALA - Blended Learning Approach - Literacy and Basic English Learning
9. National Traveller MABS
10. The Prevention & Early Intervention Network (PEIN)
11. Galway Traveller Movement - First Class Insulation

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