

Social Inclusion Forum

**Fifth Meeting of the
Social Inclusion Forum**

2008

*conference
report*

Conference Report

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Fifth Meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum

26th November 2008

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Foreword from the Chairperson

I am pleased to introduce this report of the latest meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF). This was the fifth meeting of the SIF. To facilitate the attendance of as many people as possible it was held this year in the Conference Centre in Croke Park in Dublin. The Conference continues to attract a very large number of participants. Importantly, the satisfaction of participants with the Conference continues to grow, with over 70% considering it be either excellent or very good.

The SIF was established by Government to provide an opportunity for a wide range of voluntary groups and individuals at local level:

- To present their views and experiences on key policies and implementation issues relating to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS);
- To identify barriers and constraints to progress and to suggest how best these may be tackled; and
- To provide proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

This year, the main themes discussed at the workshops were childhood care and development, facilitating employment participation for vulnerable groups, integrated services for older people and the provision of housing and accommodation.

In addition, the EU Peer Review Group, comprising representatives from the Member States and the European Commission, who came to observe the proceedings in 2007, provided a number of very useful suggestions with regard to the organisation of the Conference, strengthening the links between the SIF, the social partners and other policy-makers, and providing participants with clear information as to what actions have been taken on foot of the Conference proceedings. We have taken steps to put all of these suggestions into effect and we are confident that these actions will serve to enhance the proceedings further in the future.

Against the background of the recent very rapid deterioration in the public finances, the timing of the Conference was opportune, enabling participants not just to put forward their views and proposals with regard to the NAPS but to strongly emphasise to senior officials from Government Departments and State Agencies the importance of protecting the existing services and provisions for disadvantaged groups in Irish society, and to stress the importance of officials working closely with participants in trying to resolve these issues.

This Conference Report will now be submitted to all Government Ministers and the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration, which is chaired by the Taoiseach. It will also go to the other institutions that support the NAPS, including the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, the Office for Social Inclusion, and Social Inclusion Units in Government Departments and Local Authorities. It will be circulated to all Members of the Oireachtas, the European Commission and our own NESF members. And, of course, it will be sent to all those who participated in the Conference.

Finally, I wish to convey my deep appreciation to all those who participated in the Conference. A special thanks to those who assisted in running of the Workshops – the chairpersons, rapporteurs and those who made specialist presentations. I also want to thank the staff in the NESF Secretariat, the Office for Social Inclusion, the Combat Poverty Agency and the European Anti-Poverty Network who worked hard to make this Conference the success it was. I would also like to thank Ms. Carmel Corrigan and Mr. Mel Cousins for their help in preparing this Report.



Dr Maureen Gaffney

Chairperson

Social Inclusion Forum

National Economic and Social Forum



Introduction and Executive Summary

- 1.1 ● The Social Inclusion Forum is part of the institutional structures put in place by the Government to support the development and implementation of the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) and the Social Inclusion Chapter of the National Development Plan (NDP). The current NAPinclusion covers the period 2007–2016, in line with the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. The social inclusion section of the National Reports for the EU on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion sets priorities every two years for making progress on both the NAPinclusion and the NDP.
- 1.2 ● The Social Inclusion Forum is convened annually by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in collaboration with the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI). The 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 annual Social Inclusion Forum is to provide organisations and individuals including those that are not involved in the social partnership process with the opportunity to:
 - Input their views on key policies and implementation issues;
 - Identify barriers and constraints to progress and how best these can be tackled; and
 - Provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.
- 1.4 ● This report provides a summary account of the fifth meeting of the Forum, which took place on 26th November 2008 in the Croke Park Conference Centre, in Dublin. It includes a summary of the papers that were presented by guest speakers at the Plenary Sessions, as well as a summary of the discussions that took place in four parallel Workshops and in Roundtable discussions. 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 ● This report will be formally submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration which is chaired by the Taoiseach.

1.6 ● The structure of the report is as follows:

Section II provides an overview and an analysis of the main themes and policy issues raised at the meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum. It sets out briefly the policy context in which the Forum took place. It also looks at the views of the Forum as to what is working well in addressing social inclusion in Ireland and also at its views on barriers and constraints. It then outlines the key issues discussed in the thematic workshops. Finally, it discusses the policy implications of the issues raised by this Forum.

Section III provides a summary of presentations made at the morning Plenary Session. **Ms. Mary Hanafin, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs** provided the opening address. In the light of changing economic circumstances, the Minister stressed that our focus must remain on the people who are the most vulnerable and these must be at the heart of policies and services. The Minister highlighted the importance of talking to those affected by policies and services, the role of various Government Ministers and Departments in promoting and securing social inclusion, and the need to bring this together with the knowledge and experience of community and voluntary organisations to secure the best results for vulnerable people and groups.

Minister Hanafin stated that the integration of the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) into a new division of the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) would strengthen and enhance the unified approach needed to tackle social inclusion issues. Priority policy issues are identified in the recent National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010. These include child poverty, access to quality work and learning opportunities, access to quality services for homeless people and the integration of migrant populations. The Minister reiterated that the Government is committed despite changes to the economic climate to achieving the targets in relation to the elimination of poverty.

Ms. Mary Doyle, Assistant Secretary, Department of An Taoiseach, provided the second input of the morning Plenary. In the context of more straitened economic circumstances, Ms. Doyle stressed that it was important to remember and safeguard the progress that had been made over the past 10 to 15 years. She highlighted the improved and strengthened infrastructure and the rich policy-making framework that have been developed. In facing the current global crisis, Ms. Doyle stressed the importance of dialogue and working together in order to align our expectations in accordance with resources and make prompt decisions about our priorities. In making these decisions we need to re-examine the goals we have set ourselves in policies and in the national agreement, *Towards 2016*, and consider how we can now achieve them.

The third input at the morning Plenary was provided by **Mr. Gerry Mangan, Director, Office for Social Inclusion**. Mr. Mangan said that, although difficult to measure for a number of reasons, the Social Inclusion Forum has influenced policy and he highlighted a number of areas in which the deliberations of the Forum have had an impact. These include addressing child poverty through educational provision, the removal of barriers to labour market participation for a number of groups and the provision of childcare as a labour market mobilisation support, the development of Home Care Packages and the All Ireland Free Travel Allowance for older people. Mr. Mangan informed participants that a comprehensive report on progress under the NAPinclusion and the social inclusion chapter of the National Development Plan is due in the first quarter of 2009.

- 1.7 ● Section IV provides an account of the morning's Roundtable discussions. Participants were asked to discuss three issues in these Roundtables. These were (i) what works well to promote social inclusion; (ii) barriers and constraints to progress; and (iii) suggestions on policy proposals for the future. As in previous years a very wide range of issues were raised in these discussions and Section IV attempts to collate these in a detailed and accessible manner. This Section also provides a summary of a question and answer session at the morning Plenary Session.
- 1.8 ● Section V provides a summary of the discussions that took place in four parallel workshops. Each workshop addressed issues in papers drafted by the Office for Social Inclusion relating to a specific target group and/or theme. Box A below provides a summary of the priority issues as selected by participants at the workshops and how these could be addressed.
- 1.9 ● Section V provides a summary of the final Plenary, including a presentation by **Ms. Esther Lynch, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)**. She agreed that securing progress already made would be difficult but that we must also ask that if securing high quality services was not possible in the boom years, what chance do we have of developing them now? She identified a number of characteristics of the new unemployed and some of the problems facing them, most specifically high mortgages and debt.

Mr. Gerry Mangan, OSI also responded to a number of the issues highlighted throughout the day and in the feedback from the workshops. He emphasised the positive changes that have come about since the 1980s. These include the development of the social partnership process and the development and improvement of many services. Mr Mangan reiterated the importance of access to integrated services. He concluded by saying that he is confident that integration of the Combat Poverty Agency and the OSI within the Department will result in the new Division being in a position to provide more effective support to the development, implementation and monitoring of the NAPinclusion process and to more effective consultation and collaboration with stakeholders, especially the Community and Voluntary sector.

Box A

Suggestions from the Workshops on the Way Forward – Key Issues to be Addressed

Priorities for Childhood Care and Development

- Ensure access to, and flexibility of, childcare provision.
- Emphasise the social development of children in early years provision and throughout the education system, and with a balancing between citizen's rights and responsibilities.
- Support the engagement of fathers.
- Strengthen the links between the local and national levels.

Facilitating Employment Participation for those Vulnerable to Exclusion from the Labour Market

- Address discrimination among employers and service providers towards disadvantaged groups.
- Ensure appropriate progression pathways are available.
- Focus measures and services on those who are most distant from the labour market.
- Ensure co-ordination between policies, organisations and incentives at the local and national level.

Integrated Services for Older People

- Ensure equal and easy access to services through the provision of information contact points staffed by trained personnel.
- Put adequately and appropriately staffed Primary Care Teams in place, and working in different ways such as developing mobile services and using all available public buildings in the community.
- Maintain and increase Home Care Packages and introduce standards for these.
- Ensure an appropriate balance between public and private care and that no one falls below an established minimum level of care, with the need to consider increased taxation for this purpose.
- Improve the integration of hospital and community care.

Provision of Housing and Accommodation

- Improve the quality of housing and accommodation for Asylum Seekers.
- Consider ways of using the increasing number of vacant private and public dwellings in the context of growing housing lists and homelessness.
- Develop linkages between national policies and local implementation.
- Provide accessible information on housing schemes and developing the concept of 'one-stop shops'.



MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS, MS MARY HANAFIN, T.D.



Key Themes and Policy Issues Raised

Context

- 2.1 ● The 2008 Social Inclusion Forum took place in a greatly changed economic situation, a fact commented on by speakers and participants alike. Unemployment had risen very dramatically both in terms of numbers claiming unemployment payments (up over 100,000 from November 2007) and as a percentage of the labour force. While unemployment has been under 5% for the past years, by November 2008 it had risen to 7.8% and is predicted to rise to 10% in 2009.

Economic growth has stopped and Ireland is officially in a recession (with negative growth for two quarters). As a result, tax revenues have slowed significantly. Tax income (to November 2008) was €5.8 billion lower than in the same period of 2007. The combination of falling tax revenues and increased pressure on public expenditure due to rising unemployment have all led to significant fiscal constraints.

These trends are predicted to continue in 2009 and possibly into 2010. However, many participants made the point that Ireland as an economy and society has made very significant developments over the last 10–15 years and is now in a much better position to respond to the current economic downturn than it was, for example, during the very high unemployment of the 1980s.

There have also been significant changes in family structures in recent years. A recent report¹ shows that marriage is no longer the prime gateway to family formation that it once was. Conversely there has been a rise in cohabitation so that, in 2006, cohabiting couples made up 12% of all couples and one-third of those with children. The incidence of divorce has risen, although the divorce rate in Ireland today is low by international standards.

Over the past ten years there has been a large increase in the formation of new families, as indicated by a rise of 57% in first births between 1994 and 2006. The report suggests that over the past two decades buoyancy in job opportunities for women has had a strong positive effect on birth rates. There has been a decline in large families, and children in Ireland are now much more likely to grow up in households with only one or two children.

¹ T. Fahey and C.A. Field, *Families in Ireland: An analysis of patterns and trends*, 2008.

There has also been a steady increase in the numbers of children living in lone parent families (18% of children aged under 15 in 2006 based on Census data).

The report also found that the caring functions of families remain strong. Relatives are the main source of childcare for the children of working mothers and family members provide significant unpaid care to those with disabilities.

Views of the Forum

- 2.2 ● An important focus of the Social Inclusion Forum – before turning to specific policy areas – was to identify what is working well in policy and implementation and also to identify barriers and constraints.

What is working well

First, it is clear that Ireland now has well developed strategies in many policy areas such as the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion), and the National Disability Strategy. In addition, social inclusion issues are strongly represented in the National Development Plan (NDP). The overall poverty goal in the NAPinclusion is to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2 per cent and 4 per cent by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016. The Plan also identifies 12 high level strategic goals in key priority areas (which are based on the life-cycle perspective), in order to mobilise resources to address long-standing and serious social deficits. These goals give overall direction to policy and its implementation.

The high level goals, which also form part of the NDP, are accompanied by over 150 detailed targets and actions. Further strategies are currently under development, for example, in relation to carers.

Second, a recurrent theme at the Social Inclusion Forum was the benefit of engagement and integration in the development and delivery of policies to address social inclusion. Participants highlighted the importance of engaging with those experiencing social inclusion and with community and voluntary organisations in both the development of policies and the delivery of those policies on the ground. Participants also highlighted the benefits through the proper integration of services.

Third, the existence of strong institutions in the areas of social inclusion was highlighted. This runs all the way from local partnerships to the existence of a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration. The Social Inclusion Forum itself plays a very important role as a forum for civic dialogue.

² See National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection And Social Inclusion: 2008–2010, 2008.

The progress which has been made was confirmed by the 2007 results from the CSO Survey of Living and Income Conditions in Ireland (SILC) published just after the meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum.³ This showed that the consistent poverty rate fell from 6.5% in 2006 to 5.1% in 2007, in line with the NAPinclusion target to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty. The consistent poverty rate for children also fell from 10.3% in 2006 to 7.4% in 2007. Members of lone parent households, although still having a high level of consistent poverty, showed a sharp fall in their poverty rate from 33.9% in 2006 to 20.1% in 2007.

