Third Meeting of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum

15th February 2006 • Royal Hospital Kilmainham

Conference Report

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Foreword from the Chairperson, Dr. Maureen Gaffney

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) Social Inclusion Forum – which was established in 2002 by the Government as part of the new institutional structures for the NAPS – provides an important opportunity for people at local level, who are not directly represented in the social partnership process:

— to hear at first hand what is being done to combat poverty and social exclusion, both at the national and EU levels, and the key developments and challenges for the future;

— to put forward their views and experiences on key policies and implementations issues relating to the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion;

— to identify barriers and constraints to progress and how best these can be tackled; and

— to provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

The Government has given the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), which I also Chair, the task of convening the Social Inclusion Forum on a regular basis. The first meeting of this Forum was held in early 2003. It is regarded by the Government and at EU level as an important mechanism to facilitate consultation with and get feedback from those who are directly experiencing or representing people loving in poverty and who have a stake in making the NAPS work.

This report is a summary record of the third meeting of the Forum which was held in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham on 15th February last. The specific purpose of this meeting was to provide participants with an opportunity to input their views on the next National Action Plan, (NAP/inclusion), which will cover the period 2006–2008. Ireland, along with its EU partners is required, under the Lisbon Strategy, to prepare and submit these plans to the European Commission in Brussels in September next.

The overall focus of this year's Forum meeting was on the needs of specific vulnerable groups. The themes that we selected for discussion by the Workshop Groups at the meeting also reflected the importance of achieving greater coordination across policies and programmes to meet social inclusion objectives, and the importance of having stakeholder involvement in all aspects of this process.

This latest meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum also marked the culmination of a regional consultation process that the Minister for Social and Family Affairs and

the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) in his Department were engaged in over the last few months. The report[1] that the OSI circulated on this consultation process provided a very effective input to the meeting. In addition to this, every participant was circulated in advance of the meeting with briefing papers prepared by the OSI, (see Appendix III), outlining the key issues that emerged from this process and which related to the particular Workshop that they would be attending.

Other regional consultation meetings were organised separately by the European Anti-Poverty Network and the Combat Poverty Agency and these were also very helpful in the preparatory work for our Forum meeting.

There was a capacity attendance of nearly 300 people and I am especially pleased to be able to say that the meeting was generally regarded as very positive by all those who were present.

One of the side-benefits of the Forum meetings is the opportunity they provide participants to network with each other. A practical example of this was the meeting at last year's Conference between Ms. Marie Lynch of the Irish Wheelchair Association and Ms. Louise Richardson, CEO, of the Older Women's Network. This resulted in both organisations cooperating to develop a research project and a report[2] on the social inclusion of older women with disabilities. I was very pleased to launch this report at our present Conference. This report will be of value also in providing a model of good practice for other groups to work together to promote the inclusion of marginalised groups.

I again wish to thank the Speakers, all those who assisted in the Workshops (through either chairing, making presentations or acting as rapporteurs) and the staff in the NESF Secretariat, the Office for Social Inclusion, the Combat Poverty Agency and the European Anti-Poverty Network and to Ms. Carmel Corrigan for her help and expertise in preparing this report.

Finally, this conference report will now be submitted to: all Government Ministers and the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, which is chaired by the Taoiseach; and to the other institutions that support the NAPS: the Senior Officials Group, the Office for Social Inclusion, the Social Inclusion Units in Government Departments and the Local Authorities and the Social Inclusion Consultation Group. The report is also being sent to Members of the Oireachtas, the European Commission, our own NESF members and to all those who attended the Forum meeting.

Dr. Maureen Gaffney
Chairperson
NAPS Social Inclusion Forum
National Economic and Social Forum

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[1] *Report on the Consultation for the Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006–2008, Office for Social Inclusion, February 2006.*

[2] *New Horizons: Steps Towards Inclusion For Older People, A Networking Initiative by the Older Women's Network and the Irish Wheelchair Association, February 2006.*

Introduction and Executive Summary

1.1 ● The NAPS Social Inclusion Forum is part of the institutional structures put in place by the Government to support the development of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). This Strategy has now dovetailed with the National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion) which the European Union requires Member States to submit every three years. The last NAP/inclusion covered the period 2003 to 2005, and a new Plan is now under preparation to cover the period 2006 to 2008.

1.2 ● The Social Inclusion Forum is convened annually by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF). The Social Inclusion Forum represents 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.

1.3 ● The purpose of the Social Inclusion Forum is to provide those not directly involved in the social partnership process with the opportunity to input their views, how to tackle barriers to progress and provide suggestions and proposals for more effective policies in the future.

1.4 ● This report provides a summary account of the third meeting of the Forum, which took place on 15th February, 2006 in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin. It includes a summary of the papers that were presented by guest speakers at the Plenary Sessions, as well as the discussions that took place in the five parallel Workshops and at the Roundtable discussions that made up part of the Plenary Sessions.
A copy of the papers and presentations that were given at the Forum can be obtained from the NESF Secretariat, 16 Parnell Square, Dublin 1, email **info@nesf.ie** or from the NESF website at **www.nesf.ie**.

1.5 ● The structure of the report is as follows:

—Section II provides a summary of relevant developments at EU level as presented by Mr. Martin Territt, Director of the Office for EU Commission Representation in Ireland. Mr. Territt outlined the position of the NAP/ inclusion process under the Renewed Lisbon Strategy which focuses on growth and employment and the introduction of the new National Reform Programmes. Mr. Territt stressed that these changes do not undermine or diminish the importance of social inclusion in any way. The Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) on which previous NAP/inclusion

processes have been based will run parallel to the new National Reform Process. Mr. Territt highlighted some of the key social inclusion challenges facing the EU, including increased migration from new Member States in particular, the rising costs of health care and the increasing need for childcare provision. In addition, Mr. Territt complimented Ireland's significant contribution to the social inclusion agenda at EU level.

— Section III provides a summary of the presentations by **Mr. Gerry Mangan of the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)** and **Mr. Robin Hanan of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)**. Mr. Mangan highlighted positive progress that has been made on most of the targets that have been set under the Irish NAP/inclusion. He stated, however, that the question remains as to whether we were doing enough to help the most vulnerable in our society. In moving forward, he suggested that we consider a lifecycle approach to policy that focuses on the key stages of childhood, working age and retirement and old age. Mr. Mangan paid tribute to all those involved in the consultation processes and high-lighted the very positive and multi-faceted contribution of people in poverty and the organisations that work with and represent them.

Mr. Hanan drew attention to the fact that, however defined, poverty is still with us and that particular groups, including lone parents, people who are ill or people with a disability, remain particularly vulnerable. This Plan comes at a time when we can afford to re-commit to ambitious targets to eradicate poverty. He illustrated how the tax and social welfare systems interact to create poverty traps at relatively low levels of earnings. In addition, as the country with the highest level of 'relative poverty' in the EU, the effects of economic growth are not trickling down to the most vulnerable and we are not redistributing our new wealth to their benefit. It must be made clear to everyone that this is the result of conscious political decisions over generations and needs a strong response.

— In the morning, delegates at the Forum were asked to discuss a number of issues in roundtables. These issues related to the EU's presentation, their awareness of NAP/inclusion and how they think Government Departments and agencies could communicate more effectively on this. Section IV provides a summary of these discussions and of the question and answer session with the morning's Speakers.

—Section V provides a summary of the discussions that took place in the five parallel Workshops. Each Workshop was asked to consider priorities for action in relation to five key themes under the NAP/inclusion. A summary of these priorities is provided in Box A overleaf.

—Section VI provides a summary of the closing address given by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mr. Seamus Brennan, T.D., and by the Forum's Chairperson, Dr Maureen Gaffney.

DELEGATES AT THE PLENARY SESSION

Box A
Proposed Priorities for Action
under the NAP/Inclusion 2006–2008

Children and Families

- Overall aim should be to eradicate child poverty. Quality early years and after-schools services are required.

- Educational Disadvantage needs to be addressed in innovative and flexible ways.

- Benefit Traps must be identified and addressed.

- Medical and support services, particularly for vulnerable groups including migrant parents, need to be readily available.

- Parents must be recognised and supported as the key resource in fighting child poverty.

People of Working Age

- Must be recognised that lone parents are in poverty due to inadequate welfare payments, not due to their lack of employment.

- Priority themes identified in policy documents must be adequately resourced and pay attention to gender issues.

- Implement the recommendations in the NESF Report No. 33 on *Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market.*

- Childcare is critical in supporting women and lone parents, in particular to take up work.

- Activation methods are rendered ineffective by poverty traps and these must be addressed. A relative poverty target is needed.

- Social welfare policy and changes alone will not help people back to work. The importance of addressing other barriers, including lack of childcare and low levels of education should be recognised.

- Work is not the only way out of poverty. Re-open the debate on income adequacy, indexation etc.

Public Services

- More effective mechanisms for the co-ordination of public services on the ground are needed to bridge the implementation gap.

- Develop mechanisms to give people greater rights of appeal and redress when they have a problem with services delivery.

- Mechanisms to meet the needs of individuals and groups on the ground and to involve them more in the policy process.

- Multi-annual funding of services to ensure their longer-term sustainability.

Box A contd.

Older People

- Health services need to be co-ordinated and the Government report on the abuse of older people needs to be implemented.

- Income adequacy needs to be linked to average industrial wages, particular issues facing older women need to be addressed.

- Participation by older people should not be hampered by ageism, lack of employment opportunities, safety concerns or the lack of a public voice, particularly for those in residential care.

- Information and communication with older people needs to be clear around eligibility and entitlements and to be user-friendly. Data on older people is also needed.

- General services such as transport and housing need to be co-ordinated.

- Particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable older people e.g., those with a disability, mental health problems, living alone etc.

- Develop a National Action Plan on Ageing. There should be a rights-based approach, linked to needs assessment.

Public Participation

- Increase electoral participation by people experiencing poverty and disadvantage through supporting and working with local communities, local politicians and education programmes in the schools.

- The roles and responsibilities of the wide range of State bodies and structures at local level should be better co-ordinated, and in an inclusive basis, rather than by continual pilot schemes.

- National/local linkages are important, and national guidance, adequate resources for local implementation and local involvement are the way forward.

- While learning should be fed in, mainstreaming should be clarified, impact evaluations undertaken and standards for implementation set. More action on existing reports and strategies through specific measures, time-frames, resources and clarity on areas of responsibility.

- The Community and Voluntary sector has the capacity to represent people in poverty but must be adequately resourced to do so and their involvement recognised through dialogue and feedback. A participative stakeholder model was suggested.

The EU Context

2.1 ● In opening his presentation, **Mr Xavier Prats-Monne**[3]**, Director in DGV of the European Commission Services in Brussels,** identified three issues that he wished to address:

—the importance of poverty and social inclusion in the Renewed Lisbon Strategy;

—the streamlining process by which the EU is seeking to integrate work on social inclusion, social protection, and health and long-term care; and

—the challenges facing the Member States in addressing poverty and social exclusion.

2.2 ● He outlined the key recent development at EU level, namely the adoption by the Commission on 25th January of the first Annual Progress Report on the Renewed Lisbon Strategy focussing on growth and employment. This renewed focus arose from the dismal progress in the EU in tackling unemployment, as evident by the 19 million people now unemployed in the EU. The primary focus of the Renewed Strategy is to get the majority of these into gainful employment as soon as possible. To do so, an 'integrated set of guidelines for growth and employment' have been developed covering all aspects of the economy. These guidelines will result in new National Reform Programmes.

2.3 ● However, this does not mean that the issues of social exclusion and social cohesion have or will be set aside. Indeed, the first round of National Reform Programmes, including the programme put forward by the Irish Government, illustrate the continuing relevance of social exclusion issues and of dealing with poverty in the context of the Renewed Strategy. Many of the issues raised in these programmes would be addressed in the Social Inclusion Forum.

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[3] *Mr Prats-Monne was called away at the last minute the previous evening on urgent and unforeseen Commission business and, in the circumstances, his address was given by* ***Mr Martin Territt, Director, EU Commission Office in Ireland****.*

2.4 ● Mr. Prats-Monne went on to address the second issue of concern, that is, the streamlining process and the links between this and the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC). The purpose of the OMC is to foster co-ordination and learning among Member States about modernising and improving policies, including those relating to social exclusion. It has allowed the Commission, the Member States, and the other actors, to have a constructive exchange about shared policy objectives, good practice, and good governance. The Commission believes that this method has stimulated Member States to intensify their efforts to fight poverty and social exclusion, and has promoted positive policy exchanges about ensuring adequate and sustainable pensions into the future.

2.5 ● The OMC will operate in parallel to and interact closely with the revised Lisbon process and the two processes are now more than ever designed to reinforce one another. Separate reporting under the OMC on social protection and social inclusion will continue, but social inclusion and protection issues relevant to the new integrated Lisbon Guidelines, are also being reflected in National Reform Programmes. Streamlining the OMC and the National Reform Programmes in this way aims to create a stronger, more visible OMC with a greater focus on policy implementation which will interact positively with the revised Lisbon Strategy.

2.6 ● Mr. Prats-Monne addressed one additional area in relation to the streamlined processes. This concerned health and long-term healthcare, where the Member States have agreed that the streamlined OMC can usefully be employed to stimulate policy development, highlight common challenges, and facilitate learning. The types of issues which may be examined include ensuring access and reducing health inequalities, developing the provision of long-term care, increasing patients' choice and involvement, and promoting quality. One of the issues the Commission is very anxious to promote is the whole concept of health and wealth, and the linkage between the two.

2.7 ● In identifying the challenges facing the EU Member States in addressing poverty and social exclusion, Mr. Prats-Monne highlighted three key issues that emerged from the EU's Joint Social Inclusion and Social Protection report published in 2005. The first of these is the growing social challenge arising from increased migration across the EU, and in particular the very sudden migration from the new EU Member States. While recognising that this raises particular issues in Ireland, he commented that the level of migrants here is broadly similar to the levels experienced in other Member States.

2.8 ● The second issue that emerged from the Joint 2005 Report is the rising cost of health care and health insurance across the EU.

2.9 ● The third issue arising is the increasing need for more affordable childcare, greater provision for people with disabilities, more provision for elderly dependents in the light of demographic changes and increasing labour force participation by women.

2.10 ● Mr. Prats-Monne paid tribute to the important role that Ireland has played in promoting the EU's social inclusion processes and in ensuring that the issues of poverty and social exclusion remain central to the European policy agenda. The Irish contribution is particularly evident in the work of the Social Protection Committee, currently being chaired by Ireland's representative, Mr. Tom Mulhern, Assistant Secretary General, Department of Social and Family Affairs.

2.11 ● Attention was drawn by Mr. Prats-Monne to the added value of the inclusion process, in particular the way that it has highlighted the multi-dimensionality of poverty and exclusion and the consequent need for fully joined-up policy responses. It has also promoted good governance, openness and the participation of actors. One clear example of this is the pensions process whereby a consensus has been reached that adequacy, sustainability and modernisation of systems must underpin pension reform. This was one of the issues highlighted by the Commission in its recent response to the Irish Government's National Reform Plan. The Minister has now given a commitment to push ahead with implementation of the national pensions review plan.

2.12 ● Mr. Prats-Monne also complimented Ireland's Implementation Report[4] submitted to the Commission in June 2005. This report was clearly based on a systematic and very thorough effort to identify the extent of progress against each of the targets in the Irish NAP/inclusion. There is evidence of progress in relation to the income adequacy and employment targets and the introduction of a new action plan on educational inclusion. Delivering equality of opportunity in schools is a measure which should bring positive improvements over the years to come.