The importance of employment in addressing poverty was shown by the fact that unemployed people had high consistent poverty rates (17.5%), compared with a rate of just 1.3% among people who were at work. Similarly, those living in households where no person was working had a high consistent poverty rate (16.3%), while consistent poverty rates were 4% for those living in households where at least one person was at work.

Barriers and constraints

The fiscal constraints which impose limits on public spending in coming years received considerable attention. However, participants also highlighted the fact that issues concerning resources related not only to the amount of funding available but also to flexibility in relation to the use of funding, the need for medium-term security in the provision of funds, and the matching of funding to human resources.

A further issue – following on from the importance attached to engagement and integration – involved examples where it was felt that there is currently a lack of integrated policy and/or delivery of services (childcare and transport were given as examples) and insufficient engagement with those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Gaps between the national and local levels were also highlighted. In particular, a disjunction between policy and implementation was identified. This could operate in both directions. Policies developed at national level may not be fully implemented at local level. It also can happen that issues identified (or good practices developed) at local level may not inform policy at national level or its implementation.

There was a clear message from the Forum that continuing and improving action in the fight against social inclusion was not only about resources – important though this is – but also about (i) addressing the barriers which lead to less than optimal integration of services (both between different agencies, between the State and the community and voluntary sector, and between the national and local levels) and (ii) ensuring that participation and engagement of all concerned is continued and strengthened at all levels.

³ CSO, *Survey of Living and Income Conditions in Ireland 2007, 2008*.

Key Themes

- 2.3 ● Four key themes were identified at the Forum and discussed in detail at workshops. Each workshop identified a number of key points in its policy area.⁴

Childhood care and development

The first key issue was the importance of access to childcare services across a range of areas including early years education. This highlighted issues such as limited choice and limited flexibility in terms of how childcare services are provided and the need for flexibility in the operation of the community childcare subvention scheme.

The second issue was the importance of the social development of children and the need for education in both rights and responsibilities.

The third point was the importance of the engagement of fathers. It was suggested that in many communities there seems to be an absence of fathers or an absence of responsibility and accountability.

Finally, the importance of national and local linkages between policy and implementation was emphasised.

Employment participation for those vulnerable to exclusion

The first issue identified was the problem of discrimination and the need to address discrimination in order to support people in employment.

Second, the importance of progression was highlighted, so that people can develop and build up their skills and capacities and move into work or community engagement where they are making a positive contribution to society.⁵

Third was the need to focus on people who are most excluded and furthest from the labour market such as people who are long-term unemployed, or who have very low skills, members of the Traveller community, migrants, and people with disabilities.⁶

Finally, this workshop also emphasised the need for coordination between policies, between organisations and between incentive measures.

Integrated services for older people

First, the workshop highlighted issues concerning access to services. The point was made that it can be difficult to access services because there is no one point of contact and there are different levels of services geographically.

⁴ Further detail on discussion at the workshops and the points raised is set out in Section V of the main report.

⁵ Goal 5 of the NAPinclusion is to 'Introduce an active case management approach that will support those on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment.'

⁶ Goal 9 of the NAPinclusion is to 'Increase the employment of people with disabilities who do not have a difficulty in retaining a job. The longer term target is to raise the employment rate of people with disabilities from 37% to 45% by 2016 as measured by the Quarterly National Household Survey. The overall participation rate in education, training and employment will be increased to 50% by 2016.'

The second issue raised was that there should be an acceptable level of care below which no citizen should fall (even if this requires additional taxation to fund it).⁷

The final point again concerned integration, in this case between hospital and community emphasising the importance of good communication.

Housing and accommodation

The first issue concerned accommodation for asylum seekers. The point was strongly made that the quality of accommodation is currently very poor and can impact on a person's health.

Second, the number of vacant properties was highlighted despite the long housing waiting lists.

The third point again raised the importance of linking the national and local level in terms of housing provision.

A final point was the need for greater information on housing schemes particularly at the local level and the idea of the 'one stop shop' for the provision of information.

Policy Implications

- 2.4 ● Arising from the discussion both in the Plenary Sessions of the Forum and in the workshops, this section outlines a number of key policy implications.

General approach

First, one point which came through very strongly from all those engaged in the Forum was the need to continue with the social partnership approach. This has served us well both in previous times of economic downturn and, more recently, during the economic boom. The point was made by a number of speakers that there is strength through unity (or as one speaker put it ní neart go cur le chéile). A particular benefit has been the importance of consultation, especially through the Social Inclusion Forum, for obtaining feedback on the effectiveness of policy and its implementation from the perspectives of people experiencing poverty and those who work with and support them.

Secondly, there was widespread agreement about the importance of safeguarding the progress which has been achieved in the last decade. While participants recognised the changed economic and fiscal climate, there was a very general feeling that it will be important not to allow the progress which has been achieved to be eroded, so as to provide a strong basis for future developments.

⁷ Goal 7 of the NAPInclusion is to 'Continue to increase investment in community care services for older people, including home care packages and enhanced day care services to support them to live independently in the community for as long as possible.'

However, recognising the economic and fiscal constraints which now exist (and which seem likely to continue in the short to medium-term ahead), there was a recognition of the need to prioritise what we want to achieve in the coming years and to reprioritise, i.e. examining existing services, in order to ensure that we are achieving the best outcomes from the resources being invested.

In that context, a number of participants highlighted the importance of learning from our experiences in the 1980s and, for example, to be prepared to invest in policies that work in terms of getting people into employment or improving educational and skill levels to make Ireland more competitive.

Finally, there was a general recognition of the importance of rights (including anti-discrimination measures) and standards of quality service. Given Ireland's more diverse society, measures to ensure equal opportunities for all can play a vitally important role from both an economic and social perspective. In terms of public services provision, it was clear from the workshops that there are still significant gaps or variations in access to services and, in this context, the establishment of a right to a service and/or of quality standards for the provision of services can play an important role in ensuring a more comprehensive and better service.

Key issues for policy development

Drawing on the discussion in the workshops, this section outlines some of the key policy measures which might be adopted to address the challenges identified by participants. A number of examples are given of policy approaches in the different areas discussed at the Forum. These are not intended to be exhaustive and further details of the discussion will be found in the main report.

Importance of preventative and proactive policies

One of the themes running through the Forum and the issues identified in the workshops was the importance of preventative and proactive policies. Rather than waiting until something goes wrong, we should aim to put in place policy measures to reduce the risk that social exclusion will occur. In the area of childcare, for example, research has highlighted the importance of early childhood education and the economic return which can be achieved from investment in this area in terms of better educated children⁸.

A further point here was the importance of the context in which children grow up for their future participation in society. Thus, an important part of education should involve instilling children with the notion of rights and responsibilities as part of citizenship education. Supporting fathers in engaging with their children can also play an important role in the socialisation of children and in ensuring the best outcomes for future generations.

⁸ The NESF Report No 31 (2005) on *Early Childhood Care and Education* presented a cost-benefit analysis showing that there was a return of €7 for every € invested in childhood care and development.

The theme of prevention and a proactive approach can also be seen in relation to the labour market. In particular, it will be very important to have a targeted system of early engagement with people who become unemployed and are at risk of long-term unemployment. It will also be important to have an ongoing case management of people who are out of work (including lone parents and people with disabilities).⁹

The priority of our welfare system should not be simply about paying people while they are unemployed but rather about getting them back into employment and supporting them (both financially and in terms of necessary training and supports) in that process. Finally, it will be important to ensure ongoing support for vulnerable people who have moved into employment (e.g. people with disabilities) to improve retention and progression.

Prioritisation of resources

A second key theme running through the discussion was the importance of the prioritisation and reprioritisation of resources. A very good example was given in the housing area where the point was made that despite long waiting lists for housing, there are many vacant houses in both the public and private sectors. This can arise from inefficiencies in transfer of tenancies but also from the difficulties in ensuring the full use of private sector accommodation. It will be important that measures are put in place to ensure that vacant housing in both the public and private sector is fully utilised.

In the case of labour market policies, prioritisation will also be important. It is often neither productive nor necessary to target interventions on people who will be able to find work on their own. However, existing methods of targeting resources (such as durations on welfare payments) are, at best, a crude measure of need. It will be important to be able to target interventions on those most excluded (or at risk of becoming excluded), including members of the vulnerable groups mentioned above.

Improved co-ordination

A recurrent theme through the Forum was the need for better co-ordination and integration of policies and implementation. This can arise at a number of levels.

Firstly, between the national and local levels – ensuring that lessons learnt at local level are integrated into national policy but also ensuring that national policies are implemented at local level. While the benefits of such integration are clear, there are a range of practical difficulties to their achievement (such as structures of accountability, and need for high levels of trust and co-operation). It may be important for Government to look at good practice in this area – both in Ireland and internationally – and to put in place further practical measures to ensure the development of such integration in practice.

⁹ See Goal 5 of the NAPinclusion.

Secondly, there is a need for better integration between services (interagency working) e.g. better integration between hospital and community care. Again while the benefits of such an approach are obvious there are also a range of difficulties in the way of achieving such integration in practice (including work practices, funding structures). Again, it may be important for the relevant agencies to take the lead in developing greater integration by looking at examples of good practice and by putting in place concrete measures to support the development of integrated services.

Participation-engagement

Finally, the importance of participation and the engagement of both people affected by social exclusion and community and voluntary organisations was a key theme at the Forum. It will be important to ensure that the existing mechanisms to support participation and engagement are further developed to build consensus and to ensure that we can respond to the new challenges which we are now facing.

At a national level, there was recognition of the value and potential of existing structures such as the social partnership process and the Social Inclusion Forum itself. However, participation and engagement need to be embedded in all aspects of the development and delivery of policies.

Practical examples of how this can be achieved include building the participation of service users into the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, and examining the composition of the local partnership boards to ensure these better reflect the concerns of those experiencing social exclusion.



L-R: MS MARY DOYLE, ASSISTANT SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF THE TAOISEACH.
MR SEÁN ÓHÉIGEARTAIGH, DIRECTOR, NESF. DR MAUREEN GAFFNEY, CHAIRPERSON, NESF.
MS MARY HANAFIN T.D., MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AND FAMILY AFFAIRS.
MR GERRY MANGAN, DIRECTOR, OFFICE FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION



Opening Presentations

- 3.1 ● The Forum was opened by its Chair **Dr. Maureen Gaffney**, who is also the Chair of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF). She welcomed everyone to the Forum, and particularly those who had travelled considerable distances from around the country. She paid tribute to the work that many participants are doing at local level with marginalised groups. This experience and knowledge of how policies and programmes are implemented on the ground, as well as knowledge of how issues and problems are developing, are critical inputs to the work of the Forum. This year's Forum comes at a time of unprecedented economic change and turmoil, which is reflected in the huge interest in the labour market workshop at the Forum. Securing the interests of the most marginalised in our society in these difficult times is extremely important.
- 3.2 ● Dr. Gaffney stated that the Forum is a key component of the institutional framework. It provides a mechanism whereby participants can provide policy-makers and bodies with invaluable information that allows for a more comprehensive review of Ireland's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion). To further the learning generated from the Forum, its proceedings will be written up as a conference report. This Report will be formally submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration which is chaired by the Taoiseach, and circulated also to all members of the Oireachtas, to the Senior Officials Group, the Social Inclusion Units in all Government Departments and State Agencies, and to all Forum participants.
- 3.3 ● Dr. Gaffney then introduced the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Ms. Mary Hanafin T.D.
- 3.4 ● **Minister Hanafin, T.D.** opened her address by commenting on the broad representativeness of the Forum participants, having met with people from the Cameroon, Kerry, Cork and Dublin already that morning. She paid tribute to the work done at preparatory meetings and the contribution these made to policy development. She assured participants that they can rightly take a good deal of credit for progress over the past number of years in areas such as education, health, social inclusion and partnership approaches.

- 3.5 ● The Minister stressed that such progress had taken place in a positive economic climate that was the case up to now. Unfortunately this has changed very rapidly, not only in Ireland but in many countries around the world. Much of the change we are experiencing is being propelled by international factors and this makes our own circumstances all the more difficult to manage. However, our focus must remain on the main issues, which are trying to ensure that the people who are the most vulnerable and most at risk are those who get the most care and attention. This remains a key Government policy. This policy is progressed through a number of mechanisms and structures, three of which the Minister would participate in on the day of the Forum. The first is the Social Inclusion Forum itself, the second is the Dáil in which the Social Welfare Bill was to be debated, with the third being the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration which would meet in the afternoon.
- 3.6 ● Minister Hanafin reiterated the key role of community and voluntary organisations, officials and volunteers in the delivery of services and in the provision of support to individuals, families and groups. These also play a key role in the generation of research, informing policy-making and progressing the social inclusion agenda. The importance of the voice and experience of people who themselves experience poverty and exclusion should not be underestimated and is a valuable part of the policy process.
- 3.7 ● The Minister also drew on her previous experience as Minister for Children and as Minister for Education and Science, as well as her teaching and volunteer experience, to highlight a number of issues. These included the importance of talking to those affected by policies and services, the role of various Government Ministers and Departments in promoting and securing social inclusion, and the need to bring this together with the knowledge and experience of community and voluntary organisations. This will secure the best results for vulnerable people and groups.
- 3.8 ● The difficult times we face require a more integrated approach to social inclusion. In this respect, Minister Hanafin acknowledged the high calibre of the staff and previous work of both the Combat Poverty Agency and the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI), and welcomed the forthcoming integration of these two bodies under the auspices of her Department. This will ensure that the advice, research, awareness training and policy work undertaken by them will provide a strengthened input into policy-making in the area of social inclusion. This will be of particular significance in preparing for the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, which will take place in 2010. In preparing for this, we need to look not only at what we have achieved to date but also at our priorities for the future. This will undoubtedly be a subject for discussion at future Social Inclusion Fora.

- 3.9 ● In addressing current priorities, the Minister drew attention to the recent National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010. In this, combating child poverty is set out as the first priority, as well as access to quality work and learning opportunities for lone parents and people with disabilities in particular. Providing access to quality services for homeless people and the integration of migrant populations are also identified as priorities. Pilot projects in many of these areas are operating in communities around the country and are already bringing about positive change and progress.
- 3.10 ● Minister Hanafin said that a number of Forum participants had asked her that morning why the Government would not commit themselves to the elimination of poverty in Ireland by 2010. She stated that this was because this is an unrealistic target. However, and despite difficult economic circumstances, the Government remains committed to eliminating consistent poverty by 2016 and to substantially reduce it by 2012. The Social Inclusion Forum will help to ensure that Government policies reflect changing circumstances, identify priorities and maintain a focus on the realistic targets set.
- 3.11 ● In conclusion, the Minister thanked all those involved in organising and running the Forum, and the participants for their input and interest.
- 3.12 ● **Ms. Mary Doyle, Assistant Secretary, Department of An Taoiseach,** provided the second input at the morning Plenary Session. She welcomed the opportunity to speak at the Social Inclusion Forum and in particular the opportunity it provided for a dialogue between various sectors, organisations and people about priorities and how to move forward in more straitened economic circumstances.
- 3.13 ● In these changing circumstances, it is important that we do not lose sight of the progress we have made in the past 10 to 15 years, and the role of the social partnership process in achieving this. Ms. Doyle highlighted the improved and strengthened infrastructure in areas such as health, education and social welfare. In addition, we have a rich policy-making framework including the NAPinclusion, the National Development Plan, the National Agreements and other policy documents. While gaps remain and some people are critical at the rate of progress, we should not lose sight of the fact that much has been achieved that will help us in facing current difficulties. One key area is to improve the connection between the national and the local level.
- 3.14 ● In facing the current global crisis, Ms. Doyle stressed that our tradition of talking to each other and working together to find solutions is one of our greatest strengths. This has been evident in the Social Inclusion Forum itself, in the work of the NESF and in valuable documents such as the National Economic and Social Council's (NESCC) report on the developmental welfare state. We are now facing a time when expectations will exceed what can be delivered and maintaining communication between sectors and stakeholders will be of key importance. However, history has taught us that we must not delay in making the hard decisions that are required in difficult economic times.

- 3.15 ● In finding our way forward, we all need to accept that we face difficult policy choices and need to prioritise carefully. Equally, we need to realign our expectations in line with what we can deliver and achieve with our resources. Even before the current global economic crisis, pressure had begun to build on our public finances. Many of the very desirable programmes and policies we had put in place were also proving to be very expensive and our capacity to fund them in the long-term was being questioned.
- 3.16 ● Therefore difficult choices were, and are going to have to be made and an institutional structure put in place to implement them. In the short-term, even legitimate expectations and demands will not always be met as the resources do not exist. This will be difficult for many to come to terms with due to the very long period of economic expansion we have experienced, coupled with the very rapid nature of the recent economic downturn.
- 3.17 ● Ms. Doyle also suggested that we need to consider the goals we have set ourselves in our principal policy documents and the vision of Ireland they espouse. These were developed at a time when economic growth of between 4.0 and 4.4 percent over the period 2006 to 2013 was assumed. We now know that these assumptions no longer hold. In this context, where there is a need to reiterate the strong link between economic and social development, we need to ask a number of questions about what we want as a country. Are the pathways, the objectives and the vision for Ireland that people signed up to in the social partnership agreement still what we want for the country? This is an issue that the social partners have discussed recently and have agreed that, while the vision remains valid and that we are going in the right direction, we need to recognise the obstacles that face us now. If we are to continue on the lines set down in the National Agreement, *Towards 2016*, Ms. Doyle argued that we need to address two issues. First, we need to safeguard the advances that have been made over the past 10 to 15 years and, second, we must think carefully about the policy choices that we will make regarding expenditure in the light of our constrained resources.
- 3.18 ● In the current economic climate, value for money and maximising the benefits from expenditure will become essential. One way this can be achieved is to better integrate services to secure better outputs and outcomes. Much work has already been done in this area and forthcoming work by the NESF on children and older people will further contribute to this. Achieving better integration of services requires a commitment from all stakeholders to being flexible, being open to work in different ways, and to think differently about what good outcomes are and how we can achieve them. It also requires that we strengthen dialogue within Government, across Government Departments and between national and local actors.

- 3.19 ● In looking at where we go from here, Ms. Doyle reiterated the importance of the strong foundation we have built in terms of infrastructure and policy structures. The latter include Cabinet Committees, social partnership structures, the NESF, the Social Inclusion Forum itself and a number of groups, including the Housing Forum and the Disability Stakeholders Group. In addition to existing policy structures, it is notable that these will be added to by the creation of a high level group on the labour market as a response to the current rise in unemployment and increasing job losses. She also highlighted the recent review of *Towards 2016* and the transitional agreement. This essentially reiterates the social partners' commitment to *Towards 2016* and identifies a small number of areas they wish to focus on. These include the labour market, manufacturing, regional policy, education and skills, and health. The Social Inclusion Forum provides an opportunity to feed into these discussions by identifying and clearly communicating the key issues that people are facing on the ground.
- 3.20 ● The third input at the morning Plenary was provided by **Mr. Gerry Mangan, Director, Office for Social Inclusion**. In opening his presentation, Mr. Mangan referred to the diversity of the participants at the Forum in terms of their interests, their experience and their geographic spread. The discussions and deliberations of this diverse range of people would, as in previous years, be recorded in a report, which represents a major outcome of the Forum. This conference report is designed to ensure that the experiences, insights, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum are fed into the policy-making process and are available to all interests.
- 3.21 ● In addition, this year the NESF and the OSI have commissioned an analytical study of the Forum's deliberations that will clearly identify the main views of the participants, the key action and resources required, and the recommendations for dealing with policy implementation. This type of analytic material, which will be produced in future years, should make it easier to track trends and progress in the years ahead. The first of these is incorporated in Section II of this report.
- 3.22 ● Feedback shows that many Forum participants want to know if the Forum has any real impact on policy and its implementation. Mr. Mangan stated that, from his personal experience, the answer to this question is yes. However, it can be hard to measure that impact for a number of reasons. For example, many other interests may call for a change of policy to which the Forum may add its considerable weight. If the changes are made, it can then be hard to know how much of this was due to the Forum or to the other interests, or if the Forum's intervention was the decisive one.

- 3.23 ● Mr. Mangan also stated that there are a number of reasons why recommendations made at the Forum are not always adopted. A particular course of action may be recommended to deal with a specific challenge, but in taking a much broader view of all the options available and factors operating, the Government may decide that a different solution is more feasible and appropriate. This may occur even where full account is taken of the views expressed at the Forum.
- 3.24 ● Another factor to consider is that of time scale. Where the Forum often calls for immediate policy change and implementation, Governments are generally reluctant to immediately embrace the untried and untested, particularly as there are always many other competing priorities.
- 3.25 ● Finally on this theme, Mr. Mangan stated that it is important to recognise that the views of the Forum do not only result in direct action. They also serve to prevent measures of a more negative nature being taken or at least soften what may otherwise have been harsher measures.
- 3.26 ● To provide an outline of the main initiatives taken in response to recommendations made at the Forum would require an additional day. To produce a document detailing them would overlap considerably with a comprehensive social inclusion report due out in the first quarter of 2009 on progress under the NAPinclusion and the social inclusion chapter of the National Development Plan. In light of this, Mr. Mangan provided a few brief examples of some of the main developments, picked at random for illustrative purposes, which responded to recommendations made at the Social Inclusion Forum.
- 3.27 ● Child poverty has been a major priority for Forum participants. Early education has been identified as a key factor in reducing child poverty and a number of recommendations had arisen in this regard. Significant progress is being made in all of these. One example is the literacy and numeracy programmes that are currently being extended to all urban band primary schools under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme. The aim is to have all of these programmes in place by 2010.
- 3.28 ● With regard to people of working age, the main thrust of recommendations has been the removal of barriers to taking up employment and developing flexible training and education options. A social and economic participation programme is being developed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) as part of a wider mobilisation agenda. This approach involves treating all people of working age in receipt of income maintenance in a similar way and facilitating progression to employment. A high level group, which includes representatives of all relevant Departments and agencies, has been convened to drive the process forward. Related to labour market mobilisation, lack of childcare has been repeatedly highlighted at the Forum as a major barrier to employment. Grants approved in 2007 under the programme for childcare are expected to lead to the creation of almost 24,000 new childcare places, as well as supporting nearly 6,000 existing places.

- 3.29 ● In the case of older people, a major concern of the Forum participants relates to the development of services to support those in need of care but who wish to remain at home. Needs-based home care packages are an important element of the support provided and consist of a mixture of grants, contracted care services, therapeutic input and equipment and other such community services. By the end of 2007, care packages benefiting an estimated 11,500 older people were introduced. €120 million has been invested in these since 2006. A steering group, including representatives of the Department of Health and Children and the HSE is currently evaluating the packages and is expected to report in 2009.
- 3.30 ● In 2007/2008 approximately 12 million home help hours were provided, benefitting nearly 55,000 people. Also relating to older people, the rural transport programme which is heavily financed under the National Development Plan and through the free travel scheme administered by the DSFA is a critical provision. A recent significant development has been the introduction of the All Ireland Free Travel Scheme for senior residents in all parts of the island. This enables senior citizens in both parts of the island to travel free of charge on all bus and rail services in any part of the country. The measure now benefits over 40,000 older people resident in the State.
- 3.31 ● Mr. Mangan concluded by emphasising that these examples only provide a flavour of the content of the aforementioned more comprehensive report due in the first quarter of 2009. This report will help participants to monitor progress and frame recommendations for priority actions in the future. This approach will help to bring the Forum even more directly and visibly into the policy-making and policy monitoring processes.

IV

Morning Plenary and Roundtable Discussions

Plenary Sessions

- 4.1 ● Following these inputs, questions and comments were invited from the participants. The first issue raised referred to the use of language and how we need to reconsider some key terms. These include labour market terms such as ‘mobilisation’ and ‘activation’, which can have threatening and negative connotations for groups such as people with disabilities and lone parents. They suggest or can be interpreted as an imposed requirement to work, as opposed to the provision of access to services that allow vulnerable people to prepare for and take up appropriate training and employment opportunities. Further terms that should be reconsidered are ‘pillars’ and ‘stakeholders’, particularly their use in the context of social partnership.

It was suggested that referring to the community and voluntary sector as ‘the fourth pillar’ in social partnership was misleading as it suggested that the groups contained therein are homogenous and have equal status to the other pillars, neither of which is accurate. The use of the term ‘stakeholders’ also suggests such equality and it was suggested that the NESF look at the stakeholder model as developed by the Judge Institute in Cambridge, as this provides for equal status among all stakeholders.

Second, a representative of People With Disabilities Ireland (PWDI) thanked Ms. Doyle for her positive comments on the Disability Stakeholders Group and on the need to safeguard the advances made in relation in the disability sector. As a recent report from Europe indicated that one in three people with a disability are unemployed, this is an issue that is going to be brought to the social partnership table again and again over the coming years.

Third, in recognising the disjuncture that frequently occurs between national policy and local implementation, it was suggested that each of the Forum’s workshops should provide some suggestions or recommendations on how national policy and local activity can be more closely linked.

Fourth, the pivotal role of families as providers of care to children, people with disabilities, people with long-term illnesses and older people was raised. While the resourcefulness and resources of families should be recognised, there is also a need for practical resources and supports to be put in place to allow them fulfil their caring roles and other objectives relating to employment, education or other activities. Research in this area and a means of valorising the essential caring work of families is needed.

Responding to these issues, Ms. Doyle reiterated her view that we must safeguard achievements to date, including progress in relation to services for people with disabilities, but that difficult choices lie ahead in the context of reduced resources. However, part of the solution to sustaining services is for the State, which has a role in supporting families, to work in partnership with individuals and families who are the primary providers of care. In this regard the current evaluation of the home care packages for older people should produce lessons that are applicable across a range of services and sectors. This learning – e.g. through new ways of co-operating and better resources to those most in need – and its implementation can be enhanced by linking national policy more firmly with local level activity.

Mr. Mangan agreed that the use of certain terms can create difficulties in communication. However, terms such as ‘activation’ can in other respects aid communication in so far as they are used as a form of shorthand for a range of programmes and provisions. In addition, as these terms frequently originate in and are used across the EU, diverging from them may cause some difficulty in international communications. He expressed concern that they can be perceived as threatening or negative and acknowledged that there may be a need to develop more acceptable alternatives.

In regard to providing support for families, Mr. Mangan mentioned that the Government policy is constantly adapting to the relatively rapid changes in family structures and needs. The Forum is a particularly important source of suggestions and recommendations on how to move forward in this area.

Roundtable Discussions

- 4.2 ● The morning’s inputs at Plenary level were then followed by Roundtable discussions at which participants were asked to discuss the following three questions:
1. What works well to promote social inclusion?
 2. What are the barriers and constraints to progress?
 3. Has the group any suggestions on policy proposals for the future?