2.13 ● The Implementation Report also acknowledged some of the limitations of this Plan, particularly as regards the capacity to effectively measure progress in some areas owing to difficulties in securing adequate baseline and updated data. This is an issue that confronts policy-makers right across the spectrum of policy areas in the EU.

2.14 ● An outstanding issue in the Irish context, however, is that of childcare. The Commission has repeatedly highlighted this as a key issue for Ireland, and looks forward to seeing the impact of the childcare measures brought forward by the Government in the most recent Budget.

2.15 ● Finally, Mr. Prats-Monne wished the participants success with the Forum and stated that he looked forward to seeing the proceedings of the day and conveying these to his colleagues in Brussels.

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[4] *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003–2005 – Implementation and Update Report, Office for Social Inclusion, June 2005.*

The Irish Context: Progress and Challenges

3.1 ● To complement the EU perspective as outlined in the previous Section, **Mr. Gerry Mangan, Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)** provided some background material relating to Ireland in order to aid discussions by the participants at the Conference. He began by acknowledging the contribution made by the Social Inclusion Forum 2005 to the evaluation process which informed the preparation of Ireland's (June 2005) NAP/ inclusion Implementation and Update Report to the EU. As part of this evaluation, the OSI carried out a systematic analysis of the progress made. Against the 58 objectives and targets identified in the plan, 6 were fully achieved and significant progress was made in another 45. Some limited progress was made in a further 4. Only in 2 cases was insufficient progress made, and in 1 lack of relevant data meant it was not possible to determine conclusively the degree of progress made (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Progress on Meeting Targets and Commitments NAP/inclusion 2003–2005

	Number
Achieved	6
In Progress	45
Limited Progress	4
Insufficient Progress	2
Unknown	1
Total	58

3.2 ● The 2003–2005 NAP/inclusion also includes up to 30 targets where progress was to be made by a set deadline. The analysis showed the deadline was met on 8 targets. In another 15 the target was likely to be met, and in a further 2, unlikely, but still possible. It was concluded that in just 5 cases the deadline would not be met. (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Will Targets be met on Time?

Yes, target already met	8
Likely to be met on time	15
Possible, but unlikely to be met on time	2
No, target will not be met on time	5
Total	30

3.3 ● The OSI were very encouraged by these outcomes. They demonstrate that the strategic process is working well, if not perfectly, that the process is well on its way to being embedded in policy-making and implementation and there is a real across-the-board commitment to systematically achieving the targets and objectives set.

3.4 ● A number of lessons have also emerged from this process. These include the need for good data to measure the progress or effectiveness of policy and the need for realistic targets to be identified at the outset. While the temptation to be overly ambitious is ever present, Mr. Mangan expressed the view that it is better to err on the side of under-promising and over-delivering, than on over-promising and under-delivering.

3.5 ● While progress to date has been positive, Mr. Mangan posed a fundamental question: are we doing enough of the right things to meet the broad EU objective of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010? To help answer that question, the OSI has undertaken an extensive nationwide consultation process and, in many respects, the Social Inclusion Forum is the culmination of this. This involved consulting in particular with the people who are the real experts, that is, the people experiencing poverty and those who work with and support them. Reports on the consultation process to date are now available. Staff of the OSI and the Department of Social and Family Affairs would provide some details of these consultations and the main findings that arose in order to stimulate discussion in the Workshops later in the morning. Through these Workshops, Forum participants can build on these consultation findings to provide a clearer and more complete picture of what should be included in the next NAP/inclusion.

3.6 ● Mr. Mangan went on to outline a framework for the next social inclusion strategy, drawing on the approach advocated by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) for a Developmental Welfare State, and on the EU guidelines for the next action plan on inclusion, which are already available in draft form. The EU is recommending that services for people experiencing poverty and exclusion, as well as those aimed at prevention, should be adequate, accessible, financially sustainable, adaptable and efficient. Such services include housing, education, employment supports, health etc.

3.7 ● However, experience has shown that a more co-ordinated approach is also required. Services must not just meet their own targets and objectives, but also be co-ordinated and integrated with other services so as to deliver the best overall outcome for individuals and families. The approach put forward by the National Economic and Social Council examines this from a lifecycle perspective, the three main stages of which are childhood, working age and retirement and old age. This approach should allow for a greater focus on the desired outcomes for people of all ages and in different circumstances.

3.8 ● From a social inclusion perspective, a fundamental dimension of this approach is whether or not we are doing enough for people in vulnerable situations. In the consultation process, seventeen different vulnerable groups or vulnerabilities were identified ranging from being a lone parent, being a migrant, to being old and living alone in a rural area. While accepting that the EU is correct in that our services must be accessible, adaptable, adequate etc., we must ensure that they serve the needs of people who are in vulnerable situations. In addressing this we must also take account of the gender perspective and the differences that exist between rural and urban locations and between regions.

3.9 ● This framework has implications for implementation and what the EU calls the implementation gap, that is, the gap between what Member States commit to in their national plans and what they achieve in practical terms. This is further reflected in one of the Commission's overarching objectives of the NAP/inclusion, that is, to strengthen governance and transparency in policy development and implementation. Therefore including greater co-ordination in the Irish Plan must be followed by greater and more effective co-ordination between Government Departments and agencies at national, regional and local level.

3.10 ● Mr. Mangan then outlined a further over-arching objective of the NAP/inclusion process, that is, to increase the involvement of key stake-holders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy. In recognising that much progress has been made in this area in Ireland, Mr. Mangan also highlighted some of the key advantages for policy-makers in having greater involvement with people in poverty and the groups that work with them. These advantages include having access to the first hand knowledge of poverty and exclusion and the effectiveness of policies and provisions to address this, the role such organisations play in influencing public policy through their access to and use of the media,

their capacity to identify emerging issues and problems at an early stage and their ability to identify good practice. In addition, the services that organisations working on the ground deliver are vital to those experiencing poverty, while their direct contact with people in poverty strengthens the credibility and legitimacy of the organisations to speak on their behalf.

3.11 ● In conclusion, Mr. Mangan stated that making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty requires a concerted response at national, regional, local and international levels. It requires action by Government and by all stakeholders, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion themselves. Finally, it requires that strategic processes are used to work together to get the best possible outcomes for all the vulnerable groups in terms of a decent standard of living, a good quality of life and prospects, and social inclusion.

3.12 ● **Mr. Robin Hanan, European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)** opened his presentation by acknowledging the importance of the Social Inclusion Forum in not only bringing together many of those involved in the fight against poverty, but in providing an opportunity to think about where the whole strategy is going and what we can do to put the fight against poverty right back at the centre of the agenda.

3.13 ● In contributing to the Irish NAP/inclusion, the EAPN organised a series of focus groups with people who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion and who have not been active in community organisations to date. Some of the key messages from these focus groups would be reflected throughout his presentation.

3.14 ● Mr. Hanan drew attention to two key milestones that had been agreed by the Irish Government. The first of these is to reduce consistent poverty to 2% or its complete elimination by 2007. The second is our commitment under the European Social Inclusion Strategy *'to make a decisive impact on the eradication of (relative) poverty by 2010'*.

3.15 ● However, it is important to remember that these two commitments relate to two different measurements of poverty. The first is to reduce or eradicate *consistent poverty*, that is, poverty measured using relative poverty and the most basic and extreme forms of poverty illustrated by the use of indicators such as not having a warm coat or not having a hot meal every day. This measure tells us the extent to which economic growth has allowed us to move away from the more material and traditional forms of poverty. Our commitment under the European Social Inclusion Strategy is to make a decisive impact on *relative poverty*, that is, the ability of people to take part in society. This latter measure is used across the EU and signals the extent to which Member States are redistributing their resources, and the extent to which people are becoming included in society.

3.16 ● Mr. Hanan went on to say that Ireland should now be more willing to talk about and use the relative poverty measure. In looking at the new NAP/inclusion, we should take this opportunity to relaunch our own National Anti-Poverty Strategy that was developed eight years ago and whose targets are due to be achieved by 2007. In doing so, there is a need to consider all of the main indicators and strategies which were put in place, and ask what have we achieved, what have we not achieved and to set very ambitious targets for the future.

3.17 ● With regard to Ireland's current levels of poverty, official figures show that both consistent and relative poverty are still very much evident, (see Graph 1 below). In 2004, the level of relative income poverty at the 60% poverty line was just under one in five. The level of consistent poverty, measured on the basis of combined income and material deprivation, stood at approximately 7%.

Graph 1 Poverty in Ireland 1998–2004

■ Consistent Poverty
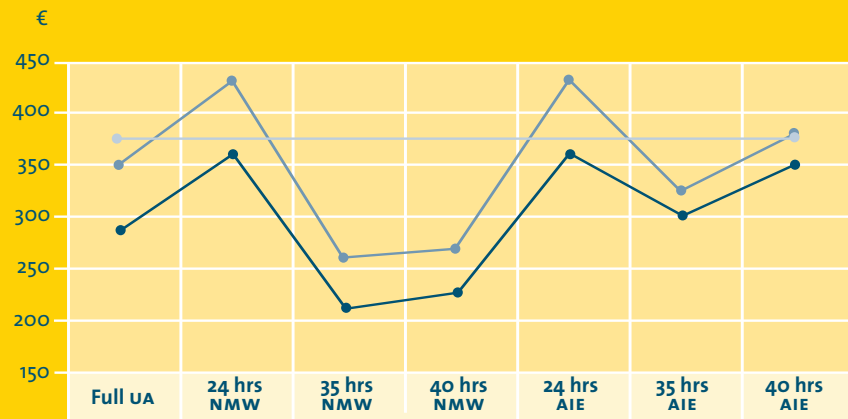

■ Relative Poverty (60% line)

3.18 ● Mr. Hanan went on to explain that, in Ireland, the 60% poverty line meant that an individual adult had a weekly income of less than €185. This places us at the bottom of the EU scale and competing with Slovakia for having the worst relative income poverty. This is more frequently discussed outside Ireland than within it. Relative poverty in Ireland is most evident among lone parents, women, those living in rented accommodation, the ill or people with a disability and the unemployed.

3.19 ● Ireland is the second richest country in the EU but has the highest rate of relative poverty. The EU has commented on this and has drawn attention to the fact that social transfers are very ineffective in Ireland in alleviating poverty. People experiencing poverty in this country are less likely to benefit from general economic prosperity and more likely to suffer persistent forms of poverty than most other Member States. The way Ireland has structured its economy, the way its society is structured, the way services have been structured, not just over the last couple of years but over generations, means that economic growth trickles down less to people experiencing poverty than it does in many of the EU countries. This has not happened by accident but is the result of conscious political choices about how resources in Ireland are allocated.

3.20 ● Mr. Hanan raised the issue of poverty traps that exist in the Irish employment and welfare system. Drawing on a report commissioned by the EAPN and OPEN[5], (see Graph 2 opposite), he illustrated how many households experience these traps as they move from welfare to work. For example, a couple with one child receiving full Unemployment Assistance benefit from a move to employment at the National Minimum Wage up to 24 hours employment per week. If, however, they work 35 or 40 hours per week at the National Minimum Wage their income from employment starts to fall significantly below their social welfare income and well below the 60% poverty line. In fact, income can drop by up to 40%. Those earning Average Industrial Earnings fare slightly better, but experience similar poverty traps the more hours they work. These poverty traps also exist for one parent households. They are created by the withdrawal of benefits such as rent allowance and medical cards, and the costs of working, particularly childcare costs. This is the real impact of activation policies on people's lives.

3.21 ● Mr. Hanan said that Ireland is now in a better position to eradicate poverty than ever before and possibly that it will be again for a long time. It has the financial resources and the expertise. Ireland has played a pivotal role in placing poverty on the European agenda and has led in pilot and innovative approaches to poverty. We also now have the necessary structures including the OSI, the Combat Poverty Agency, the NESF, and the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion led by the Taoiseach. The core question remaining is do we have the political will to implement policies to eradicate poverty and to place this at the top of the political agenda?

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[5] *Out of the Traps, European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN), December 2005.*

3.22 ● The focus groups undertaken by the EAPN highlight some of the key issues to be addressed. These include setting ambitious targets for the eradication of consistent poverty and the substantial reduction of relative poverty to below the EU average, resetting the minimum social welfare income and increasing the National Minimum Wage to eliminate poverty traps. We need to examine the relationship between low wages and poor enforcement of employment conditions that leads to exploitation and the creation of poverty, and to address all of the benefits, pensions and other welfare issues related to this. We need to abolish direct provision for asylum seekers, as this is an abuse of human rights and forces them into poverty and isolation.

Graph 2 *Out of the Traps* by EAPN Ireland and OPEN, December 2005, updated February 2006

Poverty Traps Example 1
Unemployment Assistance, Couple with one child

Poverty Traps Example 2
One parent family with one child
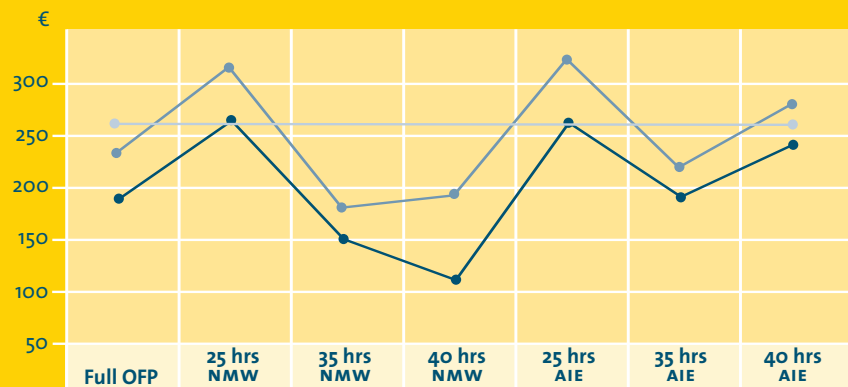
■ Before Budget 2006   ■ After Budget 2006   ■ 60% Relative Poverty Threshold

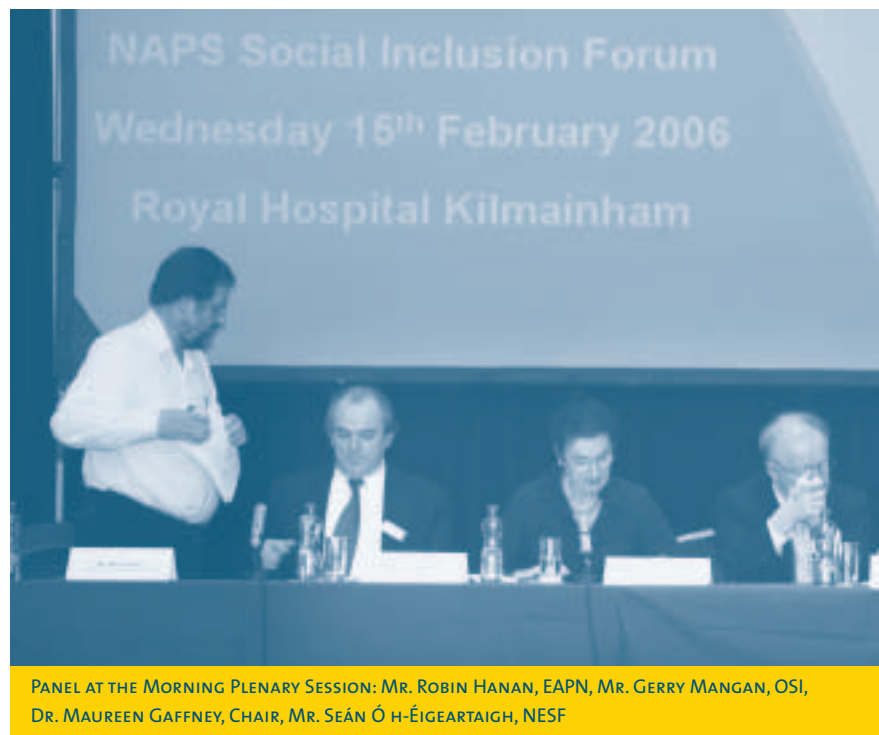3.23 ● Mr. Hanan went on to talk briefly about activation and 'flexicurity'. Activation has been a part of the policy landscape for quite some time. At the regressive end of the spectrum this can mean withdrawing benefits and forcing people into other welfare categories or into low paid employment and poverty. At the more progressive end of the spectrum, activation means providing people with the necessary supports to help them into the labour market and out of poverty. While Ireland's activation policies are among the more progressive in the EU, we need to ensure that this remains the case.