What Works Well

- 4.3 ● Participants expressed a number of viewpoints on what works well in promoting social inclusion. While some of these related to specific aspects of social inclusion, many were generic and could be applied to a variety of different areas. Key areas to emerge are summarised here.
- With regard to what works well to promote social inclusion a general sense from the Roundtables emerged. This essentially pointed to **the implementation of a coordinated and coherent approach to addressing social exclusion at both national and local level**. Therefore **integrated working between and across agencies** was identified as essential in promoting social inclusion. Interagency and cross Departmental strategies to tackle poverty and social exclusion, such as regeneration programmes in areas like Ballymun, and the Combat Poverty Agency-led community health programme are needed, as is co-ordination and cooperation between agencies in both the community and statutory sectors. This is important in preventing the duplication of services and in utilising resources with a view to maximising output for those experiencing social exclusion.
 - The **role and status of the Community and Voluntary Sector** also emerged as a key theme in promoting social inclusion. At policy level, the failure to recognise the community and voluntary sector as an equal stakeholder and partner in eliminating poverty and social exclusion has meant that funding to the sector has been piecemeal and ad hoc. This has a direct impact on long-term strategic planning. Specifically mentioned was the need to recognise and value the qualitative outputs from the community and voluntary sector rather than an almost exclusive focus on quantitative outputs and analysis in measuring progress in meeting social inclusion targets.
 - The need to **involve target groups and grass roots organisations** and to **maintain a focus on excluded people** in decision-making and strategic planning emerged as a common theme. Key positive factors included working with people on the ground, respecting their experience and where they 'are at', a commitment to the participation, empowerment and genuine consultation with people on the ground, and valuing the input of grassroots organisations. Building the capacity of and empowering people experiencing social exclusion to actively participate in finding solutions to issues in their communities and their lives was seen as a vital element in promoting social inclusion. For this to happen flexible, inclusive and adequate training and support at local level is essential. Such an approach should help to develop the community-based responses that participants also saw as essential in promoting social inclusion.
 - In achieving the best strategies to promote social inclusion, actors need to identify and operate from a **clear and agreed definition of social inclusion** to ensure coherence across strategies to tackle social exclusion and poverty.

- **The provision of various resources and services** also emerged as a common theme. As indicated above, adequate funding on a long-term basis for organisations working in the area of social inclusion, as well as accessible information, is important. Specific services required to promote social inclusion include advocacy services for the most vulnerable in society, and adequate child and elder care provision. A continued Government commitment to such services is a vital component of any strategy to enhance social inclusion.
- **Adequate social welfare payments** were recognised as playing an important role in enabling those marginalised in Irish society to become more active socially; however caution was advised to avoid dependency and dis-incentivising a return to the work force.
- Good **leadership** at all levels and political willingness to see positive social change and development were also identified as key factors in promoting social inclusion.
- **Opportunities to communicate, share information and network** at a number of levels are important in progressing social inclusion. At the local level the key role of the Citizens' Information Service and local community networks as a means of sharing information and resources was highlighted. However, it was felt that much of the learning generated in this way at local level does not filter through to the national level and therefore much learning is lost. However, the Social Inclusion Forum itself was identified as important in promoting social inclusion by enabling people to come together to discuss and identify issues of concern to those experiencing poverty and social exclusion.
- The **role of independent agencies** such as the Combat Poverty Agency was highlighted as important in providing a critical voice to the marginalised in Irish society. The status of the Combat Poverty Agency in national legislation was seen as central to this. Any future arrangements should ensure that its functions should remain and be further developed, and that it should promote and facilitate an independent perspective on policy.
- **Social partnership**, despite all the challenges, was seen to remain as a positive mechanism for promoting social inclusion.

Barriers and Constraints to Progress

- 4.4 ● Participants at the Roundtables went on to identify a series of barriers to social inclusion that must be addressed if commitments to implementing long-term strategies to eliminate poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion are to be realised.

- A number of diverse issues were raised in relation to **information**. These included misinformation emanating from Government offices and organisations, information overload that made services difficult to understand, information not being made freely available, lack of information on rights, services and facilities, inadequate information for people with literacy difficulties and those without access to information technology, lack of expertise and training in Government Departments on social exclusion and poverty and lack of knowledge of how to generate and distribute relevant information. Lack of information and expertise in Government Departments was also seen to undermine the expertise of those working on the ground.
- **Poor availability and accessibility of services** emerged as a multi-faceted barrier to inclusion. Opening hours of offices and organisations are often inadequate. Lack of affordable childcare services prevents women participating in the workforce and/or returning to education, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Inadequate and poor quality foreign language supports prevent many migrants from accessing appropriate services, while the lack of services for rural communities, the centralisation of services in local rural areas and the lack of rural transport services all act as barriers for rural dwellers. Finally, the lack of coordination between service providers often contributes to confusion about services and the ‘passing around’ of service users from one provider to another.
- Not surprisingly, **the current economic climate** also presented a number of barriers in achieving social inclusion. While there is a need to safeguard the progress we have made and to be aware of the financial restrictions we now face, there is also a need to have more creative solutions to problems. However, this may not be encouraged in the light of recent economic changes and there is a risk that inequalities will not be addressed. In addition, there may be a lack of political willingness to engage with social inclusion measures in the context of economic restraint.
- In line with these comments on the current economic climate, **funding and resources** were also identified as a barrier. Issues raised here include the following: lack of access to funding and information on where to apply for funds; short-term funding for innovative initiatives and pilot projects but with little mainstreaming to address long-term problems; onerous reporting requirements, and administration of very small budgets which is a large expense for local community-based organisations and one that is inadequately supported; cutbacks in the provision of funding for staff to implement policies and programmes aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion; and a fear within the community and voluntary sector of losing funds if they challenge Government policy or are seen to be politically active or involved in lobbying for change.

- The extent and nature of **bureaucracy** was identified as a key barrier in promoting social inclusion. The space for cooperation between local agencies and projects being limited by, for example, statutory staff not being given time to participate in local clusters and community platforms. Agencies who have budgets think the money is theirs to decide what to do with and people on the ground have no say in how this should be used for local outcomes, purposes, and priorities. There is a plethora of agencies and structures working in the social inclusion field. This coupled with a lack of flexibility in applications for various schemes and programmes causes confusion for people trying to access services.
- There are inadequate evaluation mechanisms within programmes and projects which, along with a lack of accountability, allow bureaucracy to flourish. The further growth in bureaucracy is seen in the subsuming of the Combat Poverty Agency into the Department of Social and Family Affairs, with a corresponding loss of an independent voice. Bureaucracy also contributes to the disconnection between services on the ground and national policy.
- Following on from this, and reflected in the factors seen to promote social inclusion identified above, **a lack of co-ordination and collaboration** arose as a key barrier. Again, participants saw this as having a number of dimensions including: lack of joined up approaches at national/Government level; lack of involvement at national level of key people working at local level; a plethora of agencies with little connection and cooperation; a lack of communication between Government Departments and agencies that leads to a duplication of services and inefficient use of resources (one participant gave an example of where one family experiencing difficulty had 17 agencies working with them).
- **Inadequate consultation processes** including inadequate and token processes, poor public consultation, failure to include those experiencing poverty in decision and policy-making, the use of consultation to keep people quiet by making them feel included, lack of engagement with target groups and the absence of change on foot of consultation were all identified as barriers to social inclusion.
- **Lack of recognition of the Community and Voluntary sector** was also identified as a key barrier to achieving social inclusion and comments were made in line with those already outlined above. Participants felt that the sector was sometimes seen as part of the problem rather than the solution, that the sector is frequently not listened to and is not an equal partner in the partnership process. Nevertheless, the sector is expected to deliver services on miniscule budgets and with very little recognition. In addition, there is a failure on the part of the statutory sector to recognise the value and contribution of the Community and Voluntary sector in promoting and delivering positive social change in communities where poverty and social exclusion are experienced.

- **Housing** was one of three specific policy areas in which participants identified a number of barriers to achieving social inclusion. The following were the key issues raised: poor accommodation provided for Travellers with little consultation or choice as to its location. Consequently it is often in inaccessible locations and is coupled with poor conditions; single people are passed over in the provision of public and social housing with no representation available for this group of people; standards in expensive private accommodation are often poor; private landlords are not accountable to anybody, are not subject to rent control regulations or required to meet set standards of accommodation; and there is a lack of access to housing with community facilities and supports.
- The second specific policy area to arise here was the **social welfare system**. The barriers to social inclusion inherent in this system include financial disincentives to take up employment, fear of applying for training and employment schemes in case existing benefits are lost, and the inadequate level of welfare for asylum seekers.
- The third policy area to emerge was that of **services for specific minority or target groups**. A comprehensive list of barriers was identified under this heading and included the following: the lack of foreign language supports, both translation and language training that make accessing services difficult; discrimination against people who have no voice or do not know how to go about accessing services including migrants, older people and people with a disability, Travellers, young people and men; cutbacks to education services to special needs groups such as immigrants which will further marginalise them; lack of 'bridges' for access to services, to employment and housing that cause some people to fall through the system; lack of consideration of different cultures, as well as racism and discrimination, and lack of recognition of foreign qualifications; and poor information on rights, facilities and how to get into the system.

Policy Proposals for the Future

- 4.5 ● Finally, participants at the Roundtable discussions were asked to make suggestions on policy proposals for the future. A large number of suggestions came forward and these are summarised and grouped thematically in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Suggested Policy Proposals from the Roundtables**Provision of and access to services**

- Review of services opening hours.
- More programmes to have a social inclusion focus (the HSE in particular).
- Disability access officers to be employed in each local authority on a full time basis where this is not already in place.
- Consistent access to State, as opposed to increasingly privatised services for all people in all areas.
- Provide free broadband for all, including the elderly.
- Joined-up continuous approach to service provision, particularly in relation to childcare.
- Provision of crèche facilities by the State.
- State to support businesses to provide childcare facilities.
- Need for local, civil and State Agencies to be innovative and flexible in their approaches and services.

Inter-agency cooperation and collaboration

- Agencies should try to work together to achieve common goals.
- Find ways to build a culture, skills and way of working that supports and strengthens cooperation and communication between local agencies, authorities and community structures/projects, as well as between community and voluntary and statutory agencies.
- Improve communication between Government agencies, clarify their roles and services, and improve communication with the public.
- Improve co-ordination within and between Departments – all Departments should know what each other Department is doing in relation to social inclusion.
- Improve national-level links between local areas throughout the country, especially in rural areas where people are isolated from services and information; the Office for Social Inclusion should provide help in this area.
- Streamline and reduce the number of agencies.

Effective public consultation processes and inclusion of target groups in policy processes

- Build service-user participation into the development, implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of policies.
- Ensure consultation is inclusive of all groups (men, women, nationalities, races, people with disabilities, people from different social classes etc.), that policy reflects their views and that this policy remains in place.
- Provide effective networking events such as the Social Inclusion Forum.
- Make Government agencies more visible and with mechanisms to interact with the public.
- Involve key people in all sectors at all levels of policy-making.
- Ensure voluntary and community actors have full stakeholder status in the partnership process.
- Engage in increased consultation on issues such as immigration and pensions.
- Ensure the active participation of those experiencing social exclusion.

Table 3.1 Contd.

Policy development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop policies in stages, review and amend where appropriate. ■ Ensure political commitment to policies. ■ Incorporate lessons from policies that are not working into policy-making processes. ■ Fulfil commitments in existing strategies, such as the National Development Plan and outstanding policy commitments, such as the Assessment of Need for People with Disabilities, to safeguard progress. ■ Undertake a review of taxation so as to directly target funding for social inclusion measures. ■ Maintain momentum at national level to ensure the implementation of good proposals, such as those contained in the NESF Early Childcare and Education reports. ■ Reverse the decision to subsume Combat Poverty Agency into the Office for Social Inclusion. ■ Include Traveller issues on political agenda. ■ Continue to roll out the commitments in 	<p><i>Towards 2016</i> and realise its provisions in full.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop a national strategy for older people. ■ Introduce education, training and other measures to build the capacity and understanding of social inclusion issues among policy-makers and those who implement policies. ■ Develop policies to generate inter-generational solidarity, where those of different age groups work together. ■ Measure the social and not just the economic impact of policy. ■ Policies should be forward-thinking, take a long-term view and put in place long-term strategies. ■ Develop accessible measures for addressing poverty in families. ■ Mainstream pilot programmes that have been shown to be effective.
Volunteerism	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support, recognise and value paid and unpaid workers on the ground for their work, including bringing community issues to the attention of policy-makers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recognise the importance of Non-Governmental Organisations. ■ Acknowledge the work of volunteers and work at a pace that facilitates their active involvement in policy-making processes.
Targeting ethnic minority groups	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide opportunities for integration at local and national level. ■ Provide positive action programmes across the civil and public service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Secure political recognition of asylum seekers as a minority group. ■ Ringfence funding specifically to deal with issues facing ethnic minority groups such as English language training.
Housing and accommodation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Roll out the Traveller accommodation plan and ensure this is well managed at local level. ■ Abolish direct provision for asylum seekers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establish a group to represent single people trying to access housing and other necessary services. ■ Establish a statutory body to oversee and monitor the private rented sector.

Table 3.1 Contd.

Education and training	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase investment in early child education in schools. ■ Increase the availability of language resource teachers in schools and roll back the Budget 2009 cutbacks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase labour market education and training initiatives that respond to the current economic climate. ■ Focus on the process and benefit of education rather than merely the outcomes.
Information provision	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop new information distribution methods. ■ Address the lack of on-the-ground information in relation to entitlements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide more accessible information in a variety of formats to cater for the needs of those with specific disabilities. ■ Provide information in a number of languages.
Structures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Statutory organisations and structures should be made more inclusive, and voluntary organisations should be more flexible and trusting of other organisations. ■ Challenge the sense that social partnership is gone or is substantially weakened. ■ Increase the representation of the socially excluded in current structures and strengthen partnership organisations. ■ Examine the composition of the local partnership boards to ensure these better reflect the concerns of those experiencing social exclusion. ■ Address concerns about the lack of democratic accountability at local authority level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop good local-regional-national links between agencies and structures. ■ Deliver real decentralisation of agencies, structures and their functions. ■ Develop structures that optimise leadership and expertise. ■ Ensure that the new division arising from the amalgamation of the Combat Poverty Agency and the OSI has strong leadership and commitment and is based on an examination of good practice models, such as the Office of the Minister for Children. ■ Make Government more accountable to the electorate and establish mechanisms where this accountability is shown.
Resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide realistic long-term funding for organisations working to eliminate poverty and social exclusion at local community level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop more user-friendly funding strands.
Social welfare	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improve co-ordination between social welfare areas. ■ Address the many gaps in provision for vulnerable people dependent on welfare incomes. ■ Improve linkages between computer systems within the social welfare system. ■ Provide immediate intervention for people who become unemployed to ensure minimum reliance on the social welfare system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Review the rules relating to taking up employment by groups such as lone parents and incentivise working. ■ Introduce 'step down' procedures for people coming off social welfare payments to facilitate their re-entry to the workforce without suffering financially due to immediate loss of benefits.

- 4.6 ● The morning Plenary Session and Roundtable discussions concluded with two presentations from members of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) on the participation of Irish participants at the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty. This is an annual event held in Brussels by the country holding the EU Presidency. The first input was provided by **Ms. Anna Visser, Director of EAPN Ireland** who referred to the EAPN's DVD¹⁰, *A Journey for Change*, which had been formally launched in Dublin's Mansion House the previous evening. This DVD tells not just the story of the Irish participants, but of all those who had participated from across the EU in previous years as well. She paid tribute to all of those participants who had the courage, commitment, energy and vision to overcome their own adversities in order to share their stories with thousands of others.

Ms. Visser also acknowledged the voluntary contribution of the students who worked on the DVD and the financial contribution of the Combat Poverty Agency.



MS ANNA VISSER, DIRECTOR, EAPN IRELAND AND MR MICHAEL MACKEY

¹⁰ This DVD is available from EAPN Ireland, and can also be viewed online at <http://www.youtube.com/eapnireland>

- 4.7 ● The EU Presidency support of this event conveys a very strong message that such participation makes for better policies and that the EU is committed to hearing the voices of people experiencing poverty. The meeting provides an opportunity for people experiencing poverty to be heard at EU level and the EAPN strives to ensure that the very most is made of this opportunity.
- 4.8 ● At national level, Ms. Visser drew attention to the EAPN Ireland's shadow report on Ireland's NAPinclusion, copies of which had been made available to each of the Forum's participants. This report is based on information gathered, as an input to the Forum, during October and November 2008, through focus groups and roundtable discussions with people experiencing poverty and exclusion across Ireland. While formulated in a way that responds to the NAPinclusion, the shadow report also strives to highlight the voices of people in poverty and to inform and facilitate discussions at the Social Inclusion Forum.
- 4.9 ● **Mr. Michael Mackey** outlined his experience as a participant at the Seventh European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty. This he attended as a participant from the Simon Community representing the issue of homelessness and was accompanied by two other participants, one representing the issue of disabilities and one representing the issue of asylum seeking. The meeting worked around four themes called the four pillars in the fight against poverty.

These themes were:

- social services,
- services of general interest,
- minimum income and
- housing.

Mr. Mackey, along with six other participants, worked on the housing theme which looked at issues such as insufficient funding for alcohol and drug detox centres and follow-up support services, and accessibility of housing and accommodation in terms of rent costs and waiting lists for social housing. The group also considered the quality of housing and accommodation in relation to asylum seekers.

- 4.10 ● Mr. Mackey stressed that from the moment he left for Brussels he felt that the participants were on a mission from Ireland representing people who, like himself, had and were continuing to experience poverty. He felt that it was a great honour for him to represent the Simon Community of Ireland at an international event and to speak in Brussels in front of the legislators and policy-makers. Mr. Mackey concluded by stating that we must remember that poverty is not just in Africa, it is in Ireland and in Europe also. Participating in the Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty was not about being seen, it was about getting your message across and being heard. He stated that it had been life-changing for him. Finally, Mr. Mackey stressed that we all have a voice, and we can all make a difference.
- 4.11 ● These inputs were followed by a brief film on the participation of a number of Irish participants at the Seventh European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, which took place in Brussels in May 2008.



ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS AT THE SOCIAL INCLUSION FORUM

V

Workshops on Key Target Groups and Policy Issues

- 5.1 ● Participants divided into four parallel workshops for the remainder of the morning and early afternoon of the Forum. Three of these workshops focused on key stages of the lifecycle approach adopted by the NAPinclusion – children, people of working age, and older people – and the fourth addressed the overarching theme of housing and accommodation. In advance of the Forum meeting, participants in each workshop were provided with briefing papers prepared by the OSI on the relevant targets included in the NAPinclusion and progress achieved in meeting these, and recent policy developments and strategies (see Appendix 3).
- 5.2 ● Each of these workshops included a presentation on the relevant local and national issues. Following this input, the workshops were open to discussion and participants were asked to consider and then prioritise key issues on the basis of a voting system. Having achieved this, participants were then asked to consider how these might be addressed by the NAPinclusion. Each workshop had a chairperson and a note of the discussions was made by a rapporteur. The following paragraphs provide a summary for each of the four workshops.

Workshop 1: Childhood Care and Development

Chair: Ms Marie Kennedy, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Rapporteur: Mr Albert O'Donoghue, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

- 5.3 ● This Workshop focused on Goal 1 of the NAPinclusion relating to education – Ensure that targeted pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. It began with a presentation by **Mr. Dara Hogan**, Fledglings Childcare, an innovative social franchise model of early childhood care and education operating in West Tallaght under the auspices of the Shanty and An Cosán. He highlighted the not-for-profit, social entrepreneurial aspects of the model, the links between childcare services and economic activity for members of disadvantaged communities, and the promotion and delivery of a range of high quality childcare. This was followed by a presentation from **Ms. Moira O'Meara, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs**. This focussed on the work of the Childcare Directorate, the various funding programmes that have operated over the past decade, as well as recent changes to the policy and service delivery structures relating to early childhood care and education.
- 5.4 ● Some of the main points made during the discussion in this workshop are as follows.
- **Access to childcare and early education** remains a key concern.
 - Services must be of high **quality** and the Siolta National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education should be implemented.
 - Early years services should address the **social development of children**. To achieve this, services should aim to have a good social mix of children from various social, economic, ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds, as well as integrating children with disabilities.
 - **Engagement with fathers** as well as mothers is essential, particularly in the cases of family breakdown or separation between parents.
 - **Greater supports for children with disabilities**. Services for such children need to be mainstreamed, dedicated funding needs to be provided and greater linkages between the Government Departments providing relevant services are needed.
 - Develop **stronger links between local delivery of services and national policies and funding streams**.
 - Other issues raised included the potential use of existing State facilities as childcare centres, the need for the Department of Social and Family Affairs to engage jobs facilitators and for greater clarity on the role and function of the pilot Children's Services Committees.

- 5.5 ● The priority issues identified as key by the majority of participants at the workshop for feedback to the Plenary Session were as follows:
- **Access to childcare and early education services** is a key concern. Many parents are still faced with limited choice and limited flexibility in terms of how childcare services are provided. Access and flexibility also relate to funding. Flexibility on how access to funding under the new Community Childcare Subvention Scheme will operate is a key issue.
 - The **social development of children and rights** was also identified as a priority issue. Children need to experience a mix in terms of the backgrounds, circumstances and abilities of their peers in early years settings. Further debate is required on citizen's and children's rights and what rights should apply in terms of education at pre-school and primary level. Coupled with this is the issue of the responsibility of all people involved with children and the developmentally-appropriate responsibilities of children themselves. A balance between rights and responsibilities needs to be established that applies throughout the care and education systems.
 - The **engagement of fathers** was also identified by participants as a priority issue. In many communities there appears to be an absence of fathers or an absence of paternal responsibility and accountability. This is an important issue as the role of fathers is undermined in families and communities, fathers find it difficult to gain access to or engage with their children and male role models are absent.
 - Reflecting earlier discussions, the fourth priority issue identified by participants in the workshop related to **the importance of linkages between national and local level**. While there are good national policies and good local practice in the area of childcare and early education, there is a gap between these two. This makes it difficult for providers to deliver services at local level, in the absence of support from the national level, and also makes it difficult to transfer learning between the local and national levels.

Workshop 2: Facilitating Employment Participation for those Vulnerable to Exclusion from the Labour Market

Chair: Mr Pat Conway, FÁS

Rapporteur: Dr Anne-Marie McGauran, NESF

- 5.6 ● In this workshop, **Mr. Aaron Kirkham, Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE)** provided an overview of recent changes in unemployment, which has risen from 4.9% in June–August 2006 to 7% in the same period in 2008. He also highlighted some of the issues facing people who are distant from the labour market, the outcomes the INOU seek for such people, the attributes of some of the initiatives that have produced such positive outcomes and the changing policy context and the implications of this if appropriate action is not taken. **Ms. Deirdre Shanley, Principal Officer, Department of Social and Family Affairs** presented an overview of the goals and objectives relating to unemployment in *Towards 2016*, the National Development Plan and the NAPinclusion. She also addressed the issue of activation and her Department’s approach to this, as well as outlining the provisions under the European Social Fund (ESF) Investment Programme 2007–2013.
- 5.7 ● A very comprehensive range of issues was discussed in this workshop. **Discrimination by employers** towards people – lone parents, migrants, older people, people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged communities – arose as a key concern. This is returned to below.
- 5.8 ● The needs of **migrants** also arose as a concern. NASC, the Irish Immigrant Support Centre, found that migrants are at a high risk of falling out of work. Anti-racism and inter-cultural work is essential. In this context, the requirement for a qualification in the Irish language in public sector jobs should be reviewed, as other languages, such as Russian or Polish, may now be more valuable. The need for services for migrants was highlighted through the example of a case management programme for migrants operated by Cork City Partnership. After two months the Partnership had so many cases that they could take no further referrals.
- 5.9 ● A number of issues also arose with respect to **people with disabilities**. These include the difficulties they face in moving from training to employment, the problems caused by the withdrawal of free travel on taking up employment, and the need for training among Departmental, agency and business staff in relation to disabilities. It was also suggested that there is a need for an Employer’s Forum on Disability as in the UK, otherwise people with disabilities are dependent on the implementation of the 3% public employment quota to gain employment.
- 5.10 ● The need for **flexible provision** according to individual needs emerged as another issue of concern. Mainstream provision and schemes often lack the flexibility and resources afforded to pilots that can tailor their services to people’s needs. The support required to access employment or training may relate to personal needs and those based in the home, but supports are usually only available in the training or work place. People may need to simultaneously engage with a number of service providers, such as the HSE and FÁS, in order to access labour market measures or employment.

- 5.11 ● A number of issues were also raised in relation to **progression** from welfare dependency, training and/or education to employment. These include the need to link Life Long Learning (LLL) to progression opportunities, the need for consistent approaches to training by bodies such as the VECs and FÁS so that everyone can avail of them, and a need to review the Back to Education programme. This issue is also returned to below.
- 5.12 ● Other issues raised in this workshop included the need for good communication between the community and voluntary and State sectors, the need for consultation with the end-users of labour market measures, valuing the contribution that those who are unemployed could make in voluntary work, review of the definition of Long-Term Unemployment (LTU), the need to make the public aware of the importance of the policies contained in *Towards 2016*, training for public servants in communicating effectively with vulnerable people and the need to eliminate long-term dependency on social welfare.
- 5.13 ● As indicated above, the first priority issue identified in this workshop was **discrimination** on the part of employers. In detailed discussions on this theme a considerable number of concerns emerged. These included
- the need to recognise that only employing the easiest to employ is a form of discrimination;
 - while flexibility is often sought from employees, employment structures should also be more flexible;
 - support is also needed for employers. An interagency group to include FÁS, mentoring with regard to equality and employment legislation, and employer forums to work with voluntary and statutory organisations to combat discrimination were suggested as possible supports;
 - the introduction of employment quotas in the private sector; discrimination against those who acquire disabilities while in employment in both the public and private sector is much less common than discrimination against those who already have a disability when seeking employment, (although this may change in the current economic climate) and illustrates that flexibility is possible;
 - among Travellers, there is a need for education for those who move into a more settled way of life, including mainstream employment;
 - a mature national debate on multi-culturalism in Ireland is needed;
 - we need to recognise that discrimination is often based on a multitude of factors;
 - there is a need to prosecute and make employers legally culpable for underpaying migrants;
 - the removal of the National Consultative Committee Against Racism (NCCRI) and the culling of the Equality Authority are particularly badly timed and should be reconsidered;

- institutional discrimination, such as is evident in the new anti-begging law, must be named and addressed;
- language on discrimination needs to be more positive and evident in policy, and some terms, such as ‘disability’ should be removed entirely;
- a review is needed in the public sector to see how many of those employed under the 3% quota for people with disabilities remain at entry level or are progressing up the ranks; and
- the interaction of increased earned incomes and benefits should be considered.