3.24 ● 'Flexicurity' is a new term in the EU which, at best, means providing the type of welfare supports which make it possible for people to move flexibly from one job to another and to move into jobs which fulfil their potential, and at the worst can be the same as the worst forms of activation. Again, in addressing this issue we need to consider poverty traps within our welfare and taxation systems, the exploitation of workers' rights, the need to restore the right to work of asylum seekers, and to reform the work-permit system particularly for non-EU migrants.

3.25 ● Mr. Hanan stressed the need to invest in quality services including housing, childcare, education, health, and transport. It is important that these are developed from an anti-poverty perspective and that everyone can avail of them, not just those who can pay. Also, there is a need for investment in community development and participation. This includes investing in community facilities such as community and drop-in centres, as well as in building the ability of local communities to participate in policy-related activities and channels through which their views can be transmitted to local, regional and national bodies.

3.26 ● Targeted strategies are needed to address the needs of particularly vulnerable groups including women, certain groups of men, older people, members of the Traveller community, people with disabilities, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees. All of these are needed not only to address the needs of current vulnerable groups, but to help prevent the creation of new forms of poverty.

3.27   ● In examining what we need to achieve such progress, Mr. Hanan identified a number of essential elements. The fight against poverty needs to be mainstreamed, to be seen as the responsibility of all of the Government, all of the community sector, of local government bodies etc. Poverty proofing policies need to move from a check-list approach to a planning approach led from the top of Government. We need strong data on poverty and a strategic planning approach that sets short, medium and long-term goals with dedicated budgets to achieve them. We need greater public awareness that poverty still exists, comes directly from the policy choices that Governments make and of the real potential of public policy to address poverty. Finally, we need to encourage people in poverty to vote in order to ensure that their views are taken seriously by public representatives.

PANEL AT THE MORNING PLENARY SESSION: MR. ROBIN HANAN, EAPN, MR. GERRY MANGAN, OSI, DR. MAUREEN GAFFNEY, CHAIR, MR. SEÁN Ó H-ÉIGEARTAIGH, NESF

Roundtable Discussions and the Morning Plenary Session

4.1 ● Following the two initial Speakers' presentations, delegates had small roundtable discussions with those who shared their table. These discussions centred on three key questions:

— What is the group's initial response to the issues raised?

— How do members of the group rate their knowledge/awareness of the current NAP/inclusion?

— Has the group any views about how Government departments and agencies could communicate more effectively with people experiencing poverty and the groups that represent them?

4.2 ● The response to the European Commission's input was generally positive, although a number of participants who were not well informed or linked in the NAP/inclusion found it somewhat confusing. It was suggested that the use of overhead or PowerPoint slides would have been useful. Although most participants could identify with some of the issues raised, many felt that some had not been sufficiently identified and that key issues were in fact missing.

4.3 ● Most participants had some level of awareness of the NAP/inclusion, although for many this was at the level of those aspects that affected them or their groups. Table 4.1 below summarises the issues that participants discussed and the means by which these could be moved forward. In considering this Table it should be noted that the discussions at many of the roundtables expanded considerably beyond the input by the EU Commission, but nonetheless have validity in identifying issues of concern and where there is some confusion.

Table 4.1 Summary of Roundtable Discussions

Key Issues	Issues Raised	Suggestions or proposals for moving forward in the context of NAP/Inclusion
Target Groups	■ The deaf community ■ Migrants ■ Older people ■ Women ■ Asylum seekers ■ Indigenous ethnic minorities, e.g. Travellers ■ Early school leavers ■ People with disabilities ■ Unmarried fathers ■ Children ■ Gays, lesbians and bisexuals ■ Prisoners ■ People with mental health problems ■ Homeless	■ Recognition of the deaf community and sign language in the Constitution ■ Training for civil service staff in sign language ■ Provision of more affordable childcare ■ Provision of Child Benefit to asylum seekers ■ Ensure adequate incomes and long-term care for older people ■ Treat people as individuals not part of a target group ■ Involve and target children from a very early age ■ Need for greater communication with older people ■ Address family reunification issues for asylum seekers and migrants ■ Include gays, lesbians and bisexuals in the final plan
NAP/inclusion Targets	■ The deaf community ■ The impact of meeting or not the targets set is not known	■ Include a target specifically for the deaf community ■ Government to provide feedback on the performance indicators for the targets
Key Services	■ Health and access to health services ■ Education ■ Services for older people including carers and security measures ■ Need for expansion of the role of Free Legal Aid Centres (FLAC)	■ Provide sign language service to increase access to services ■ Make education more accessible, relevant and less intimidating for people in poverty ■ Target education on the needs of young people experiencing poverty and exclusion ■ FLAC to be allowed act in labour law, housing law etc. in particular for migrants and asylum seekers

Table 4.1 contd.

		■ NAP/inclusion should focus on the 'health and wealth' perspective ■ Provide better local facilities ■ Improve frontline staff abilities to deal with vulnerable groups
Consultation and Participation	■ Difficult to participate if everything is held in Dublin ■ Reports of consultations are too much if its not your job to read them ■ Government–NGO work is under-resourced ■ No real feedback from consultation processes ■ Consultation fatigue felt by many ■ No consistent approach across Government departments, agencies etc. to consultation	■ More local and regional consultations are needed ■ Use summary reports and leaflets on consultation exercises ■ Hold consultations in local facilities to encourage more participation ■ Include target groups in the development of strategies ■ Resource NGOs to undertake policy and consultation work ■ Resource education of people in poverty to participate ■ Government and agencies should provide feedback on consultation
Social Welfare, Tax and Employment Policy	■ Do not reflect the structure of Irish society ■ Community Employment threatened ■ Activation is necessary ■ Social Welfare Rates insufficient	■ Consider these from an anti-poverty perspective ■ Maintain Community Employment as a source of services and social contact ■ Use a holistic and mentoring approach to activation ■ Index link Social Welfare Rates to Average Industrial Earnings
Focus of NAP/inclusion	■ Needs a greater focus on equality and human rights ■ Needs a definition of poverty in a wealthy society ■ Child development and childcare absent ■ Migration glossed over ■ Lack of focus on preventative measures	■ Refocus more strongly on social inclusion ■ Recognise the particular difficulties facing Ireland on migration ■ Include preventative as well as curative measures

Table 4.1 contd.

Key Issues	Issues Raised	Suggestions or proposals for moving forward in the context of NAP/Inclusion
Communication on NAP/inclusion	■ Difficult to understand the NAP/inclusion process ■ Confusion between original NAPS and NAP/inclusion ■ Confusion about the OMC and the Lisbon Strategy ■ Lack of clarity about what the OSI does, who sets the targets or criteria for measuring success or failure ■ Need to stay in touch with all areas of EU policy, not just the NAP/inclusion process or Lisbon Strategy	■ Need a plain English versions of NAP/inclusion process ■ EU Commission needs to be clear that social inclusion is still a priority under the Renewed Lisbon Strategy
Communication of other key information	■ Public awareness of poverty is low ■ Need an everyday understanding of poverty in a wealthy society ■ Government departments need to communicate with each other more ■ Communication on how to access services is poor ■ Assumption that everyone has access to the internet ■ Lack of recognised role for local information providers, including the public libraries	■ Use local radio and TV advertisements to get the message that poverty is still prevalent in Ireland ■ Launch a public awareness campaign ■ Clearer information and more informed frontline staff at critical information points ■ Use Local Area Partnerships to disseminate information ■ Provide paper copies of everything ■ Produce multi-lingual communication materials ■ Use various forms of printed materials, such as cartoons for young people, and lots of diagrams to reach a wider audience ■ Place poverty issues on the school curriculum ■ Make information available at local level

Table 4.1 contd.

Involvement of Key Actors	- Some Government departments are not involved enough - Serious gap between the local and regional and local and national levels - Local authorities and other local agencies ineffective and ill equipped to deal with social inclusion - Role of NGOs in the growth, jobs and social inclusion agenda is not recognised - Health Services Executive not linked with the NAP/inclusion	- Government departments need to take NAP/inclusion seriously - Stronger links are needed between local, regional and national agencies - Resource and train local agencies to develop and deliver social inclusion services - Identify key local actors to lead on social inclusion - Make NAP/inclusion focus of local Social Inclusion Measures Committees - Local TDs should meet with local NGOs
Implementation	- Failure to implement well worked out proposals - Decision-making in Government still fragmented even though they talk about integration - Lack of early intervention in many areas - Gap between what Government reports say and what they do - Mainstreaming can lead to increased centralisation and alienation of people in poverty - Government needs a clear ideological and strategic position from which to launch implementation plans	- Implementation mechanisms and plans to be spelt out - Partnerships and other local structures should be used to mainstream the learning of NGOs. - Put social inclusion units and officers in each Local Authority - Learn from how others reach people in poverty such as the Money Advice and Budgeting Service and the Citizen's Information Centres. - Link the NAP/inclusion more firmly with the National Development Plan - A consistent approach to social inclusion across all Government Departments and strategies
Specific Resources Required	- Data on all vulnerable groups - Need a directory of anti-poverty organisations at local, regional and national level - Need a 'potted' version of NAP/inclusion and of the process	

4.4 ● During the morning Plenary Session which followed, three key issues were raised. These were the position of men in poverty and of fathers who are denied access to their children in particular, the need for greater co-ordination of policies and services, and the need for greater involvement of local authorities in the social inclusion process.

4.5 ● With regard to the position of men, Mr. Mangan acknowledged that when thinking of gender we are inclined to think of women, but that men are as vulnerable and falling behind in some areas. Men who are separated from their families and rural men are two particular groups of concern and these issues need to be taken into account in the social inclusion process. He accepted that we need to co-ordinate services better and that this should extend to co-ordination across the different levels of Government, including Local Authorities.

4.6 ● Mr. Hanan responded to the issue of men's exclusion by stating that this had come up in their local focus groups in relation to rural men, separated fathers, older men etc. It is important that we view these issues from a constructive and positive perspective and not from one that is conflicting or competing with women. With regard to the role of Local Authorities, Mr Hanan said that officials from these had been very evident and active in participating in their local consultation events. In addition, he stated that those responsible for social inclusion within the Local Authorities tend to be isolated and that their concerns and efforts are not responded to at the very top levels. Both of these points signal the need for more engagement with social inclusion at the political level in Local Authorities.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

V

Meetings of the Workshop Groups

5.1 ● Forum participants considered key target groups and issues in five parallel Workshops, namely:

— Families and Children

— People of Working Age

— Older People

— Public Services

— Public Participation

These Workshops involved an input on the results of the consultation process undertaken by the OSI, as well as information on the EAPN/Combat Poverty Agency focus groups. Following this input, the Workshops were open to discussion and participants were then asked to consider and prioritise key issues. Having completed this, participants were asked to consider how these priorities might be addressed by the NAP/inclusion. Each Workshop had a chairperson and a record of the discussions was made by a rapporteur. The following paragraphs provide a summary of each of the Workshops.

Workshop 1: Families and Children

Chairperson Ms. Sylda Langford, Director General,
Office of the Minister for Children
Rapporteur Dr. John Sweeney, Economist, NESC

5.2 ● **Mr. Heber McMahon, Department of Social and Family Affairs,** provided an overview of the results of the consultation exercises on families and children. These are detailed in Appendix III. Following this input, the floor was open to participants to brainstorm on the issues they believed should be addressed.

5.3 ● Many different facets of children's lives and difficulties in parenting were raised at this Workshop but all were happy that the core principle or vision driving the group is the commitment to end child poverty. The new NAP/inclusion will not be a real improvement if it does not advance us further towards this objective, in the target set, and how it motivates and mobilises every Government Department and everyone involved in this work to make Ireland a country where no child is reared in poverty.

5.4 ● Considerable frustration was aired with the experience of consultation during the previous NAPS and a strong sense that some of it was ritual-istic and formal but not meaningful, much less leading to implementation of what people believed was agreed. To this it was countered that people should not underestimate the gradual cementing of views and the growing convergence of advice coming through several channels (not just the Social Inclusion Forum) that led Government – over time and not necessarily in the next budget – to lay the groundwork for fundamental change and 'get things through the system'.

5.5 ● With ending child poverty as the core vision and driving principle, there was agreement that the key strategy should be to frontload those services, across all Government Departments, which address the need of the youngest children. Participants emphasised the impressive research evidence to show that what is done in the early years brings major savings to State spending on the same individuals as they grow older. There was broad support, therefore, for the development of a systematic, holistic and phased strategy that would increase public spending on the early years, leading to a situation where quality public services would be a hallmark of every childhood and the experience of every family with young children. It was acknowledged that the new Office of the Minister for Children faces a major challenge in leading and incentivising the public system to deliver on this.

5.6 ● Several of the main planks in this strategy were addressed at different times in the Workshop. Good quality **early childhood care and education** must become accessible and affordable for all families with young children, whether parents are in employment or not, and the NESF Report No 31 of July 2005, with its phased strategy, deserves a much stronger and more detailed response from government. **After school care** is part of this strategy and must not be lost sight of.

5.7 ● **Educational disadvantage** has not gone away while the penalties attaching to it, for the rest of a young person's life, are growing greater. More innovation and flexibility are needed in how resources are being used to stem educational disadvantage, and the child's relationships at school and the home-school link should become part of the solution rather than remain the core of the problem.

5.8 ● **Benefit traps** came up in many different guises as making life extra-ordinarily and unnecessarily difficult for parents. There was disappointment, in this respect, that resolute action has still not been taken in proceeding with a second-tier child income support and some concern that the new early childcare supplement might appear as a diversionary tactic.

5.9 ● Universal access to **medical services** for young children has still not been delivered on and it is intolerable that having a sick child is still a financial nightmare for some families. The need for prompt and expert support for **parents having major difficulties** with their children is becoming more evident and pleas for help are going unanswered. Assessment of a child's needs, a co-ordinated response from the social

services, services in the home and ensuring that the school is also engaged should be supports that parents can count on. Parents who are **migrants and their children** must become a more conscious reference group in ensuring we advance towards a society without child poverty.

5.10 ● A frequent perspective articulated during the Workshop was that **parents are the principal actors in fighting child poverty** and a core design challenge for public policy in this area is how to more effectively enlist parents' commitment and enhance their competence and resources to achieve the outcomes they want for their children. Parents who are not living in the same household as their children – in most of these instances, fathers – should be consciously 'written in' to the script at every stage in the strategy for ending child poverty and ensuring happy and successful childhoods.

Workshop 2: People of Working Age

Chairperson Ms. Patricia Curtin,
           Assistant Director General, FÁS

Rapporteur Dr. Carmel Duggan, WRC Social & Economic Consultants

5.11 ● A brief input on the results of the consultation process was presented by **Ms. Paula Lyons, Department of Social and Family Affairs**. The details are given in Appendix III.

5.12 ● In the Workshop's preliminary discussion, the link between low rates of employment among **lone parents** and their high rate of poverty was challenged. Since the Lone Parent Payment was introduced in 1994, the thresholds have not been changed, despite wages, housing costs etc. increasing hugely. This is why lone parents are in poverty. These issues were looked at five years ago but nothing of significance happened.

5.13 ● The NESC report on the Developmental Welfare State sets the tone for **policy development** and emphasises the importance of people over the economy. It places a major emphasis on people getting back to work. Of concern is how the themes identified by the report will be prioritised and resourced by government. For example, childcare has been a priority for some time, but the recent Budget spread the money so thinly, that it did not impact on poor families. Therefore, if priority themes are not properly resourced, nothing happens for those in poverty. Some participants also expressed the view that the NESC report on the Developmental Welfare State is **weak on gender issues**, especially regarding mothers of school-going children.

5.14 ● In relation to non-income aspects of work, for lone parents access to **childcare is critical**. The Department accepts this, but a lot of lone parents find that employers want full-time workers or nothing. Similarly FÁS high-end provision runs from 8.30 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. and this presents a huge logistical challenge to lone parents.

5.15 ● **Poverty traps** mean that **activation methods** are wasted efforts. The lack of childcare mentioned above or its ad hoc provision by community activists is relevant here, but rent supplement is also an enormous trap. The loss of secondary benefits and childcare issues, are huge barriers for lone parents. For people with disability, there have been some improvements, but not for lone parents. The lack of well-paid jobs also makes activation very difficult.

5.16 ● If people decide not to work full-time, we should not assume a poverty trap. **There are other factors at play**, such as a lack of childcare, and a lack of educational qualifications. Across the board changes to social welfare will not necessarily solve these problems. However, where poverty traps exist we need to look at why they are there and how to address them.

5.17 ● The issue of **part-time employment** was also discussed. For some, this is a choice because it suits them, for others, including many lone parents, part-time work is their only option.

5.18 ● Participants expressed the view that we know the issues, we have the resources, we have political stability, yet one third of children are in poverty. In rural areas, at local level access to training is very difficult, timing of provision, lack of childcare, unwillingness or inability of employers to facilitate part-time working, and poverty traps are the key issues. The problem is that the **Government response has been inadequate**.

5.19 ● Participants agreed that **work is not the only way out of poverty.**

5.20 ● The Workshop regrouped the issues raised under the following 3 thematic areas so as to identify priority issues:

— welfare/poverty traps;

— different interventions needed at the different life cycle stages; and

— the dynamics of the labour market and its impact on vulnerable groups

5.21 ● The discussion on how to progress these themes focused on:

— poverty traps and widen discrimination to cover social origin;

— self-employment option for some but it needs adequate supports;

— participation packages and joined-up approaches and who is responsible to coordinate these; and

— a relative poverty target is needed.

The Workshop's recommendations were:

— address poverty traps through reassessing the social welfare system, including re-opening the debate on income adequacy, indexation etc;

— implement the NESC recommendations, particularly those on the Nordic model; and

— implement the recommendations in the NESF report on *Creating a More Inclusive Labour Market*.

Workshop 3: Older People

Chairperson Ms.Sheila Cronin, CORI

Rapporteur   Mr. David Silke, Director, the Centre for Housing Research

5.22 ● A brief input on issues that arose for older people in the OSI consultation was presented by **Ms. Cathy Barron, Office for Social Inclusion**. A fuller outline of this is given in Appendix III.

5.23 ● After the presentation, participants had an opportunity to make **general responses** to what they had heard. The following issues were raised:

— The importance of linking State pensions and allowances to the cost of living, particularly wages.

— Surprise that the issue of elder abuse had not been raised as an issue in the consultations.

— More is needed to raise older people's awareness of their rights (e.g. secondary benefits eligibility) and obligations (e.g. to inform the Department of Social and Family Affairs when their circumstances change). Care workers, Citizen Advice Bureaus and peer advocacy were flagged as important information channels. The challenge of changing information into knowledge was raised, e.g., varying literacy levels, multi-lingual information.

— In relation to Local Authorities a number of points were raised

  • Given that older people are a key client group, Authorities should assign specific staff to this group; and

  • The National Disability Authority is currently undertaking some work which indicates that Local Authorities are administrating the Disabled Persons Grants Scheme differently in different areas.

— The impact of severe cut-off points for services or entitlements; for example, in relation to pensions and age limits on access to services.

— Measures are needed to support those who wish to remain in the labour market after retirement age.

— The new strategy should have clear objectives for older people; for example, combating ageism and achieving clarity on eligibility and entitlements.

5.24 ● Participants were then asked to list up to **ten priority areas** for action under the new Strategy. Each participant was given three votes and asked to assign them to the priorities they considered most important. The results were:

Priority Issue	Vote
Health	14
Ageism (age cut-offs, accessibility and employment)	13
Clarity on Eligibility and Entitlement	10
User-friendly Information	10
Co-ordination (planning, delivery, evaluation)	9
Housing, Environment and Accommodation	8
Participation (society, employment and local communities)	8
Transport	7
Pensions (levels, up-dating)	6
Safety (elder abuse, environment)	5

5.25 ● On the basis of this first prioritising exercise, the following five key priorities and sub-themes were then identified by the Workshop.
Health – sub-themes here were co-ordination within health services; needs assessment and with adequate resources; and resource the implementation of the Working Group on Elder Abuse.
Pension Income Adequacy – this needs to be linked to average industrial wages and particular issues facing older women should be addressed.
Participation – five sub-themes were identified, namely: ageism, employment, safety, older people's voice in society and participation in planning and advocacy (especially for those in residential care).
Information and communication – three sub-themes were identified here, namely: clarity on eligibility and entitlement, the need for data and user-friendly information.
General Services – this covered issues such as transport and housing and the need for co-ordination between services.

5.26 ● Participants also felt that it was important to identify groups of **older people who may be particularly vulnerable**; for example, older people with a disability (particularly those with mental health problems), those living alone or in isolated environments, older migrants and minority groups. Gender issues were also raised, in particular vulnerabilities faced by older women.

5.27 ● The Workshop then began to identify the following targets to reflect the priorities selected:

— Develop a National Action Plan on Ageing to include areas such as medical services, housing and income/ employment.

— Ensure all older people have an adequate income to live in dignity and respect

  • Link to average industrial wages; and

  • Raise means-tested bands in line with wage inflation.

— There should be a rights-based approach linked to needs assessment and this should be adequately resourced at national, regional and local levels.

— Government Departments should be more proactive in supplying information on services, entitlement and eligibility in a user-friendly way, recognising literacy levels, different needs of ethnic groups, etc.

— Local Authorities should be obliged to consult with older people regarding services, for example, housing design and location.

Workshop 4: Public Services

Chairperson Bernadette Lacey,
    Director General, Department of Social & Family Affairs
Rapporteur Mr. Gerard Walker, Policy Analyst, NESF

5.28 ● A brief input was provided **Mr. Éamon Moran, OSI**, on the consultation exercise and the issues that arose on public services, in particular to health and care, housing, education and transport. This is detailed in Appendix III. The Workshop considered these findings with a view to choosing three main priority areas and focusing in on how improvements in these areas might be implemented.

5.29 ● Main points that arose during the discussions in the morning Session included the following:

— It was difficult to see the link between proposals around homelessness in the NAP/inclusion and action on the ground. Particular problems cited were that of homeless people with mental heath problems, Travellers are offered unsuitable housing, education and receive poor quality health care, and the lack of suitable accommodation for women who experienced violence. Given that the problem of homelessness had been raised at the regional seminars held around the country, this should figure more in the next NAP/inclusion.

— There are different perceptions of mainstreaming and groups needed to think 'outside the box'. The delivery of services in a mainstreamed manner can take time and there is often a lag between policy interventions and outcomes. There was some concern around the issue

of consultation and capacity-building fatigue, and of a sense of 'consultation without implementation'. The political decision-making process can be slow but this is due in part to the requirement to take on board the views of all the relevant actors in the process.

— It was felt that there was a lot in the NAP/inclusion already and the challenge now is how it could be achieved and implemented. There was concern over how the NAP/inclusion 2006 – 2008 and the National Development Plan (NDP) would fit together, especially as there is little consultation around the new NDP. Overall, there was a need for the streamlining and linking of the NDP, the NAPS, Social Partnership and the NAP/inclusion. There should be a small number of national priorities rather than a lot of micro detail.

— There was a view that the general level of public services was low. In housing, it seems that this is driven by the private sector but the market alone cannot be relied upon to provide the solution. There was need to achieve a balance between private and public sector provision of public services. Current service indicators to measure the performance of local government needed to be looked at. Of the 42 indicators currently in place, it was stated that only 2 were linked with social inclusion. There should be an examination of the service indicators set to take the achievement of social inclusion objectives more into account.

— The issue of the lack of information for migrant workers in their own language was raised. It was stated that the most isolated were asylum seekers who are denied the right to work and expected to live on €19 per week. Voluntary groups often had to deal with these situations without the level of supports required.

— Overall, the greater involvement of the community and voluntary sector with other stakeholders on the ground was welcome. However, another view was that this was only minimal and that the real opportunity to change things was not there.

5.30 ● Three main areas were prioritised for more in-depth discussion. The first of these was the **need for more effective mechanisms for the co-ordination of public services delivery on the ground to bridge the implementation gap**. There is often a lack of joined-up thinking among the many agencies involved in public services which leads to an implementation gap. People often have needs which can only be met in a holistic co-ordinated way by different agencies. A key issue is that of who co-ordinates and how they co-ordinate. It was felt that efforts to co-ordinate services can often descend into turf wars. On the other hand, what should be avoided is a central 'dead hand' that impacts on innovation and flexibility at the local level. There should be an obligation on State and local agencies delivering services to co-ordinate and to collaborate, and to recognise the importance of inter-agency work within organisations.

5.31 ● Groups to whom the services are being directed should be able to contribute to the design and delivery of the services. Partnership at the local level between service providers and stakeholders was not equal and the community sector was often caught as a minority in the middle. While the Government was talking about the importance of joined up inter-agency work, this would only happen if the people affected were included.

5.32 ● There should be standard criteria about how things should be done across regions, with for example, less local discretion in terms of people not being able to avail of particular services. Service performance should be monitored and sanctions imposed where service standards are not met.

5.33 ● The second priority issue was **how to give people greater rights of appeal and redress where they had a problem with services delivery**. Linked to this was the issue around how people's rights can be made real. Marginalised people often cannot access legal aid to make their case where they consider their service needs are not being met. In reality, therefore, they cannot enforce their rights. A main constraint mentioned was that there were only two legal aid centres in the country. However, it was stated that people who experience problems with services provided by the Civil Service, Local Authorities and the Health Service can go to the Ombudsman Office at no cost to get redress. People experiencing poverty may not be fully aware of this and often do not have the personal resources to go to that Office and adequately make their case. There is also a need for cultural awareness among bodies and agencies that provide redress help.

5.34 ● Much discussion took place around how to make rights real and the fact that marginalised people were not able to enforce their rights. The question was posed (but not answered in the time available) as to how a right-based approach to the delivery of public services could be achieved.

5.35 ● The third issue discussed was **how to meet the needs of individuals and groups and to involve them more in the process**. There was need for the multi-annual funding of services to ensure their longer-term sustainability on the ground, especially those services delivered with the support of community and voluntary groups. A participative structure that would reflect the degree of inequality experienced by individuals and groups in its composition is needed. However, it was important to develop a consultative model which would avoid the situation of the needs/rights of one group being argued against those of another group; for example those of Travellers versus migrants or indeed any other group.

5.36 ● Given that there is to be a single funding structure for community development at each county level, it was hoped that this would not lead to fewer options in the long run. There was need for capacity-building and improved understanding among those staff in State agencies and bodies involved in delivering services at the local level. They need to have greater experience of the marginalised groups they were serving and more know-how around how to collect data, how to monitor performance, and how to equality proof services.

5.37 ● It was highlighted that an equality proofing exercise will be carried out on the NAP/inclusion when it is finalised. While this was considered a valuable approach, it was felt that greater resources need to be invested in this area.

5.38 ● An equality proofing tool is also being developed as an aide to Social Inclusion Officers in each Department involved in drafting the NAP/inclusion. This seeks to highlight what the equality issues are relating to the nine equality grounds around the drafting of NAP/inclusion objectives. The tool sets out why equality is important and highlights particular relevant pieces of legislation around the nine equality grounds and the specific equality issues for each NAP/inclusion objective.

Workshop 5: Public Participation

Chairperson Niall Crowley,
                Chief Executive, the Equality Authority
Rapporteur Helen Johnston, Director, Combat Poverty Agency

5.39 ● Building on a brief presented by **Ms. Órlaigh Quinn, OSI** (see Appendix III), 21 potential priority issues were identified. From these, five priority issues were identified. These were;

(i) Electoral participation

(ii) Structures at local level

(iii) National/local structures

(iv) Implementation

(v) Capacity

5.40 ● The following are the key points that were raised under **Electoral Participation**:

—There was strong support for the Vincentian Partnership model of voter participation which is based on:

• working with local communities;

• bringing issues to local politicians;

• targeting particularly excluded groups e.g. Travellers, older people in rural areas, women's groups, the deaf community;

• providing resources for people on the ground; and

• building this model of voter participation into NAP/inclusion/social partnership.

—Education programmes on voting were seen to be important, especially in the schools.

—Also valuable was work with local politicians e.g. by inviting them into local communities. In this context, there is a need to build awareness

among politicians on effective communication with some of the groups that experience inequality, e.g. the deaf community.

—The visibility of politicians was seen to be important, particularly a two-way process between the local politicians and the community.

—Part of an electoral participation strategy should be the development of individual voter awareness alongside developing community capacity.

—Better access to information at election time was required e.g. for people with disabilities, young people, ethnic minorities.

5.41 ● Under the heading of **Structures at Local Level** the Workshop highlighted the following;

—Our centralised State at national level, but there has been an effort to integrate structures at local level e.g. Partnerships, County Development Boards, RAPID/CLÁR. This range of integrating structures is very confusing at local level.

—It was suggested that a thematic approach should be adopted at local level.

—It cannot be assumed that co-ordination at local level is participative or inclusive – inclusion needs to be taken into account.

—There is still need for greater clarity and transparency in service delivery at local level – people are still being sent "from pillar to post".

—There is a need to mainstream rather than having continual pilot initiatives. Similarly, there is need to change structures rather than add more.

—A diversity of structures has value in that all the eggs are not in one basket. There is wide diversity in the community and voluntary sector and the democratic interaction between the different sectors is a key issue.

—It may be useful to draw on the experience of those who have addressed these issues elsewhere.

5.42 ● The following are the key issues that emerged under the heading of **National/Local Structures**:

—Improve the sharing of good practice.

—Collaboration could be improved by meeting and/or talking regularly.

—More "one stop shops".