- 5.14 ● The second priority issue raised in the labour market workshop was **progression** into and in employment. Locally-based initiatives involving local people, employers and employees were considered to be most effective. Skillsnet initiatives – where groups of enterprises are mobilised and supported to develop strategic answers to their joint training needs by establishing networks – were also seen as effective. However, barriers were also identified including the eligibility criteria for participation on schemes such as the Back to Work allowance which requires participants to be have been unemployed for two years, and the Back to Education allowance which requires participants to be unemployed for six months before returning to second level or FETAC Level 5 courses, with higher level courses not provided for. Greater flexibility in these criteria would help. With regard to lifelong learning, this should be focused on those with the lowest skill levels rather than those with higher skills, and address issues such as training for those who work irregular or unsociable hours.
- 5.15 ● It was noted that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and FÁS have a project that is trying to target people with very low skills in the workplace. New criteria for access as a mature student to universities may now put people off returning to education. In addition, the potential contribution of unemployed people to volunteering and community development, and their capacity to develop skills both for and through such work, should be acknowledged.
- 5.16 ● The third priority issue to emerge in the labour market workshop was the need for **co-ordination among service providers** at both macro and micro level. At national level, while high level and inter-Departmental groups are valuable, some do not have representatives from all relevant Government Departments. FÁS, the Department of Education and Science and the DSFA need to work more closely in this arena. At local level, County and City Development Boards (CDBs) that have worked well have strong leadership, support, expertise and work in partnership with others. It was noted that some initiatives of the CDBs work very well when the community and voluntary groups in the CDB are strong. However, there are a number of issues to be addressed at local level.

These include: the need for an increased focus on co-ordination; the reluctance of some major statutory groups to work and be transparent in partnership arrangements; a lack of funding at local level to enable groups to access national funding programmes; and the different resources targeted at different local areas through a range of programmes (for example, only RAPID areas have Area Implementation Teams).

- 5.17 ● More generally, people need to know which organisation is responsible for what programmes and organisations need to take responsibility for making their services accessible; while the discrepancy between the jobs being created and the skill level of the unemployed, and the misalignment of the Skills Strategy and the National Spatial Strategy all need to be addressed.
- 5.18 ● The final priority issue to emerge from this workshop was the need to **focus on those at greatest distance from the labour market** and therefore most in need of support. While participants felt that it was important not to create hierarchies of need, some groups need more intensive support than others. It is important that asylum seekers who achieve refugee status have access to supports and are not left on their own to tackle the labour market. Barriers such as language capabilities and discrimination need to be addressed. Funding for such groups needs to be ringfenced. Other groups not frequently mentioned need support, such as young men who became self-employed in the construction sector who have few skills and cannot access unemployment payments. Finally, care needs to be taken to maintain a focus on this issue.

Workshop 3: Integrated Services for Older People

Chair: Ms Geraldine Fitzpatrick, Office of the Minister for Older People

Rapporteur: Mr Catriona O'Connor, Department of Social and Family Affairs

- 5.19 ● Discussion in this workshop focussed on Goals 7 and 8 of the NAPinclusion. Goal 7, in relation to community care, is as follows: Continue to increase investment in community care services for older people, including home care packages and enhanced day care services, to support them to live independently in the community for as long as possible.

Goal 8, which relates to income support, is as follows:

Maintain a minimum payment rate of €200 per week, in 2007 terms, for all social welfare pensions over the course of this Plan and, if possible, having regard to available resources and the Government's commitment in *Towards 2016*, to enhance this provision. The overall pension structures and system to provide income supports for pensioners will be reviewed in the light of the forthcoming Green Paper on Pensions, to be finalised at end March 2007. This will review all the pillars of pension provision.

- 5.20 ● The national level input was provided by **Mr. Tom Leonard, HSE**. Mr. Leonard addressed national policy and planned provision for integrated care services in Ireland, including the role of the Primary Care Teams, progress in home-based supports, and current initiatives to support older people. Implementation of the planned integrated care model will require the continued expansion of community services (Home Care Packages, Home Helps, Day Care etc.) while also ensuring the provision of high quality long-stay residential beds that are geographically located to suit older people. If these are achieved in parallel, it will be possible to reduce the numbers of older people in long stay care from the current level of 4.6% to 4% in line with Government plans.
- 5.21 ● **Ms. Mairead Hayes** of the **Irish Senior Citizen's Parliament** provided an input on the local issues relating to integrated services.
- 5.22 ● Participants in this workshop agreed to focus their discussion on five priority areas. The first of these was **access to services**. Key issues identified under this heading included difficulty in accessing services, the absence of a single point of contact and differing levels of services geographically. Specific issues were raised in relation to elderly Travellers who have higher mortality rates than the rest of the population, poor living conditions which negatively impact on health, difficulties in getting hospital appointments and referrals when there is no postal service available and the need for elderly Travellers to access the services provided by primary health care workers and the Public Health Nurse.
- 5.23 ● Other issues identified under this heading included the need for consultation with local communities and end users, the need for training for front line staff, the need to provide choices on where end-of-life care is delivered and the importance of information.
- 5.24 ● The second priority identified in this workshop was the **role of Primary Care Teams**. Multi-disciplinary Primary Care Teams are needed throughout the country, all their services should be universally accessible and greater flexibility for those aged over 65 years needs to be developed. These Teams need to be adequately and appropriately staffed, with the employment of an adequate number of experts being essential. There is a lack of General Practitioners (GPs) in some areas.
- Where GPs are providing services for medical card holders, there should be a requirement that they see the patient at least once a year in the patient's home. Individual needs identified as a result of this visit could then be followed up by the GP linking in with the Primary Care Team. Regulation is also essential. The funding provided to the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) should be sufficient to allow them to police the sector including primary care services.
- 5.25 ● Finally, the French experience was highlighted, where each community has a centre with GPs and specialists all located under one roof. All individual needs can be catered for in one centre – the replication of this in Ireland may mean increased taxes but could be worthwhile.

- 5.26 ● The third area to be prioritised in this workshop was **Home Care Packages (HCPs)**. More HCPs are required and, at a minimum, funding for existing HCPs should be maintained. In addition, standards for HCPs should be established as currently no standards exist.
- 5.27 ● The issue of **Public -v- Private Provision** was the fourth priority area discussed in this workshop. Participants firstly agreed that there should be an acceptable level of care below which no citizen should fall. While this may require increased taxes, this may be tolerated and should be explored. At present, two-thirds of long-term elder care is being provided privately. The cost of this and the profit margins of those providing such care should be investigated. Participants felt that there is a need to look carefully at the creeping privatisation of health services for older people and to move away from this trend. They expressed the view that private enterprise should not be responsible for addressing or meeting social need and that nobody should make a profit from the health of the nation. Participants sought a reinforced Government commitment to access services based on need rather than ability to pay. Equity of access and quality services for all should underpin the health services.
- 5.28 ● The fifth and final issue discussed by participants in the workshop on integrated services for older people was **integration between hospital and community**. Participants expressed the view that the essence of integration is good communication. Communication and information help to ensure the safe transfer of care from hospital to community. The relationship between the carer, the patient and the services should be fostered and strengthened. The role of carers cannot be under-estimated but they are under resourced. The community nursing system should be built up to support those caring for loved ones in the home. Participants felt that it was useful to distinguish between people who are ill and those who are frail. Older people who can should be encouraged to socialise.
- 5.29 ● The participants at this workshop made three recommendations as follows.

Access to Services

- Each Local Health Care Centre should have an information access point. A person should be available to give information on health services, social services, community services and to provide assistance with form filling and follow-up with the service providers.
- Consideration should be given to the introduction of a mobile health check system similar to the ‘Breast Check’ model particularly for disadvantaged and minority groups e.g. Travellers who are not able to make their own way to hospitals etc.

HCPs

- All available buildings should be used, as hospital beds cannot be closed without improving primary care. Primary care centres must be delivered.

Workshop 4: Provision of Housing and Accommodation

Chair: Ms Liz Sullivan, Combat Poverty Agency

Rapporteur: Dr Jeanne Moore, NESF

- 5.30 ● This workshop focussed on Goal 10 of the NAPinclusion which is to deliver high quality housing for those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs and to underpin the building of sustainable communities. An important element will be the enhanced housing output reflected in *Towards 2016*. The input on national issues was provided by **Ms. Theresa Donohue, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government**. In her presentation, she touched on a wide range of strategies including the Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness, the NDP, *Towards 2016* and the Housing Policy Statement. Ms. Donohue also talked about measures to address housing and accommodation issues among people with disabilities.
- 5.31 ● **Ms. Karen Murphy, Irish Council for Social Housing** outlined the role and perspective of voluntary housing associations, highlighted some of the voluntary housing projects that exist for groups including people with disabilities, older people and homeless people, and pointed to some of the challenges in addressing housing and accommodation issues.
- 5.32 ● Eleven issues were raised in this workshop as follows:
- accommodation for asylum seekers is of very poor quality;
 - the presence of empty and boarded-up social housing and private accommodation while there is an increase in homelessness;
 - under the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) there can be a long delay in turnaround between tenants because, although the flat is vacant, the rent has to be paid up front;
 - a more holistic approach is needed to Traveller accommodation including quality design, management and the avoidance of overcrowding;
 - more readily available information is needed at local level on housing schemes and waiting lists;
 - representation of service users and local community and voluntary organisations on Homeless Fora, with a direct input to decision-making, is essential;
 - housing as a human right needs to be emphasised;
 - the right of people with disabilities to live independently needs to be realised;
 - there is a need for step down accommodation from prisons, mental health services and direct provision. The existing gap from these services to private accommodation is too great;

- greater consultation is needed with interest groups, and Departments need to proof policies and strategies in relation to social exclusion; and
- stronger links need to be developed between local and national policy.

- 5.33 ● Four priority issues were identified for feedback to the Forum's afternoon Plenary Session. The **poor quality of accommodation for asylum seekers** was the first of these four priorities. Many asylum seekers live in overcrowded facilities and the management of shared accommodation is often poor. Complaints are not made due to fear of being moved. The health impacts of such accommodation and direct provision more broadly need urgent consideration.
- 5.34 ● **Vacant properties and long housing lists** was the second priority raised. In the context of growing housing lists, longer waiting periods and increasing homelessness it is wasteful to have so many properties sitting empty. The reasons for vacant properties vary. Some have been built by developers and in the current climate they are not being bought or cannot be sold. Some are local authority houses which are being boarded up on housing estates because they are difficult to let. Others are in the private rental sector and, where the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) is in operation, the time between a tenant moving out and another moving back in can often be quite a long period and therefore properties remain empty. Whatever the reason, it is difficult to reconcile increasing numbers of empty properties with growing housing lists and homelessness.
- 5.35 ● The third priority issue was **the need to link local delivery with national policy**. Local delivery does not always link to policies at national level. A stronger mandate is needed for local representation of statutory agencies and Departments.
- 5.36 ● The fourth priority to emerge from this workshop is **the need for greater information on housing schemes** particularly at local level, with a one-stop shop approach being suggested.

VI

Final Plenary Session

- 6.1 ● In the final Plenary Session, **Ms. Helen Johnson, NESC** provided a summary feedback on the priority issues identified in each of the workshops. This is already detailed in Section V above, is summarised in Box A in Section I and is not repeated here.
- 6.2 ● Having provided this feedback, she made a number of observations in relation to some of the over-arching issues that were raised.
- 6.3 ● A key theme to emerge across the workshops was the importance of implementation of policies and the delivery of services. This should be informed from a perspective that people have rights to certain services and that these should then be delivered.
- 6.4 ● Next was the importance of participation, of having a voice and being heard also arose across the workshops. While the voices of people experiencing poverty and many of the groups that work with and for them were heard at the Social Inclusion Forum, this needs to be carried on throughout policy and service processes.
- 6.5 ● In this regard, the question of adequate and appropriate community representation on committees, councils and other structures was highlighted and needs to be addressed. Some committees have no community representative on them. Finally, Ms. Johnston stressed that although there are very difficult times ahead, the Ireland of today is much different and much stronger than the Ireland of the 1970s and 1980s. The physical and institutional infrastructure we have put in place must be maintained if we are to meet the challenges ahead.
- 6.6 ● Before opening the floor to questions and comments, **Ms. Esther Lynch, ICTU** provided ICTU's perspective on a number of the changes currently taking place in Ireland. She and others were angry at the way certain groups of people were being blamed for, and would suffer the brunt of the current crisis. These included workers, public servants and people who rely on public services. Those not being held to account, however, are those with real responsibility including the banks and developers along with a political acceptance of the 'cowboy capitalism' that has brought about many of the current difficulties. In terms of safeguarding what we have achieved, Ms. Lynch agreed that this would be difficult but also that we must ask that if it was not possible to secure high quality public services in the boom years, what chance do we have of developing them now?