—Go beyond structures and empower local people and share decision-making. Training of local people is important.

—Community representation needs to ensure that the people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are represented, and that power imbalances are addressed.

—There is a clash of cultures with a "hierarchical" State structure jarring with a "flat" community structure.

—National guidance on local implementation would be useful. National/ local contact structures are important as these can play a role in ensuring that the thinking that informs policy-making can also be applied to policy implementation. The role of the County Manager is important here – s/he should drive implementation at the local level. It is also important to build capacity in local authorities.

—The importance of a bottom-up approach was emphasised and to keep a focus on social inclusion.

5.43 ● Workshop participants made the following points in relation to **Implementation**:

—Feed learning into the mainstream. This requires:

• Clarity of roles between stakeholders;

• Agreed underpinning principles; and

• Resources.

—It is important to support the capacity of mainstream organisations to learn from pilot and other initiatives.

—There should be a recognition that sometimes the mainstream needs to change.

—There should be greater clarity on what is meant by mainstreaming.

— Evaluate impact, which is more than measuring outputs.

—Consider the quality of implementation, and of participation in implementation, and the need for standards in this regard.

—More action from existing reports and strategies, where implementation to date has been inadequate e.g. through specific actions, timeframes, areas of responsibility and resources.

—A code of practice for participation in implementation would be helpful. Advocacy models are supported in this regard.

—Merits awards for implementation were suggested.

5.44 ● Under the heading of **Capacity**, the Workshop participants made the following points:

— The community and voluntary sector has the capacity to represent excluded people but needs to be resourced to participate in meaningful (not tokenistic) structures/policy making and to develop capacity.

— Consideration could be given to the provision of ring-fenced funding to develop the capacity of the community and voluntary sector.

— Address the sustainability of participation e.g. through providing feedback. People need to see the benefits of their participation.

— Sustain the community and voluntary sector in terms of participation, grassroots support and accountability within the sector.

— People felt strongly that participation of the community and voluntary sector, especially anti-poverty/social inclusion participation had regressed in recent years. This needs to be addressed, perhaps by re-visiting the White Paper on *Supporting Voluntary Activity*.

— While the social partnership model has been important, it also has limitations, where some community and voluntary groups have been excluded from it. A participative stakeholder model was suggested.

— Wage rates in the community and voluntary sector need to be looked at, with the possibility of having these benchmarked against the public sector.

VI

Final Plenary Session

6.1 ● At the Final Plenary Session the rapporteurs from each of the five Workshops presented summaries of the main issues raised and the priorities that had been agreed at each of the Workshops. More detailed accounts of the Workshops are outlined in the previous Section of this report.

6.2 ● The final input of the day was provided by **Mr. Séamus Brennan, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs**. He began by thanking the Forum participants for giving up a day of their time to think about, discuss and work through issues relevant to social inclusion. He also thanked the Chairperson, Director and the Secretariat of the NESF as well as the staff of the OSI for all of their work in organising the Social Inclusion Forum. The Minister also paid tribute to all of the chairs, presenters and rapporteurs in the Workshops.

6.3 ● In commenting on the Workshops, Minister Brennan identified some of the key issues he would take away from the Conference. He was glad to hear the issues around families and children and, in response to a question from the floor, said that conclusions about the proposed second tier child payment should be achieved in the coming months. With regard to people of working age, the Minister was particularly struck by the emphasis placed on the need for responses and actions, not just reports and analysis.

MR SEAMUS BRENNAN, T.D., MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS AT THE FINAL PLENARY SESSION

6.4 ● As regards older people, he noted that the most striking issues were health and income, participation and ageism, and for more information about entitlements. Consultation and co-ordination of services, joined-up Government, the need for standard performance criteria and about funding access were key issues in the workshop on public services, while structural reform, in terms of participation and educational programme at schools, and access to information, were key areas under public partici-pation. The Minister committed himself to briefing the Cabinet on the detailed reports of the Workshops.

6.5 ● The Minister was positive that the consultation process is already well under way and that by the end of this process there will be a strong idea of what should be the key elements in our next plan.

6.6 ● Ireland is now making fairly steady progress in tackling the core issues that lead to poverty. Investment in welfare supports and in entitlements are now at a rate of one in every three Euro of spending by the State. However, the significant social issue that we face cannot be solved by welfare and support payments alone. The easy route sometimes is to salve our social conscience by simply signing the cheque and then hoping the problem goes away.

6.7 ● The route the Minister is determined to take is one that will get behind those payments, and to confront the problems that brought about the payment in the first place. He stressed how it is vitally important that supports are not viewed as something permanent, but are a means of achieving a better income, of helping people help themselves by choice to move to a better place in life, with better opportunities. Welfare support systems always have to be tailored to the specific needs of individuals, and should be seen as stepping stones to achieve a better quality of life, chosen by that individual themselves.

6.8 ● The Minister went on to say that, to achieve the social change needed, will requires courageous reforms and an anti-poverty strategy that aggressively tackles the core cause of poverty. The window of opportunity is there, and we are now beginning to shape reforms that will introduce over the coming months, and years indeed, enlightened social policies in a number of key areas. These policies and reforms are about liberating people, about empowering people, about balancing rights and responsi-bilities, about activation, and about encouragement, and above all else, about striving to ensure that the potential of not even one individual in our country is overlooked.

6.9 ● The Minister stated that key among those who will benefit from these reforms will be lone parents who need help in escaping from welfare traps, and who need encouragement on the paths to training, education, and work. Reforms in this area will be announced in the next month or so. Reforms will also be introduced to help banish child poverty, which is not acceptable in the 21st Century, and to address the impending pensions crisis that brings with it the threat of old-age poverty.

6.10 ● These and other reforms, for example in rent supplement, and rent allowance, and reforms in activation measures, will greatly intensify efforts to eliminate poverty from the Ireland of the 21st century. Side by side with these reforms, the next NAP/inclusion can unite all sections of Government, the voluntary sector, to make a decisive contribution to tackling poverty and social exclusion. The Minister stated that the plan should be ambitious, achievable, address the issues bluntly, and lay out actions. It should set targets that can be reached, but also targets that will stretch us, stretch our imagination, and stretch our capacity to deliver.

6.11 ● Implementation gaps must be addressed. Service providers should work closely together at local level in a more integrated manner.

6.12 ● The Minister stated that he was encouraged by the most recent poverty figures from the EU-SILC survey. The level of consistent poverty has been reduced from 8.8% in 2003 to 6.8% in 2004. The at-risk-of-poverty figure (relative poverty) fell slightly, from 19.7% in 2003, to 19.4% in 2004, but this figure is too high. However, these latest results show that progress is being made.

6.13 ● Between 2000 and 2006, direct spending on welfare in Ireland doubled from about €7billion to almost €14billion. The average welfare payment increase in Budget 2006, for example, was 10.5%, which is almost four times the projected rate of inflation. The Minister had, for the first time, sought a special fund to introduce reforms of over €300 million, which he will be progressing in the coming months. This indicates that the Irish taxpayer is committed to supporting so many of our people who deserve that support, and it is important that the funds are properly targeted to ensure the benefits desired.

6.14 ● The Budget also introduced a range of activation measures which were designed to ensure that the talents and potential of no individual is overlooked. Also the tapering of disregards was very important, and the tapering strategy is very central to what the Government is trying to do. Thresholds were increased for several schemes and this will help to significantly smooth the journey from welfare back to work. It is important that these tapering mechanisms, disregards and thresholds are refined so that the move from welfare to work is a smooth, seamless transition.

6.15 ● The Minister recognised that there is still a lot more to do to tackle the scourge of poverty. The next NAP/inclusion will be a key mechanism in our efforts to create a poverty-free and socially-inclusive society. The Minister also said that he had taken full account of what has been said and will try to respond to it insofar as he can. He is critically aware of the need for joined-up Government, within and between Departments in the delivery of services for tackling poverty. It is important that, as we step into the 21st century, we have a society that this generation and future generations can be proud of. The proceedings of the Social Inclusion Forum will play an important part in moving in the direction where social exclusion is a thing of the past and poverty is not part of a modern Ireland that is proud to take its place in the world.

6.16 ● **Dr. Maureen Gaffney, Chairperson**, thanked the Minister for his comprehensive presentation and reiterated his thanks to all of those involved in the organisation of the Social Inclusion Forum Conference. She spoke briefly of the need for a necessary change to a paradigm where we would move from seeing people who experience poverty as vulnerable to one that also recognises their uniqueness and their strengths, and their desire and right to determine the direction and shape of their lives.

6.17 ● Finally, the Chairperson thanked the delegates for their participation and encouraged those who did not get a chance to input their comments and views, or whether they might wish to add more fully to what they had already said, to forward these to the NESF Secretariat by whatever means as soon as possible after the Conference.

Annexes

Annex I   Conference Programme

9.00   Arrival of Participants and Guests – Registration with tea/coffee

9.30   Morning Plenary:

Introductory Remarks by the Forum's Chairperson, Dr. Maureen Gaffney.

EU Dimension: Presentation by Mr. Xavier Prats-Monne,
European Commission.

10.00   Roundtable Discussion.

10.30   Coffee Break.

11.00   Other Presentations:

Mr. Gerry Mangan, Director, Office for Social Inclusion,
Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Presentation by Mr. Robin Hanan, Director,
European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland.

11.30   Questions and Open discussions.

12.00   Meeting of Workshop Groups on;
—Families & Children
—People of Working Age
—Older People
—Public Services
—Public Participation

1.00   Break for Lunch.

2.15   Continuation of Workshop Groups on;
—Families & Children
—People of Working Age
—Older People
—Public Services
—Public Participation

Final Plenary

3.30   Feedback from the Workshops

4.00   Open Discussion

5.15   Concluding Remarks by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs,
Mr. Seámus Brennan TD.

Annex II Attendance List

Full Name	Organisation
Dr Maura Adshead	University of Limerick
Cllr Ger Barron	General Council of County Councils
Ms Cathy Barron	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Thelma Blehein	HSE Wexford
Sr Renee Breslin	Before 5 Family Centre
Mr Leonard Burke	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Noreen Byrne	Doras BUI
Mr Shay Byrne	STTC CEART Co Wicklow VEC
Ms Sandra Byrne	Rathmines Information & Community Services Centre
Mr Paul Campbell	Unmarried Fathers of Ireland
Mr Frank Cardiff	Wicklow Community & Family services
Mr Bob Carroll	National Council on Ageing & Older People
Ms Helen Carton-Quinlan	South Dublin County Council
Ms Kathryn Carty	Central Statistics Office
Ms Caroline Clarke	Our Lady of Lourdes
Mr P.J. Cleere	Disability Federation of Ireland
Mr Bevin Cody	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Anne Coffey	Presentation Sisters
Mr Eoin Collins	Gay & Lesbian Equality Network
Ms Sheila Collins	HSE - Southern
Ms Sharon Cosgrove	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Tom Costello	The Atlantic Philanthropies (Ireland) Ltd
Ms Emer Coveney	Cavan County Development Board
Ms Sheila Cronin	CORI
Ms Judith Cross	Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Mr Niall Crowley	The Equality Authority
Ms Tracy Curran	NESDO
Ms Patricia Curtin	FÁS

Ms Audry Deane	Society of St Vincent de Paul
Ms Joan Derwin	Finglas/Cabra Council for Older People
Mr Seamus Devine	Mind the Gap
Ms Susan Diffney	Matt Talbot Community Development Project
Ms Eileen Dillard	Lucan Disability Action Group
Mr Michael Dillon	The Men's Development Network
Mr Tiernan Doherty	IBEC
Ms Kathleen Donohoe	Cavan Partnership
Mr Michael Doody	ICMSA
Ms Mary Dowling	Department of Health and Children
Mr Daíthí Downey	Focus Ireland
Mrs Mary Drumm	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Peter Duffy	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Carmel Duggan	WRC Social & Economic Consultants
Mr Tony Dunne	—
Ms Breda Dunne	South Tipperary Lone Parent Initiative Ltd (STLPI)
Mr Malcolm Eremionkhale	African Cultural Awareness Project
Ms Naomi Feely	One Parent Exchange & Network, (OPEN)
Ms Maria Finn	South Dublin County Council
Ms Eithne Fitzgerald	National Disability Authority
Ms Mo Flynn	Health Services Executive
Ms Aoife Flynn	South Dublin County Council
Ms Maureen Gaffney	NESF
Ms Theresa Gallagher	Finglas/Cabra Council for Older People
Ms Ann Louise Gilligan	National Educational Welfare Board
Mr Paul Ginnell	EAPN Ireland
Ms Sally Gleeson	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Geraldine Gleeson	Department of Social and Family Affairs

Mr Sean Grehan	South Westmeath Employment Education & Training
Services Ltd (SWEETS)	—
Ms Elaine Grehan	Irish Deaf Society
Ms Irene Gunning	IPPA
Mr Robin Hanan	European Anti-Poverty Network
Mr Fintan Hanson	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Anna May Harkin	Department of Health and Children
Mr Johnathon Healy	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Tom Healy	Department of Education and Science
Ms Laura Heneghan	Longford County Council
Dr Peter Herrmann	European Anti-Poverty Network, (EAPN)
Mr Richard Hickey	St. Brigid's Family and Community Centre
Ms Emma Hoey	National Traveller Womens Forum
Ms Bernie Hughes	Parents Alone Support Service (PASS)
Ms Grainne Jennings	Matt Talbot Community Trust
Ms Helen Johnston	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Mairead Johnston	Respond!
Mr Bob Jordan	Threshold
Ms Fidelma Joyce	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Irene Kane	Parents Alone Support Service (PASS)
Mrs Anne Kavanagh	PAUL Partnership
Ms Sharon Keane	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Ray Kelly	Unmarried Fathers of Ireland
Ms Liz Kerrins	Childrens Research Centre
Ms Derville Killian	Southern & Eastern Regional Assembly
Ms Bernadette Lacey	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Sylda Langford	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Mrs Mary Lehane	—
Ms Isabella Litewski	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Aiden Lloyd	POBAL
Ms Germaine Lloyd	Special Project on Long Term Unemployment Tallaght
Mr Jacques Lobe	New Communities Partnership
Ms Camille Loftus	One Parent Exchange & Network, (OPEN)
Ms Grace Loftus	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Julia Long	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
Ms Paula Lyons	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Sr Bernadette MacMahon	Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice
Ms Catherine Maguire	IBEC
Mr Darren Malone	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Gaye Malone	NESDO
Mr Billy Mangan	Longmeadows Pitch & Putt Company
Mr Gerry Mangan	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Cathryn Mannion	National Traveller Womens Forum
Mr Mark Manto	Central Statistics Office
Mr Ovidiu Matiut	CAIRDE
Dr Rosarie McCarthy	National Disability Authority
Ms Julie McCarthy	Rialto Community Network
Ms Joanne McCarthy	Disability Federation of Ireland
Cllr Patricia McCarthy	Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland
Ms Rita McCormack	Finglas/Cabra Council for Older People
Ms Rosaleen McDonagh	Pavee Point Travellers Centre
Mr Mark McGinty	Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC)
Mrs Theresa McGouran	Markiewicz Community Centre
Ms Olive McGovern	Department of Health and Children
Mr Jarlath McKee	NESC

Ms Tricia McLaughlin	Sligo Family Support Ltd
Ms Oonagh McLoughlin	Irish Wheelchair Association
Ms Heber McMahon	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Adrian McNamee	Special EU Programmes Body
Ms Shira Mehlman	FÁS
Mr Frank Mills	Health Service Executive
Ms Bernie Moone	SPICE
Mr Eamonn Moran	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Larry Mullin	Sligo Community Forum
Ms Mary Murphy	Dublin City University
Ms Candy Murphy	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Tess Murphy	Longord Womens Link
Ms Geraldine Murphy	Finglas/Cabra Partnership
Mr Con Murphy	Cork INOU
Ms Ann Murphy	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Razieh Nikoomanesh	—
Mr Andrew Nugent	Department of the Taoiseach
Mr Denis O'Brien	Galway City Development Board
Ms Iris O'Callaghan	Cavan Partnership
Mr Gabriel O'Connell	County Monaghan Partnership
Ms Mary O'Connor	Children In Hospital Ireland
Ms Orla O'Connor	National Womens Council of Ireland
Ms Margaret O'Doherty	Muintir na Tire
Ms Evelyn O'Donnell	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Mairead O'Donovan	Department of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources
Ms Aine O'Donovan	HSE Dublin North East
Ms Margaret O'Gorman	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Seán ÓhÉigeartaigh	NESF
Ms Christine O'Kelly	Older Womens Network (OWN Ireland)
Mr Kevin O'Kelly	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Helen O'Leary	Ralaheen Ltd

Mr Cian O'Lonargain	South Dublin County Council
Mr Lorcan O'Malley	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Niamh O'Reilly	National Association of Adult Education (AONTAS)
Mr Eoin O'Seagholha	European Commission
Ms Carol O'Sullivan	The Equality Authority
Ms Maureen Paterson	Irish Country Womens Association
Ms Mary Phair	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Richard Phelan	HSE Dublin North East
Ms Brigid Pike	Health Research Board
Mr Lar Quigley	Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform
Ms Orlaigh Quinn	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Brigid Quirke	Pavee Point Travellers Centre
Ms Janice Ransom	EAPN Ireland
Ms Louise Richardson	Older Women's Network (OWN Ireland)
Ms Gillian Roche	Central Statistics Office
Ms Marcela Rodríguez-Farrelly	Free Legal Advice Centre (FLAC)
Mr Hubert Rooney	Athlone Community Taskforce
Ms Heather Rosen	—
Ms Mary Ryden	Canal Communities Local Drugs Task Force
Ms Mary Seymone	Irish Wheelchair Association
Mr John Shaw	Department of the Taoiseach
Ms Eileen Sheridan	St. Michaels Family Life Centre
Ms Patricia Short	Wicklow Trade Union Centre for the Unemployed
Mr David Silke	Centre for Housing Research
Ms Shiela Simmons	Irish Association of Older People
Mr Seamus Sisk	Irish Prison Service
Mr Kevin Stanley	Irish Deaf Society
Ms Ann Stokes	Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

Mr David Stratton	Age Action Ireland Ltd
Dr John Sweeney	NESC
Mr Trevor Sweetman	The Get Ahead Club
Ms Ann Swords	Rialto Community Network
Ms Ruth Taillon	Border Action
Mr Brendan Teeling	An Chomhairle Leabharlanna
Mr Martin Territan	European Commission
Ms Anne Timony	Association for the Development of Pettigo & Tullyhommon
Ms June Tinsley	Barnardos – National Office
Ms Sarah Toner	Integrating Ireland
Ms Kimie Tsuchiyama	Ryukoku University
MsJoanneVance	KWCD Partnership
Ms Marian Vickers	Northside Partnership
Mr Gerard Walker	NESF
Mr Jim Walsh	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Kathy Walsh	KW Research & Associates
Ms Orla Walsh	Institute of Public Health
Ms Gillian Walsh	PASS
Ms Barbara Walshe	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Gill Weyman	West Cork Community Partnership
Mr Tom Whelan	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mrs Isabelle Williams	ATD Fourth World
Mr Toby Wolfe	Pobal
Deputy Michael Woods	Fianna Fáil
Ms Nusha Yonkova	Immigrant Council of Ireland
Mr Abdelrazak Zeroug	New Communities Partnership
Ms Clare Zuk	Irish Rural Link

Annex III   Briefing Papers from the Office for Social Inclusion's Consultation Process

As part of the consultation process for the development of the Irish National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006 – 2008 (NAP/inclusion), the Office for Social Inclusion invited organisations and individuals to make written submissions on the broad objectives and policy measures of the plan. In total, 81 submissions were received.

This written phase of the consultation process was followed by a series of seven regional seminars, which were held during November and December 2005 in Carlow; Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim; Cork; Dublin; Donegal; Limerick; and Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. The seminars were designed to support the participation within the NAP/inclusion process of those with either direct experience of poverty and/or who work with groups and communities experiencing social exclusion. A total of 512 people attended the seminars including representatives from government departments, state agencies, the community and voluntary sector, and members of the general public.

Copies of the full report of the consultation process are available on the OSI website – *www.socialinclusion.ie* – or by contacting the Office at 01 704 3851.

A report summarising the key issues raised during the consultation process was made available to Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) participants on the 15th of February. In advance of this, the present papers were prepared and circulated so as to assist participants in preparing for their attendance at the Forum by giving (i) a short overview of the issues that were raised, in terms of the general findings; and (ii) a briefing on specific issues that would be relevant to the particular workshop that they would be attending at the Forum. This was complemented by a representative of the Office for Social Inclusion making a brief presentation on the day at the SIF workshops on the outputs from this consultation process.

This material on the above consultation process is presented beneath in the following sequence:

• Section 1: General Findings

• Section 2: Findings Relating to Families and Children,

• Section 3: Findings Relating to People of Working Age,

• Section 4: Findings Relating to Older People,

• Section 5 :Findings Relating to Public Services, and

• Section 6: Findings Relating to Public Participation.

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7 *The discussions at these workshops are summarised in Section V of the main report.*

1. Consultation Process – General Findings
   (presented at each workshop)

Written Consultation Phase: Key themes and messages

A range of messages and broad themes were visible across submissions:

— The process of economic and social exclusion occurs at the intersection
   of a diverse range of policy areas including public health, social protection,
   education, housing, employment, the environment, equality and social
   inclusion.

— Poverty and social exclusion are dynamic issues that are constantly shaped
   by developments in the broader economy and society. Despite Ireland's
   sustained economic growth, not all social groups or areas have
   benefited equally.

— NAP/inclusion must continue to focus on the redistribution of resources
   and opportunities towards low-income, vulnerable groups in Irish society.

— Groups identified as being 'at risk of' poverty or social exclusion include:
   children; lone parent households; older people; women; carers; unemployed
   and older men; people with disabilities; people with mental health
   illnesses; migrant workers; Travellers; asylum seekers and refugees; the
   'working poor' (i.e. minimum wage households); and those who are
   homeless or at risk of homelessness.

— Employment and poverty traps remain a feature of poverty and social
   exclusion in Ireland – reform of the tax and welfare systems and greater
   investment in social transfers is required.

— Greater efforts to integrate groups excluded from the labour market are
   required. Employment targets and initiatives and broad active labour
   market policies must recognize and respond to the specific needs of
   vulnerable groups.

— Explanatory factors identified for the continued existence of poverty and
   social exclusion include the pace of economic growth, shortfalls in services
   and provisions from previous decades, the continuation of structural
   barriers and factors, and institutional weaknesses, particularly the lack
   of sanctions for non-implementation of agreed plans and targets.

Strategic approach, implementation and monitoring, and mobilising all actors

The main issues raised here were as follows.

— NAP/inclusion 2006 – 2008 should contain clear objectives and priorities, set specific targets which are possible to monitor, be integrated in playing a central role in national decision making and commit Government to providing necessary resources.

— Tackling poverty and social exclusion necessarily requires inputs from a wide range of actors. All relevant actors and stakeholders must work together to ensure that the actions and policies of one department or agency do not impact negatively on the actions of another. The multiple needs of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion should be responded to through the development of joined-up policy making, inter-agency working, multi-disciplinary responses and joint commissioning of services at both national and community level.

— NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should ensure that its activities are embedded more concretely within local communities to build awareness of the overall process and build a local/national parallel process of learning and stronger co-ordination of local and national policies.

— NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should strengthen the contribution of comm-unity and voluntary sectors to NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 and adequately support and resource their work.

— The development of a rights based approach to the delivery of public services was seen as critical. The approach adopted by the Government in the Disabilities Act 2005, which proposes a balance between a rights based approach and investment to secure improvements of Standards of Service, was identified as a possible blue-print for future policy responses in relation to this broad debate.

— A large number of submissions argued for a variety of extended proofing processes to be supported within NAP/inclusion including poverty, rural, equality, mental health, disability, literacy, child, lone parents and gender proofing.

— Improved, targeted data collection mechanisms are essential to enable NAP/inclusion to identify and address the needs of specific disadvantaged groups.

— NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should support the development of enhanced monitoring and evaluation processes and ensure the involvement of NAP/inclusion target groups and communities in their formation, imple-mentation and monitoring.

— NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should prioritise the participation of civil society in policymaking – effective and better consultation was a continual theme.

— A striking aspect of many of the submissions was the extent to which they identified ways in which the achievement of NAP/inclusion objectives could be accomplished through the full implementation of existing legislation or the implementation of recommendations and findings by previous government task forces/committees in relation to specific policy areas and target groups.

Regional Consultation Seminars

Seminars were structured to elicit participants' views on the implementation and success of the NAP/inclusion actions and measures in respect of facilitating access to employment, education and training, health and care, housing and income supports. Seminars also sought to explore the urban and rural dimensions of poverty and gender issues. Participants were asked to:

— Identify priorities for change in respect of the above actions.

— Identify what policies and measures worked.

— Identify the policies and measures that were not working in respect of each of the above areas.

— Suggest improvements to current policies and actions.

General comments on progress

A frequent comment related to the perceived juxtaposition between the high economic growth enjoyed by certain groups in Irish society and the continued marginalisation and exclusion of vulnerable groups from full participation in society. Unsurprisingly, regional disparities and differences in rural and urban experiences of poverty and social exclusion emerged as a strong theme. Many participants commented on progress achieved to-date in tackling poverty and social exclusion. It was widely agreed that previous NAP/inclusion policies and measures had led to improvements in the design and implementation of policies, programmes and services of major significance to the lives of those experiencing poverty and/or social exclusion.

Participants welcomed the process by which specific groups are identified as vulnerable and targeted for additional supports and measures within the NAP/inclusion. It was observed that a number of additional groups should be identified as vulnerable in the NAP/inclusion including such groups as carers, lone parents and the rural poor. Positive feedback was received regarding improvements in the provision of active labour market programmes for vulnerable groups, educational policies (particularly those targeted at improving school retention and completion rates and second-chance and vocational training), specialist primary healthcare pilot initiatives, housing, income supports and initiatives to improve access to transport in rural areas.

With respect to the institutional structures underpinning the NAP/inclusion, progress was noted in respect of internal policy co-ordination across national, regional and local government. Government departments in general were considered to have improved the level and quality of customer service offered to members of the public. Other notable improvements included an increase in integrated or co-ordinated service delivery across the range of service providers. However, steps towards developing integrated policy and implementation were believed to be hampered by:

— Some continued reluctance on the part of agencies/organisations to engage with other agencies to develop integrated service responses due to competing organizational objectives and remits.

— A lack of 'real' consultation with stakeholders in policy development and implementation.

— Limited implementation of shared information management systems precluding the sharing of common data across agencies and the development of responses tailored to individual/local/regional need.

— The lack of data on local and regional trends (e.g. poverty, labour market), which militates against the development of integrated and tailored service responses at local and regional level. Enhanced, targeted data collection was viewed as essential to enabling the NAP/inclusion to identify and address the needs of disadvantaged groups.

— Competition amongst agencies and organisations for a limited pool of funding. This was identified as a particular issue for the community and voluntary sector. The lack of multiannual funding for community and voluntary service providers was seen as a limiting such providers' ability to implement and develop strategic, long-term services.

2. Consultation Process – Findings Relating to Families and Children

It was felt that significant improvements both in the rates and administration of benefits were necessary. The need for front-line staff to recognise the right of claimants to such services was emphasised. A related issue was the need for transparent and accountable decision-making amongst service providers, particularly in relation to decisions on an individual's entitlement to discretionary payments. It was argued that the expansion of integrated services provision across the public services would greatly lessen the administrative burden for service providers and result in improved access for service users.

The interplay between the social welfare and taxation systems was a focus of much discussion. Participants widely agreed on the need to address the negative impact arising from the interaction of these systems, which results in employment disincentives. A frequent proposal was to allow those returning to work to retain secondary benefits, such as the medical card, for a longer period and to increase the income threshold for secondary benefits. There was widespread agreement that the operation and integration of basic social welfare supports and secondary

benefits should be reviewed to ensure that policies facilitate people's participation in employment and/or training. Also prevalent was a call to increase the basic adult social welfare payment and the benchmarking of this to Gross Average Industrial Earnings.

Social Welfare income supports for low-income families were felt to work ineffectively. A range of specific improvements to targeted income supports were identified. Participants called for:

— The abolition of the range of social welfare benefits to be replaced with one guaranteed minimum benefit payment supplemented by additional targeted payments.

— A review of the Back to Work Scheme to assess its impact in enabling people to transition to full-time, sustainable employment.

— A review of the Habitual Residency Condition with a view to extending the entitlement to welfare rights to migrant workers.

— The tapered retention of secondary benefits as recipient's transition into long-term, sustainable employment.

— An increase in the Child Dependent Allowance.

— The introduction of a second tier of child income supports for low-income families.

— Review of the take-up and operation of the Family Income Supplement.

— Introduce refundable tax credits for working families.

— An increase in the half-rate Maternity Benefit.

— Provision of additional targeted income supports to facilitate school retention and completion amongst children from disadvantaged families.

— Extend the eligibility criteria for Child Benefit to cover all students in full-time application to the age of 22 years.

— An increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.

— The removal of the cohabitation rule from the eligibility criteria for the One Parent Family Payment.

— Increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment.

— Development of equitable maintenance and income supports for separated parents.

— Implementation of measures and supports to tackle indebtedness amongst low-income families.

— Increase the level of income support available through the Rent Supplement scheme in response to the high cost of private rented accommodation.

— Reduce the administrative burden placed on applicants applying for benefits by extending the application of the Household Budget Package to a wider range of schemes and benefits.

— Introduce a common means test for all schemes, including Supplementary Welfare Allowances.

— Supply food vouchers to all welfare dependents to address the growing issue of food poverty.

In relation to educational provision and supports, suggestions included:

— Additional resources and supports for primary and secondary schools.

— Educational supports and provisions for vulnerable groups particularly children with disabilities and early school leavers.

— Increased investment in early childhood care and education programmes.

— A reduction in class sizes at primary and second level.

— More specialist educational support services for children with special needs to enable their participation in mainstream education.

— Universal access to early childhood care and education services.

— An increase in breakfast/after-school/homework clubs.

— The development of an individual learning plan for children in education reflective of their individual skills.

— Increased provision of specialist educational services (e.g. psychological services, special needs teachers) in rural and urban disadvantaged areas.

— More outreach services for Travellers and children who are homeless.

— Additional supports for young parents in education e.g. more affordable and accessible childcare places, and more opportunities for participation in pre-schools for children from disadvantaged families.

On the issue of children and adults with disabilities or special needs in education, participants called for:

— A review of the adequacy and efficiency of current educational provision and supports for people with disabilities.

— Greater provision of educational supports for disabled children and children with behavioural and learning difficulties.