- 6.7 ● She went on to identify a number of characteristics of the new unemployed and some of the problems facing them. Many have never been unemployed before and have large mortgages and several sources of debt. At least some will face eviction from their homes. ICTU have proposals on action that would allow people to pay what they can reasonably afford rather than financial institutions adding more interest and fines to their debt and foreclosing on their homes. She stated that one of the keys to the Irish economic boom was investment in those who were unemployed, their families and communities through training and employment schemes. Such schemes allowed people to work in their communities and deliver valuable services. These now need to be revisited not only to ensure the provision of services but as a means of keeping people's skills fresh and updated.
- 6.8 ● Finally, Ms. Lynch stated that shaping the current debate is very important and part of this is the type of discussions that take place at the Social Inclusion Forum and the practical recommendations that emerge from it.
- 6.9 ● **Mr. Gerry Mangan, OSI** responded to a number of the issues highlighted throughout the day and in the feedback from the workshops. In a number of instances, Mr. Mangan referred back to the situation that faced us in the 1980s and the positive changes that have come about since. These include the development of the social partnership process and the many good strategies that have resulted, either directly or indirectly, from this. Good strategies, based on sound analysis, that have clear goals and objectives will help in facing the challenges of the current economic downturn.
- 6.10 ● Another positive development since the 1980s is the development of many services. This includes the creation of new services as well as the improvement of existing ones. In the current climate what we might hope for is a continued honing of such services as wasteful or lax approaches are eliminated.
- 6.11 ● Mr. Mangan said that implementation is an issue both nationally and internationally and that a key question in this regard is how well resources are being used and how effectively policies are implemented on the ground. Events such as the Social Inclusion Forum and the feedback it provides help provide answers to such questions. With regard to the question of rights, Mr. Mangan said that we must never lose sight of people's rights to adequate services but that this requires an ongoing focus on changing attitudes to support this approach.
- 6.12 ● Mr. Mangan concluded by addressing the issue of the integration of the Combat Poverty Agency and the OSI into a new division in the DSFA. While he understood people's concerns about this change, he is looking forward to working with colleagues from the Combat Poverty Agency and is confident that this move will result in a more integrated unit that will lead to better services and greater support for achieving inclusion.

- 6.13 ● A small number of other issues were raised by participants in this final Plenary Session. The first of these supported earlier comments on the **model of development** that has brought about the current difficulties. The Community Workers Co-operative informed the Forum that they would be launching a discussion document, entitled *A Better Ireland is Possible* which has been written by Peadar Kirby and Mary Murphy. This outlines an alternative model of development and would be published in December 2008.
- 6.14 ● In relation to **maintaining what we have already achieved**, it was suggested that part of this fight has already been lost as evidenced by the integration of the Combat Poverty Agency into a Government Department, and the closure of the NCCRI.
- 6.15 ● The Chairperson, Dr. Maureen Gaffney in closing the Forum mentioned that, in a workshop she had attended, she was struck by both the very specific and practical problems people highlighted, while the discussion also addressed policies and systemic difficulties. This highlighted the complexity of the issues being addressed. Solving what may appear to be very small and specific problems may be achieved at local level, but often they require much larger and national level changes as well. This can be facilitated through high quality dialogue between the actors at local and national level.
- 6.16 ● Dr. Gaffney invited participants to send any additional comments to the NESF by phone, email, fax or post and asked participants to please complete the evaluation forms that had been circulated. She thanked everyone for their attendance and participation, as well as their ongoing work on the ground with people experiencing poverty and exclusion, and wished everyone a safe journey home.



PLENARY SESSION OF THE FORUM

Annexes

Annex I Conference Programme

8.30 Arrival of Participants and Guests

Registration with tea/coffee

9.00 Morning Plenary

- Welcoming Remarks by the Forum’s Chairperson, Dr. Maureen Gaffney
- Opening Address by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Ms. Mary Hanafin, T.D.
- Presentation by Ms. Mary Doyle, Assistant Secretary, Department of An Taoiseach
- Presentation by Mr. Gerry Mangan, Director, Office for Social Inclusion

10.00 Questions and Open Discussion

10.15 Roundtable Discussion

10.45 Presentation of DVD by Ms. Anna Visser, Director, EAPN Ireland

11.15 Coffee Break

11.45 Meeting of Workshop Groups on:

- priorities for childhood care and development
- facilitating employment participation for those vulnerable to exclusion from the labour market
- integrated services for older people
- provision of housing and accommodation

1.00 Break for Lunch

2.15 Continuation of Workshop Groups

3.15 Coffee Break

Final Plenary

3.15 Feedback from the Workshops

3.45 Open Discussion, with Panel

5.00 Concluding Remarks

by the Forum’s Chairperson, Dr. Maureen Gaffney

Annex II Attendance List

Full Name	Organisation
Mr John Anderson	Society of St Vincent de Paul
Ms Marie Aspill	Older Women's Network
Mrs Mary Barrett	Irish Nurses Organisation
Mrs Brigid Barron	Caring for Carers
Cllr Ger Barron	Association of County & City Councils
Ms Katherine Baxter	Department of Community, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs
Ms Emer Begley	Age Action
Ms Carol Bourke	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mrs Margaret Bourke	Co Roscommon Support Group Ltd
Mr Andy Bourne	Galway Simon Community
Ms Gráinne Boyle	Cavan County Council
Ms Saoirse Brady	FLAC
Ms Lillian Buchanan	Disability Federation of Ireland
Miss Aislinn Burke	MDASI
Mr Patrick Burke	Simon Communities of Ireland
Ms Fiona Burke	Southside Local Employment Service
Ms Suzanne Byrne	FLAC
Ms Kathryn Byrne	NESDO
Mr Frank Cardiff	Wicklow Community & Family Services
Ms Siobhán Carey	Central Statistics Office
Dr Gemma Carney	NUI Galway
Mr James Carroll	Castleblaney Care
Mrs Jean Carroll	Castleblaney Care
Ms Marie Carroll	Southside Partnership
Mr Brian Carty	PLANET
Ms Caroline Clarke	Our Lady of Lourdes
Ms Nóirín Coghlan	Ballymun Partnership
Mrs Mollie Collins	Pavee Point
Ms Martina Comerford	Kilkenny County Council
Mr Pat Conway	FÁS
Ms Claire Conway	Department of Social and Family Affairs

Ms Nuala Coonerty	Southside LES
Ms Catriona Corcoran	Westmeath Community Development Ltd
Mr Eamon Corcoran	Department of Health and Children
Ms Carmel Corrigan	
Ms Mel Cousins	
Mr Jim Cousins	Dundalk MABS
Ms Hannah Creedon	EAPN Ireland
Mr Terence Cullen	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Sean Cunningham	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Maria Daly	Pavee Point
Ms Frances Daly	
Mr Pat Delaney	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Catherine Devaney	HSE
Mr Kris Dhont	Rehab Care
Mr Ciaran Diamond	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Eileen Dillard	Lucan Disability Action Group
Mr John Doherty	North West Simon Community
Mr Michael Donohoe	County Monaghan Partnership
Ms Theresa Donohue	Dept of Environment, Heritage & Local Government
Mr Michael Doody	ICMSA
Miss Mary Doyle	Ralaheen Research & Design
Ms Mary Doyle	Department of the Taoiseach
Ms Gina Duffy	Department of Health and Children
Ms Emer Duffy	Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society
Ms Clare Duffy	The Carers' Association
Mr Paul Dunbar	NASC
Ms Paula Dunne	Revenue Commissioners
Ms Marian Durnan	OWN Ireland
Ms Rose Fagan	NESDO
Ms Caroline Fahey	Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Mr Jarlath Fallon	Department of Education and Science
Mr Conor Farrell	ICTU
Ms Niamh Fawl	National Disability Authority

Ms Geraldine Fitzpatrick	Department of Health and Children
Ms Annamarie Foley	Kerry Women's Refuge & Support Services
Mr Malachy Foots	Louth PWDI
Dr Maureen Gaffney	NESF
Ms Niamh Gallagher	Children's Rights Alliance
Ms Vanessa Gannon	North West Simon Comunity
Ms Jane Gatto	AKIDWA
Mr Paul Ginnell	EAPN Ireland
Ms Maria Gorman	CPA
Mr Richard Grant	FÁS
Ms Máireád Hayes	Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament
Nohemí Mata Hernández	EAPN Ireland
Dr Peter Herrmann	European Anti-Poverty Network, (EAPN)
Mr Dara Hogan	An Cosán
Mr Aongus Horgan	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Tom Horton	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Pascal Hosford	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Caroline Hotchkins	Cáirde
Ms Elaine Houlihan	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Ann Irwin	Community Workers' Co-operative
Ms Olivia Joyner	NESF
Mr Stephen Kealy	Sisters of Charity & Jesus & Mary
Ms Caroline Keane	Pavee Point
Ms Sharon Keane	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Donagh Kelly	Department of Education & Science
Mr Pat Kelly	Louth PWDI
Ms Niamh Kelly	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Danielle Kennan	Irish Human Rights Commission
Ms Marie Kennedy	Department of Health and Children
Ms Karen Kiernan	One Family
Ms Emily Kindness	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Elaine King	EAPN Ireland
Mr Aaron Kirkham	INOUE
Ms Joan Kirwin	Older Women's Network
Mr Cherif Labreche	CAÍRDE

Mr Thomas Lawlor	Matt Talbot Community Trust
Mr Tom Leonard	Kerry Local Health Office (HSE)
Ms Barbara Lesniak	Galway Irish Polish Association
Ms Helen Long	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Esther Lynch	ICTU
Ms Maureen Madden	Louth PWDI
Ms Chaira Magini	Volunteering Ireland
Ms Catriona Maguire	Ballymun Partnership
Mr Michael Mackey	Galway Simon Community
Mr Darren Malone	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Gaye Malone	NESDO
Mr Gerry Mangan	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Monika Martinaiyte	NESDO
Ms Mary Masala	AKIDWA
Ms Mary Mason	Older Women's Network (OWN Ireland)
Mr Peter Masterson	Acorn CDP
Ms Shylet Mateu	AKIDWA
Mr Seamus McAleavey	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
Mr Pdraig McBreen	Cavan Partnership
Ms Kathleen McCann	Congress Centres Network
Ms Mairéad McCann	Rathmines Community Partnership
Ms Elise McCarthy	Rice University
Ms Mary McCarthy	Trinity College
Ms Ruth McCarthy	NESDO
Ms Cliona McCormack	Rehab Group
Ms Mary McDermott	National Women's Council of Ireland
Dr Anne Marie McGauran	NESF
Ms Helen McKenna	Finglas MABS
Mr Gerard McLoughlin	Ballymun Partnership
Mr Finn McQuirk	Southside Partnership
Ms Miriam McSharry	Irish Wheelchair Association
Mr Frank Mills	Health Service Executive
Mr Sean Misteil	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Lindiwe Mkhwanazi	AKIDWA

Dr Jeanne Moore	NESF
Ms Loraine Mulligan	SIPTU
Ms Tatyana Muralechko	Cáirde
Ms Karen Murphy	Irish Council for Social Housing
Ms Hasifa Nabale	AKIDWA
Ms Orla Ni Cheallachain	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Colma Nic Lughadha	Ballymun Partnership
Mr Declan Nugent	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Patrick Nulty	Focus Ireland
Mr Denis O'Brien	Galway City Development Board
Ms Aileen O'Brien	Southside Partnership
Cllr. Paddy O'Callaghan	AMAI
Ms Maeve O'Connell	Women 2gether Network
Ms Catriona O'Connor	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Philip O'Connor	Dublin Employment Pact
Mr Gabriel O'Connor	County Monaghan Partnership
Ms Joan O'Donnell	Disability Federation of Ireland
Ms Evelyn O'Donnell	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr Albert O'Donoghue	Department of Health and Children
Ms Joan O'Dowd	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Mr John O'Driscoll	
Ms Joan O'Flynn	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Michael O'Gorman	Simon Communities of Ireland
Ms Catherine O'Hara	Clare Co Council
Mr Seán ÓhÉigeartaigh	NESF
Ms Mary O'Kane	Dublin Institute of Technology
Mr Kevin O'Kelly	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Chigozie Okoro	Matt Talbot Community Development Project
Ms Moira O'Mara	Department of Health and Children
Ms Mairéad O'Neill	Department of Health and Children
Mr Derek O'Reilly	Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups
Ms Evelyn O'Reilly	NESDO
Mr Diarmaid O'Sullivan	Ballyfermot Partnership
Dr Roger O'Sullivan	Centre for Ageing Research & Development

Ms Máireád O'Sullivan	South Kerry Development Partnership
Ms Irina Pokhilo	Cáirde
Ms Ciara Quigley	NESDO
Ms Sinead Quill	National Council on Ageing & Older People
Ms Emma Ramsey	NALA
Mr David Reynolds	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Sr Brigid Reynolds	CORI
Ms Anna Rooney	Culture Link Training & Integration
Ms Thabi Rose	AKIDWA
Miss Sylvia Rouget	PCAP Ltd
Mr James Ryan	First Crew
Mr Brian Scanlon	Age & Opportunity
Ms Beatrix Sheehan	HSE
Ms Mary Sherry	Irish Farmers' Association
Mr David Silke	Centre for Housing Research
Miss Shiela Simmons	Irish Association of Older People
Ms Julie Smyth	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Eufemia Solinas	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Madaline Spiers	INO
Ms Elizabeth Sullivan	Combat Poverty Agency
Mr Brendan Teeling	An Chomhairle Leabharlanna
Mr Bernard Thompson	National Association of Building Co-operatives
Ms June Tinsley	Barnardo's
Ms Gillian Treacy	Department of Health and Children
Ms Kasey Treadwell-Shine	Combat Poverty Agency
Ms Anna Visser	EAPN Ireland
Mr Brendan Walker	Department of Social and Family Affairs
Ms Carolyn Wallace	Community Partnership Network
Ms Elizabeth Waters	An Cosán
Ms Marian White	Mountwood/Fitzgerald Park CDP
Dr Joanna Wydenbach	Healthy Food for All
Mr Issak Yousief	Cáirde

Annex III Briefing Notes for the Workshops

These Briefing Notes were prepared by the Office for Social Inclusion to facilitate discussions at the Workshops. Copies of the Notes were sent in advance of the Conference to participants for the particular Workshop they had indicated they wished to attend. The Notes are presented in the following sequence beneath:

- Priorities for Childhood Care and Development,
- Facilitating Employment participation for those Vulnerable to Exclusion from the Labour Market,
- Integrated services for Older People, and
- Provision of Housing and Accommodation.