— The development of specific programmes, in line with international models of best practice, to encourage and enable children with disabilities in the transition from second to third level education.

Issues raised in relation to early school leavers included:

— Expansion of youth vocational education and training programmes.

— Reduce the age threshold for youth vocational education and training programmes.

— The provision of income supports for early school leavers engaged in
specific training programmes, e.g. Youthreach, was seen in some instances
to act as a disincentive to children to remain in mainstream education. It
was felt that the Department of Education and Science should review its
role in the provision of such supports.

— The need to prioritise the achievement of agreed school completion
targets and reduction in early school leaving.

A further theme was the need for the system of income supports to support the
participation of those dependent on such payments in education and/or training.
Key points emerging from the discussions were:

— The need to streamline the interaction of different benefits/income
supports schemes.

— The need to ensure a system of sustained income supports to support
those with low level qualifications as they move from welfare to
sustainable employment.

— Support with childcare costs was essential to enable low-income families
participate in education and training.

Other issues in relation to community-based adult and life-long
education included:

— The need to ensure childcare and eldercare provision is adequate to meet
the needs of adults with caring responsibilities who wish to participate in
adult education.

— Individualisation of the social welfare system to address the exclusion of
women who are not on the live register and accordingly cannot receive
welfare payments or access training and employment programmes in
their own right.

3. Consultation Process – Findings Related to People of Working Age

Facilitating access to employment for jobseekers, preventing unemployment, and
ensuring that those who become unemployed remain closely attached to the
labour market and increase their employability are essential to tackling poverty
and social exclusion. Written submissions argued that to achieve this objective a
mixture of active and preventive measures must be supported in order to: break
down barriers to entry; facilitate access to guidance, training and other active
labour market measures; ensure that work pays; and, remove unemployment,
poverty and inactivity traps.

While employment opportunities and labour force participation in Ireland was
agreed to have dramatically improved in recent years (as evidenced by the decline
in long-term unemployment), the continued exclusion of particular groups from
the labour force was of concern. Lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers,
minority ethnic groups and young people were particularly mentioned, many of

whom were engaged in 'atypical' employment options (e.g. part-time, flexi, seasonal work) due to caring responsibilities – but it also reflected the failure to fully resolve 'welfare to work' and employment traps. Access to childcare and other such support services (including adequate financial supports) were seen as essential to facilitate and encourage participation in active labour market programmes.

Many written submissions commented on progress towards the achievement of income support targets as identified in NAP/inclusion 2003–2005. Increases in social welfare payments and progress in reconciling the social welfare and tax systems to support participation in work and the reconciliation of work and family life were acknowledged but it was argued that these increases were insufficient to meet needs due to increases in the cost of living and increasing wages and should be further increased.

It was generally agreed at the consultation seminars that policies and programmes must address the perceived existence of a 'benefits trap' and the associated disincentives to participation in employment and/or education/training initiatives arising from the interaction of the social welfare and taxation systems.

A substantial number of submissions referred to the issue of income adequacy for the 'working poor'. A number of submissions noted that participation in employment did not necessarily ensure a poverty free household while others called for the introduction of a longer period of transition from unemployment to employment during which one's eligibility for secondary benefits such as a medical card would be reduced on a gradual basis.

A low level of take-up of supplementary income supports was noted particularly amongst those eligible for Family Income Supplement and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. This was partly attributed to a lack of awareness of the supports and the associated red tape in applying for them. The Family Income Supplement was not felt to be working as effectively as it should. This was attributed to the rigidity of such schemes e.g. its failure to recognise atypical forms of employment such as seasonal work and a lack of awareness amongst target groups of the supplement.

How should things be done better?

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to **those not in employment** were:

— Develop targeted active labour market policies to encourage and facilitate the participation of vulnerable groups to work and training.

— Offer a continuum of supports to support participation in active labour market programmes, such as health services, placement and employment support systems, and individual learning budgets.

— Provide people with disabilities with an increased range of meaningful occupation and training options and enforce equality legislation; introduce a Cost of Disability payment.

— Explore the provision of a Work Permit system that would allow asylum seekers awaiting processing of their claim for more than six months the right to work.

— Create bridging active labour market programmes to support people with mental health illnesses to make the transition from sheltered work programmes to mainstream programmes.

— Identify and encourage appropriate Positive Action Measures to address the marginalisation of unemployed persons (as per NAP/inclusion categorisations) from the labour force and provide culturally specific active labour market programmes for disadvantaged groups.

— Continued support for, and development of, area-based partnership measures to reduce long-term employment and generate economic growth.

— Develop specific initiatives to tackle rural unemployment.

— Develop new actions to incentivise employers to provide placement and job opportunities for drug users, offer drug awareness training programmes for employees and review the appropriateness of policies and procedures regarding the use of drugs in the workplace.

— Provide accreditation for all community training and employment initiatives through the National Framework for Qualifications.

— Address the lack of affordable, high quality, accessible childcare and eldercare provision.

— Address disincentives arising from the operation of social welfare and taxation systems in order to support participation in employment, particularly in relation to the retention of secondary benefits.

— Greater public and private transport e.g. expansion of rural transport schemes, provide a voucher system for people with disabilities to enable them to avail of private transport use.

— Enable social welfare, training and employment schemes to accommodate part-time and atypical work-life patterns; ensure a system of sustained income support as persons move to sustainable employment.

— Allow recipients of the Carers Allowance to participate in active labour market schemes and extend the period of eligibility for the Carers Benefit to support the return to employment of family carers.

— Expand the number of interventions to improve access to employment and education for people with disabilities.

— Review the accessibility and relevance of enterprise supports for minority ethnic groups and develop self-employment as an employment option.

— Expand the number of Community Employment (CE) scheme places and develop structured progression mechanisms between CE and the broader labour market.

— Review the impact of and extend eligibility for the Back to Work Allowance to include those who are unemployed for more than 12 months and those with mental health illnesses.

— Individualisation of the social welfare system to address the exclusion of women who are not on the live register and accordingly cannot receive welfare payments or access training and employment programmes in their own right.

Additional modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to **those in employment** included:

— More incentives for employers to promote the participation of their workforce in basic and further education schemes.

— Provide a Back to Education Allowance for low paid workers who wish to return to full or part-time education.

— Develop competency based recruitment strategies and target minority ethnic and vulnerable groups for specific opportunities in the public and private sector.

— Examine the long-term impact of low-paid, part-time employment on women's general income and pension levels.

— Require all employees to contribute to a Personal Retirement Savings Account.

— Review the Work Permit System and adopt the definition of 'worker' used in Art. 2 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families.

— Resource State agencies (e.g. Labour Inspectorate Unit) to monitor and enforce the employment rights of vulnerable groups and protect workers employment rights.

— Increase the One Parent Family Payment earnings disregard to a level equivalent to 80% of gross average industrial earnings.

— Expand the legislative framework to support family friendly workplaces e.g., extend the duration period of maternity leave, provide more paid paternity and parental leave.

— Index link the minimum wage to increases in average industrial earnings and remove all persons on the minimum wage from the tax net.

— Introduce refundable tax credits for working families.

— Increase the Family Income Supplement threshold, reduce the qualifying working hours to meet the needs of those in atypical employment, actively track people who are eligible for supports and review its operation to ensure that its take-up is maximised.

— Extend the Wage Subsidy Scheme to people with disabilities who wish/or are only able to work less than 20 hours per week and promote greater understanding of the scheme and its operation among employers.

A range of proposals emerged in relation to improving the overall design and implementation of **active labour market programmes and measures**. It was suggested that such programmes should in general prioritise the identification of barriers to participation and:

— Link to mainstream educational programmes to facilitate the transition from education/training to mainstream employment and or additional vocational education and training opportunities.

— Prioritise the progression of participants to sustainable employment.

— Reconsider the length of time that any one participant is eligible to remain within active labour market programmes in recognition of the need of some for longer-term support before transitioning to mainstream employment.

— Address youth (18–25 years) unemployment by, for example, developing a scheme of targeted supported employment similar to the Community Employment Scheme.

— NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should establish a guaranteed adequate income standard for all dependent on social welfare payments or in minimum wage employment, which is linked to gross average industrial earnings.

4. Consultation Process – Findings Relating to Older People

A number of areas of concern were particularly prominent in both the written submissions received and the consultation seminars, namely – overcoming loneliness and isolation, adequate provision of income and housing supports and access to services and participation. The following extracts from the Consultation Report relate: to older peoples priorities for change which became evident throughout the whole consultation process; policies and measures that are working; policies and measures that are not working; and suggested improvements to current policies and actions.

In relation **to social participation**, it was suggested that a commitment be put in place for proactive planning, delivery and development of services for older people. This should be supported by the development of an appropriate data strategy to identify current and future needs. The establishment of monitoring structures linked to local and national level government processes was proposed. An enhanced transport service (public and private) for older persons and a voucher system to enable older people to avail of private transport where no public transport is available was seen as vital for the participation of older people in society today, particularly in rural areas. The development of a database of ideas and opportunities during retirement (with models of best practice) for organisations working with older people was also evident from many of the submissions received. Exclusion from the labour force was seen as a particular issue for older people – submissions continually stressed the need to develop specific and targeted strategies to increase the engagement of this group.

The provision of community-based adult and life-long education also emerged as a strong theme with calls for a greater commitment to funding educational programmes for older people (e.g. computer training) and recognition of the value of life-long learning.

In relation to **health**, respondents welcomed new institutional structures such as the Health Services Executive, the National Disability Authority and the NAP/inclusion Health Group. Improvements in data strategy for health services were welcomed, as were efforts to address data deficits in respect of particular groups. The general operation of regional public health services, primary care initiatives, considering the limited facilities and resources available, was praised. However, the lack of support services for the elderly was strongly criticised. A range of suggested improvements were outlined in respect of this group:

— Increase the provision of assisted living services to support those who are capable of independent living but require support to do so.

— Increase in sheltered/supporting accommodation for those who need care but who do not wish to reside in long-term, residential care.

— Extension of the home help service and additional emphasis placed on up-skilling and accrediting home helps.

— Regulation and inspection of long-term care facilities.

— Increase in recuperative and short-term care placements for the elderly following discharge from hospital.

— Increase in state funding support for community and voluntary providers of support services for the elderly.

— Extension of the present Community Development system within the Health Services Executive to include Services to Older People.

— Greater provision of community-based social and health services to support the elderly in independent living.

In relation to **housing**, respondents welcomed the increased focus on the provision and monitoring of social and affordable housing outputs. Similarly, it was felt that there had been tangible improvements in the consultation processes used by government departments and agencies when developing housing legislation and provision, although weaknesses remained. Improvements in the provision of information on housing needs through a more joined-up, inter-agency approach were noted. Key proposals for how improvements could be made included:

— The delivery of an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures to meet the needs of different types of household.

— Increased involvement by tenants in the design of social and affordable housing to ensure that it is accessible and appropriate to their needs.

— The development of a range of housing types in recognition of the housing needs of various individual groups (e.g. people with disabilities, single men, lone parents, the elderly, etc).

— Increase in grant aid to owners of former local authority housing stock (particularly the elderly) to ensure adequate maintenance of housing.

Participants also called for greater financial resources to support essential repairs and maintenance on the housing of elderly local authority tenants and those who live in private housing, where these persons are not able to meet the full costs of such repairs, etc. Establishing a dedicated Housing Advice Service for older people to assist with the identification of suitable accommodation options in terms of home improvements, adaptations or moving to alternative accommodation was also put forward as a suggestion.

There was widespread acknowledgement that the current **social welfare system** acted as a safety net for those experiencing difficulties. The existence of a basic social welfare allowance, as well as secondary and ancillary payments such as fuel allowance, free travel, rent supplement, were seen as a positive support for those dependent on social welfare payments. Some submissions referred to the issue of income poverty amongst older people, noting significant increases in income poverty amongst this group since the mid-1990s. The agreed NAP/inclusion target of €200 for the lowest old age pensions to be reached by 2007 was generally welcomed although a number of submissions argued for state pensions to be linked to gross average industrial earnings. The need to increase the qualified adult payment was addressed in a number of submissions.

There was general agreement that although the range of benefits and income supports was positive and made a significant difference to the lives of those in receipt of them, significant improvements in the rates and administration of these benefits were necessary. The need for front-line staff to recognise the right of claimants to such services was emphasised. A related issue was the need for transparent and accountable decision-making amongst service providers, partic-ularly in relation to decisions on an individual's entitlement to discretionary payments. It was argued that the expansion of integrated services provision across the public services would greatly lessen the administrative burden for service providers and result in improved access for service users. The following suggestions were advanced:

— Guarantee a basic income for the elderly.

— Increase the Living Alone Allowance.

— Increase in the Fuel Allowance and extend the duration of the scheme.

— Introduce a national waiver scheme for the elderly in relation to the payment of waste charges.

— Achievement of the Sustaining Progress commitment to increasing the level of Qualified Adult Allowance for pensioner spouses to the level of the Contributory Old Age Pension, and for this to be paid directly to the Qualified Adult.

— Linking the basic rate of state contributory and non-contributory pensions with the cost of living.

— Supplementing the state pension with a second tier pension, reflecting people's living standards prior to retirement.

— Retrospective extension of the Homemaker's Scheme to include older women.

— Reviewing the flexibility of the Older Persons grant allowance to ensure it meets the needs of older people.

— Abolition of refuse charges for older people.

— Income supports to meet the cost of long-term residential care.

— Improve information provision on rights and entitlements and decision-making in relation to benefits.

5. Consultation Process – Findings Relating to Public Services

The following extracts relate to comments made during the consultations in relation to public services. Access to public services is accepted as critical to the tackling of poverty and social exclusion. This paper focuses on the major public service areas of Education, Health & Care, Housing and Transport.

Education

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to **facilitating access to education** were overcoming barriers to participation in education and training including financial barriers, childcare and addressing educational disadvantage. A strong message emerging from the consultation was the need to prioritise improvements in educational attainment levels among disadvantaged groups.

The critical role that schools and the wider education system have to play in tackling poverty and social exclusion was emphasised. There was broad support for a range of specialist intervention and support programmes to tackle educational disadvantage but it was stressed that state commitment to the provision of long-term, multi-annual funding of programmes was necessary to achieve best results.

A wide-ranging set of proposals was advanced in respect of how educational provision and support could be improved. There was generally felt to be a number of key challenges yet to be addressed within mainstream primary and secondary education provision with specific recommendations in relation to vulnerable groups, early school leavers, children and adults with special needs and adult education.

Examples suggested as to how services could be improved include

— Identification and promotion of models of good practice for educational services.

— Expansion of educational disadvantage initiatives and mainstream successful pilot initiatives.

— Adoption of a rights-based approach to access to education.

— Increased educational supports and provisions for vulnerable groups particularly children with disabilities and early school leavers.

— More outreach services for Travellers and children who are homeless.

— Increased investment in early childhood care and education programmes.

— A reduction in class sizes at primary and second level.

— Measures to address early school leaving.

— Increase Back to Education initiatives within the community education sector Expansion of youth vocational education and training programmes.

— Development of multi-annual funding streams to support community and voluntary providers of adult and community based education.

— Ensure childcare and eldercare provision is adequate to meet the needs of adults with caring responsibilities who wish to participate in adult education.

— Establish adult literacy targets as part of NAP/inclusion targets.

— Free access to adult and second chance education for asylum seekers and refugees.

— Continued attention to developing integrated policy responses to educational needs.

Health and Care

Respondents welcomed new institutional structures such as the Health Services Executive, the National Disability Authority and the NAP/inclusion Health Group. The general operation of regional public health services, primary care initiatives was welcomed. It was believed that there was an improved awareness of mental and physical health issues and developments relating to carers.

Particular deficits were noted in respect of the provision of:

— Mental health services.

— Drug and addiction rehabilitation services.

— Community-based health promotion services.

— Support services for carers.

— Respite care options

— Recuperation/step-down services and regional and local nursing home places.

A general theme was the need to develop a holistic, rights-based approach to service delivery and provision and to build awareness of the needs of vulnerable groups particularly carers, people with disabilities and low-income families. The importance of developing sustainable, healthy communities was emphasised, as was the need to further develop preventative health services. A greater provision of appropriate, flexible, high quality and affordable childcare and eldercare and services and supports for carers in the home was another major theme. The following priorities were identified:

— Use of health impact assessments across public policy areas.

— Research in relation to health status, service access and outcomes for vulnerable groups.

— Mainstreaming of successful pilot projects

— A reduction in the administrative burden required to access entitlements.

— Expand the availability of drug treatment and rehabilitation services

— Greater inter-agency co-operation in the planning and delivery of services.

— Targeted primary and secondary health services for vulnerable and isolated groups.

— Implement a national mental health strategy.

— Increase long-term residential care places.

— Increase the income eligibility thresholds for the medical card.

— Improved provision of the range of necessary supports for carers.

Housing

Respondents welcomed the increased focus on the provision and monitoring of social and affordable housing outputs. The additional supply of housing by both voluntary and local authorities was noted. It was felt that there had been tangible improvements in the consultation processes used when developing housing legislation and provision, particularly the development of housing and homeless-ness forums. A range of improvements in local authority accommodation services was noted.

However, there were concerns expressed regarding the marginalisation of disad-vantaged local authority housing estates. Particular issues were noted with the supply of appropriate and affordable housing options, particularly for vulnerable groups, those with special needs and Travellers. An increase in the NAP/inclusion social and affordable housing targets was considered essential, including housing provision in rural areas. The importance of ensuring that diverse policies and programmes contribute to the development of sustainable communities was emphasised. A range of supports was considered necessary for local authority tenants including: pre-tenancy courses, courses in parenting, budgeting and home management. It was generally agreed that housing allocation lists and procedures should be more transparent and accountable. Participants also argued for additional state support for existing statutory bodies dealing with homelessness and warned against an over reliance on community and voluntary provision.

A number of priorities for change were identified:

— Regular monitoring and reporting on progress towards social/affordable housing targets.

— Delivery of an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures to meet the needs of different types of household/vulnerable group.

— Enforcement of local authorities' obligations e.g. Traveller Accommodation Programme.

— Improved regulation of the private rental accommodation sector.

— Intensive programme of refurbishment of unoccupied local authority housing units.

— Require all new social and affordable housing outputs to meet best practice and standards in respect of accessibility.

— Review the implementation of Part V of the Planning Act.

— Cessation of the sale of existing social and affordable housing stock.

— Include NESC-identified social housing output targets within NAP/inclusion.

— Develop local area based responses to homelessness.

— Provide adequate supports for elderly persons living in their own homes.

— Increase the Disabled Persons Housing Grant to 100%.

— Adopt a right-based approach to access to housing.

— Integrated service delivery across housing providers.

— Increase stakeholders' involvement in planning and implementation of housing policy.

— Additional resources to support voluntary and community providers of affordable housing.

— Expansion of local authority Tenant Liaison Scheme and other support schemes.

— Improved information provision on housing rights and entitlements.

Transport

While transport was not the subject of an individual consultation workshop it did arise as an overarching issue within all of the other public service topics. The key modification and improvement to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to transport services* was the expansion of existing public and private transport schemes to combat the social isolation of vulnerable groups and facilitate participation in employment, education and training. It also is key in helping to build sustainable communities which was a key priority within the housing area. The rural transport initiative was seen to be very positive and worked well, however, it was agreed that it needed to be implemented in all areas.

6. Consultation Process – Findings Relating to Public Participation

Key themes and messages for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008

- Achieve more effective levels of co-ordination and interaction between Government Departments and between the relevant local government and community and voluntary actors.

- Clearly articulate the contribution of the local and national dimensions, strengthen the contribution of the local and community sectors to the promotion of social inclusion and adequately support and resource their work.

- The design, implementation and monitoring of anti-poverty policies must be participative and have a strong local/community dimension.

- Develop enhanced monitoring and evaluation processes and ensure the involvement of NAP/inclusion target groups and communities in their formation, implementation and monitoring.

The following categorised responses develop and provide detail to the above key themes and messages.

What is Working?

— The following services were seen to have built the capacity of target groups to participate in policymaking and supported improved consultation processes.

- Family Resource Centres

- Community Development Support Programmes

- Area Development Partnership companies

- County Development Board Social Inclusion Groups

- Housing Fora

— The National Anti-Poverty Networks Programme, funded by the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, forms a key support for grass-roots anti-poverty work and facilitates the involvement of those directly experiencing poverty in policy-making.

— The Combat Poverty Agency, particularly its role in linking anti-poverty activity to policymaking processes and its support for community development approaches to tackling poverty.

What is not Working?

— Insufficient resources and the lack of multi-annual funding for community and voluntary service providers was seen as a limiting such providers' ability to implement and develop strategic, long-term services.

— The current approach to combating social exclusion must change in respect of the degree of accessible advice, guidance and advocacy available.

— The disparity between commitments given in government strategies and policies to the development of an 'enabling approach' and "the adoption of community development principles of participation and inclusion" and the reality of government agencies'/departments' dealings with the community and voluntary sector.

How could things be Improved?

• Consultation and involvement of vulnerable groups in the development of active labour market programmes.

• Ring-fenced funding for the establishment of strategies and mechanisms to promote women's access to political decision-making including the establishment and maintenance of a women's political caucus.

• Acknowledge the importance of advocacy organisations and approaches in facilitating vulnerable people. Establish an Advocacy Office to represent socially excluded individuals in their dealings with public services.

• Develop an infrastructure to enable disadvantaged lesbians, gays and bisexuals (LGBs) to participate in the policymaking process. Include LGB groups in the monitoring and review mechanisms for NAP/inclusion.

• The development of a national-local structure to advance social inclusion in Local Authorities including a structured feedback process and the development of linkages between the delivery of social inclusion at national and local level including community and voluntary organizations.

• Introduce representation of vulnerable groups on the monitoring and steering committees of relevant state agencies and bodies to ensure their contribution to policymaking. Introduce Citizens Juries to monitor the achievement of health and housing targets. Establish Client Councils to represent users of services experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

• State agencies should develop appropriate outreach strategies to underpin their work with marginalised groups.

• Introduce an electoral participation initiative for disadvantaged communities.

• Establish a national 'Active Citizen' co-operative to promote the principles of active civic engagement

Information Provided on Current Mechanisms for Public Participation

Social Partnership Agreements

The Government consults with the social partners as appropriate on policy proposals and the design of implementation arrangements in respect of matters covered by the social partnership agreement. New mechanisms for engagement with the social partners in relation to the wider policy framework were introduced under the Sustaining Progress Agreement. This included the establishment of a Steering Group, representing Government and each of the social partner pillars, with overall responsibility for the management of the implementation of the Agreement.

Sustaining Progress introduced ten Special Initiatives which were progressed during its lifetime. The Special Initiatives focused on key issues of economic and social policy which were identified by the parties to the Agreement. These included – Housing and Accommodation; Migration and Interculturalism; Long-term Unemployed, Vulnerable Workers and those who have been made Redundant; Tackling Educational Disadvantage – Literacy, Numeracy and Early School Leaving; Care – Children, People with Disabilities and Older People; Alcohol/Drug Misuse; Including Everyone in the Information Society; and Ending Child Poverty.

Social Inclusion Forum

The Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) is of particular importance in providing an opportunity for individuals and groups to be consulted. The goals of this process are to enable them:

• to put forward views and experiences on key policies and implementation issues relating to the NAPS;

• to identify barriers and constraints to progress and recommendations on how best these can best be tackled; and

• to provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

The SIF is a unique gathering in the EU context. The European Commission representative at the 2005 SIF stated that Ireland is at the forefront in bringing together those who represent people experiencing poverty to input their views into the policy-making process and, in this respect, provides an extremely worthwhile and important example to the rest of the European Union.

Social Inclusion Consultative Group

This group constitutes an important vehicle for involving the social partners in the NAP/inclusion process. It is co-chaired by the Departments of the Taoiseach and Social and Family Affairs and comprises representatives of the relevant Government Departments and Agencies and the Social Partners. This Group is consulted and offers advice in relation to ongoing social inclusion developments.

Some Examples of other Fora for Participation

Community Fora

The establishment of the County Development Boards (CDB) and Community Fora have given rise to a new brand of participation. The Community Forums are essentially the platform, which provide every person with the opportunity to become involved in a consensus approach to designing and implementing county-wide plans. Research across the country has revealed that Community and Voluntary Fora representatives have dedicated their efforts into the development of the CDB Strategies.

Housing Fora

The Housing Forum provides an opportunity for the social partners to contribute to housing policy developed by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. In addition to representatives of the social partners, the Forum chaired by Mr. Noel Ahern T.D, Minister for Housing and Urban Renewal, includes representatives of local authorities and voluntary and co-operative housing sector, and a number of Government Departments. The establishment of homeless fora, comprising of representatives of the local authority, health board and the voluntary sector, has been achieved in every county. The fora have provided a useful space for the exchange of information and views.

Office for Social Inclusion Consultation Process

As described at the start of this brief, this is another important forum for participation. The consultation seminars sought to gather participants' views on the local, regional and national implementation of the NAP/inclusion policies and measures. Seminars were structured to elicit participants' views on the implementation and success of the NAP/inclusion actions and measures in respect of facilitating access to employment, education and training, health and care, housing and income supports. Seminars also sought to explore the urban and rural dimensions of poverty and gender issues. Participants were asked to:

— Identify priorities for change in respect of the above actions.

— Identify what policies and measures worked.

— Identify the policies and measures that were not working in respect of each of the above areas.

— Suggest improvements to current policies and actions.

Annex IV   Participants' Evaluation of the Conference

A4.1   Participants were asked to complete an evaluation form on the day of the Social Inclusion Forum. This sought their views on the Conference overall, the morning presentations, the Workshops, the venue and catering, and asked for their opinion on what worked best on the day, what they would change and how they would like to be kept informed about the progress of the NAP/inclusion. Thirty-four participants returned completed evaluation forms.

A4.2   Table A4.1 shows that the majority of these participants were very positive about the Forum. Over half of those who completed questionnaires stated that all aspects of the Conference were very good or excellent. In addition, the majority by far reported that they were satisfied with the venue and catering on the day, with only one complaint being made about the food. A small number of participants would have liked to have coffee or tea in the afternoon and commented on the crowded room where lunch was served.

Table A4.1   Participants' Rating of Overall Conference, Morning Presentations and Workshops

	Overall Conference	Morning Presentations	Workshops
Excellent	9	9	6
Very Good	10	14	14
Good	10	7	7
Fair	5	4	7
Poor	0	0	0

A4.3   A number of participants made comments on the Conference, morning Session and Workshops, both positive and negative. In relation to the **conference overall** the comments included:

— Too many participants, too rushed and too much jargon used.

— Too few opportunities to engage with policy and decision-makers.

— Social Inclusion Forum should make the policy and decision-makers more accountable.

— Too much was the same as last years Social Inclusion Forum, more imagination is needed around this type of participation.

— The effort that went in to the Forum was very evident.

— Enforced seating for the deaf should be avoided and the deaf community consulted on this beforehand.

— Assumption of too much knowledge – introduction or overview of NAP/inclusion process needed at the start.

In relation to **the morning inputs**, the following comments were made.

— Some inputs were similar to last year, the topics don't change.

— Speakers did not engage with each other.

— More time is needed for questions and answers.

— Robin Hanan's input was passionate, very good and inspiring.

— Need to see new faces representing the community and voluntary sector.

In relation to **the workshops**, many more comments were made. These related to the following issues.

— Each workshop should have a facilitator, aided by a note-taker, to summarise the main points on a flipchart as the discussion progresses.

— When registering, people should be given a slip of paper to fill in one or two key questions related to the workshop; these could then be dropped into a box in the morning, summarised and then presented at the start of the workshop.

— The workshops were too crowded and large, and there was not enough time for all views to be heard.

— Workshops needed more structure.

— Circular rather than lecture style room layout would be better.

— Much more could have been achieved.

— There is no sense of where the discussion at the workshops will go or lead.

— The workshops were well chaired, well directed and outcome focused.

— Workshops did not stick to the brief.

— Having to prioritise issues was very challenging.

— Prioritising exercise was flawed and the chosen priorities did not necessarily reflect the views of the group.

A4.4 Participants were also asked to identify what aspects of the Social Inclusion Forum they found most useful, what they would change and to provide suggestions for future Social Inclusion Conferences. The three most common responses to **what participants found most useful** were the opportunity to meet people and network, the roundtable discussions and the workshops. Other useful aspects mentioned included the information obtained through handouts and inputs and the opportunity to meet the Minister and lobby him for change.

A4.5   With regard to **what participants would change** the following suggestions were made:

— More time to allow everyone to participate.

— More focused, less general inputs.

— Allow more time for questions and answers.

— Circulation of a summary of recent policy reports, statements and relevant issues in advance.

— The need to have the Social Inclusion Forum at all.

— Smaller, more structured and more focused groups.

— Shorter lunchtime.

— Inputs from representatives of all sectors and more from the community and voluntary sector.

— Fewer platform speakers and only speakers who are to stimulate the Workshops.

— Less jargon in presentations.

— Provision of more information beforehand.

— Shorter and less tedious report back from the Workshops – limit to three key points from each one.

— Policy and consultation with the deaf community.

— More handouts on the day, more use of visual aids and ask speakers to speak up.

— Greater input on co-ordination structures and empowering local communities.

— Workshop format.

Participants were also forthcoming with **suggestions for future Social Inclusion Conferences**. Many of these are already reflected in the changes suggested above. Additional suggestions included the following.

— Move this from Dublin to another location.

— Include reports on what actions have been undertaken and impacts achieved, not just how many targets have been met.

— Adopt a results focus, identify what works and what does not.

— Make summaries of relevant reports, such as those from the NESF and NESC, available on the day.

— Do not hold the Forum during school mid-term.

— Provision of childcare.

— Develop a statutory body to co-ordinate the relationship between the NGOs and the statutory sector.

— Highlight the role of Local Authorities, Local Partnerships etc. and secure their input and involvement.

— More round-table discussions.

— Seek more supported involvement of people in poverty.

— More awareness and discussion on Irish Sign Language (ISL).

— Greater participation by local and national politicians.

— Be clear and honest about what happens on follow-up to the discussions.

A4.5   Finally, participants were asked how they would like to be kept informed of progress on the implementation of the NAP/inclusion. The majority of the participants who completed the evaluation forms opted for some form of electronic communication, via e-newsletters or other briefings. Also, many of these stated that relevant websites should be regularly updated and email prompts of these updates should be circulated. However, a small number asked that correspondence be posted to them. A small number of participants specifically stated that a draft of the NAP/inclusion should be circulated by the OSI for further discussion before it is finalised and submitted to the European Commission in Brussels.