The current economic down turn will inevitably slow the pace of progress in implementing the commitments in the NAPinclusion, *Towards 2016* and the NDP. However, it will not alter the Government's determination to ensure that the plans are implemented within the shortest time frame that improving economic conditions permit.

Workshop on Priorities for Childhood Care and Development

The Note includes information on:

- Social inclusion strategies which have been put in place since last year's Forum;
- The Vision for Children as set out in *Towards 2016*, the social partnership agreement reached in June 2006;
- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007–2016;
- High Level Goals in the NAPinclusion relating to Children;
- Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006–2007;
- Key Developments relating to Children (reported in annual Social Inclusion Report);
- Progress on High Level Goals;
- Progress on NAPinclusion targets for Children;
- Key developments relating to Children (reported in the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010);
- Budget 2009 Update;
- Details of relevant websites where further information is available in relation to the above.

1. New Strategies for Social Inclusion

Since the last Forum took place in November 2007, the Government has launched the National Report for Ireland on the Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. This report was submitted to the European Commission in October 2008.

According to EU guidelines, we were required to identify 3–4 priority policy objectives which will be pursued between 2008–2010, which it was felt, would best contribute to achieving the relevant EU Common Objectives. The following four priority policy objectives were proposed with a suggested narrower focus on activation measures for lone parents and disabilities under 2, and on vulnerable groups such as the homeless, under 3:

- Child Poverty
- Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities (Activation Measures)
- Access to Quality Services
- Integration of our Migrant Population

2. *Towards 2016* Vision for Children

The vision as set out in *Towards 2016* for children in Ireland is a society where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential. Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is committed to its implementation in our laws and policies.

To achieve this vision, the Government and social partners in *Towards 2016* undertook to work together over the next ten years towards the following long-term goals for children in Ireland:

- Every child should grow up in a family with access to sufficient resources, supports and services to nurture and care for the child and foster the child's development and full and equal participation in society;
- Every family should be able to access childcare services which are appropriate to the circumstances and needs of their children;
- Every child should leave primary school literate and numerate;
- Every student should complete a senior cycle or equivalent programme, (including ICT) appropriate to their capacity and interests;
- Every child should have access to world-class health, personal social services and suitable accommodation;
- Every child should have access to quality play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood, and
- Every child and young person will have access to appropriate participation in local and national decision-making.

The *Towards 2016* Review and Transitional Agreement 2008–2009, published in September 2008, reaffirms the willingness of both the Government and the Social Partners to work together during this difficult period of economic transition and uncertainty to ensure that the vision and Goals set down in *Towards 2016* can still be achieved.

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

The new NAPinclusion which was published in February 2007 sets out a wide-ranging and comprehensive programme of action to address poverty and social exclusion. The Plan is intended to set out a coherent and comprehensive approach for the next ten years using a lifecycle approach, as set out by National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) in its report, *The Developmental Welfare State*, and adopted by the national partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. The lifecycle approach places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery by assessing the risks facing him or her and the supports available at key stages of the lifecycle.

These key lifecycle groups are: Children; People of Working Age; Older People and People with Disabilities; and their Communities. The adoption of the lifecycle approach offers a comprehensive framework for implementing a streamlined, cross-cutting and visible approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

To ensure that a decisive impact on poverty is made, the Government believes that significant interventions are required to prioritise a small number of high level goals. These targeted actions and interventions are designed to mobilise resources to address long-standing and serious social deficits with the ultimate aim of achieving the objective of reducing consistent poverty.

The overall goal of this Plan is:

To reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition.

Within each section of the lifecycle, a number of high level goals are being prioritised to achieve this overall goal. These are detailed below.

4. High Level Goals in the NAPinclusion relating to Children

Education at all stages of a child's life is of central importance for their development and future well-being. Accordingly, it forms the basis for the main targets in this area. In addition, the importance of income support in tackling child poverty is also recognised. The high level goals for this life stage are:

Goal 1: Education

Ensure that targeted pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan;

Goal 2: Education

Reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. The target is to halve the proportion from the current 27%–30% to less than 15% by 2016;

Goal 3: Education

Work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20–24 completing upper second level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013; and

Goal 4: Income Support

Maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33%–35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate over the course of this Plan and review child income supports aimed at assisting children in families on low income.

The high level goals in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016 are accompanied by over 150 more detailed targets and actions across all stages of the lifecycle. 42 of those targets and actions relate to services for children including income supports, early childhood development and care, health and nutrition, youth homelessness, sport and leisure and child participation among others. In addition, a number of cross-cutting targets in the Communities chapter of the NAPinclusion (chapter 6) will impact on children.

A copy of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion is available from the Office for Social Inclusion at (01) 7043851 or on our website at www.socialinclusion.ie

5. Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006–2007

As part of a more streamlined and efficient monitoring and reporting process agreed in the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, the Office for Social Inclusion was given an expanded role to coordinate and prepare an annual Social Inclusion Report.

The annual report reviewed each stage of the lifecycle; provided a detailed assessment of progress towards set targets; identified new issues arising or issues that might benefit from a more co-ordinated, joined-up approach; and reported on stakeholders' views emerging from various fora. The report also covered the social inclusion elements of *Towards 2016* and the NDP, ensuring that the reporting processes for all three strategies were streamlined.

6. Key Developments relating to Children (reported in annual Social Inclusion Report)

6.1 National Development Plan 2007–2013

The NDP commits to investment of €12.3 billion in the Children Programme over the period 2007–2013. This investment will provide childcare services, child protection and recreational facilities and educational help for children from disadvantaged communities and those with special needs.

6.2 Programme for Government

The Programme for Government 2007 contains commitments relating to childcare, children's health and well-being, income supports, education, recreation, child protection, youth justice and foster care. It also commits to the establishment of an all party Oireachtas committee to build consensus on a constitutional amendment to acknowledge and affirm the natural rights of all children.

6.3 Office of the Minister for Children

The Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) has made progress in promoting innovative and integrated service delivery, including the establishment of the National Children's Strategy Implementation Group in November 2006 and the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme.

7. Progress on High Level Goals

Target	Progress
<p>High Level Goal 1 Ensure that targeted pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan.</p>	<p>The Department of Education and Science has reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Office of the Minister for Children has agreed that for capital applications under the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP), one of the criteria used in assessing applications is whether a childcare facility can demonstrate that it will support pre-school services for schools designated as disadvantaged under DEIS; • Existing pre-schools associated with DEIS Urban Band 1 schools have been identified. An analysis of how these pre-schools could be clustered for early years intervention and the type of intervention model that could be used has taken place; • The model of intervention is now being further developed. <p>DEIS: A number of City and County Childcare Committees and National Voluntary Childcare Organisations will be running a pilot scheme in 2008 to support the implementation of Síolta in a number of settings under a funding line of the National Childcare Investment Programme for innovative schemes.</p>
<p>High Level Goal 2 Reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. The target is to halve the proportion from the current 27%-30% to less than 15% by 2016.</p>	<p>The Department of Education and Science has reported that under the DEIS action plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 additional literacy and numeracy tutors have been recruited to provide in-school support and guidance to all teachers in these schools. This brings the total to 19 literacy and numeracy tutors. • Training in Reading Recovery and First Steps is being rolled out to all DEIS urban/town primary schools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Reading Recovery is a school-based early intervention programme designed to reduce literacy problems in schools. Two new Reading Recovery Teacher leaders have completed their training and they, along with the existing cohort of trained teachers, will roll the programme out to a further 70 schools in 2008. Another teacher leader to support Dublin West Reading Recovery-served schools is currently being trained. — First Steps targets the whole school or a specific school group on a particular strand/unit of the curriculum with the emphasis on a holistic approach to the teaching of literacy. The First Steps programme is being extended to a further 80 schools in 2007/2008;

Target	Progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — A new Family Literacy Project is being implemented; — The School Development Planning Service continues to support schools in developing their plans and policies for teaching literacy and numeracy and in setting measurable targets for the reduction of serious literacy and numeracy difficulties. 3 year plans are currently being implemented in all DEIS Primary schools • 35 DEIS schools will avail of literacy camps around the country in summer 2008. The camps will run for one week per school. A selected group of 7–11 year old children, in locations which have high concentrations of ‘at-risk’ pupils, will explore literacy and thinking skills, through a project-based approach with an emphasis on arts activities.
<p>High Level Goal 3 Work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20–24 completing upper second level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013.</p>	<p>The Department of Education and Science has reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fifteen additional posts have been allocated to the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) for 2007 under the first phase of the provision in <i>Towards 2016</i>. A recruitment process to fill these posts has taken place and 12 of these posts have now been filled, the remaining 3 will be filled shortly. The increase in staff will facilitate the Board to respond to more children with attendance difficulties; • The NEWB has deployed staff in areas of greatest disadvantage and in areas designated under the Government's RAPID programme; • An increase of €8m for Youthreach was provided for in 2007 for the expansion of the number of places by 400, bringing the total to over 3,600. This will rise by a further 600 by the end of 2009; <p>A group comprising representatives of the NEWB, the School Completion Programme and the Home School Community Liaison has identified a number of regions where the three teams will work together to identify particular issues that contribute to absenteeism and to develop operational guidelines. This work will commence in the 2007-2008 school year with the aim of agreeing operational guidelines by the end of the year. Funding is being provided in 2008 to allocate an additional 100 Youthreach places</p>
<p>High Level Goal 4 Maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33%–35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate over the course of this Plan and review child income supports aimed at assisting children in families on low income.</p>	<p>Progress made towards the existing NAPS target for those relying on social welfare payments, which the parties agree remains valid and appropriate – i.e. that the combined value of child income support measures be set at 33-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate.</p>

8. Progress on NAPinclusion targets for Children

Department of Education & Science

Target	Progress
<p>In order to meet high level Goal 1, the Early Childhood Education measure under the DEIS Action Plan will be extended to the urban primary school communities with the most immediate and pressing needs by 2010. This measure will continue to be extended to encompass the remaining schools in the urban primary strand of DEIS after 2010.</p>	<p>Analysis of Band 1 Urban DEIS schools with an intake of junior infants has been completed. The analysis showed that in over 90% of Junior Infant classes, some of the children had attended a pre-school service.</p> <p>A further analysis has looked at how schools could be clustered and the different models for implementing the Early Education strand of DEIS.</p> <p>These recommendations are currently being analysed in the Department of Education and Science.</p>
<p>To help further address absenteeism, early school leaving, behavioural problems and special needs, an additional 100 posts will be provided for the National Educational Welfare Board and the National Educational Psychological Service by 2009.</p>	<p>15 posts have been sanctioned under Phase 1 of <i>Towards 2016</i> for the NEWB (12 have been filled to date).</p> <p>31 posts have been sanctioned for NEPS and the recruitment process is underway.</p>
<p>Support for the effective integration of migrant children at both primary and second-level will be enhanced through the provision of an extra 550 teachers for language supports by 2009 and the removal of the current limit of two additional teachers per school. Some €637 million will be available by 2013 for teachers for language supports to assist children from non-English speaking backgrounds.</p>	<p>Currently, there are just under 2000 language support teacher posts in primary and post primary schools. In addition the limit of two additional teachers per school has been lifted.</p> <p>Integration of International Children</p> <p>In 2007, the limit of two language support teachers per school was lifted and the provision of language support was extended beyond two years, where a specific request is made.</p>

Target	Progress
<p>Young people enrolled in Youthreach centres throughout the country need additional supports to develop skills which will ensure they can reach their full potential socially, personally, educationally and economically. Some €2 million is to be allocated in 2007 to 20 existing Youthreach Centres to address the special educational needs of students aged 15-20 years. Consideration will be given to extending the arrangement to all Youthreach Centres following an evaluation.</p>	<p>The additional €2 million has been allocated and the Special Educational Needs Initiative is being implemented in 20 Youthreach Centres.</p> <p>The evaluation of the SENI is ongoing and consideration is still being given to extending the SENI.</p>
<p>The 475 schools in the DEIS action plan not benefiting from the school meals programme will be targeted to increase participation and the current number of participating schools will be increased by 215, by the end of 2007. Additional funding of €3 million has been provided for this programme in 2007.</p>	<p>Schools Meal Programme*</p> <p>Demand on the Schools Meal Programme exceeded expectation and total expenditure in 2007 was approximately €27m. By end 2007, 185,000 pupils from 1,900 schools benefited from the School Meals Programme, including pupils from almost 700 DEIS schools. A further tranche of DEIS schools will be included in the scheme during 2008. Expenditure on the scheme will be in the region of €32m in 2008.</p> <p>*this target is the responsibility of the Dept of Social and Family Affairs.</p>
<p>The majority of the recommendations of the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, mindful of the Survey of Traveller Education Provision, will be implemented between 2007 and 2011.</p>	<p>The Traveller Implementation Group (TIG) was established in late 2006 to progress the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy.</p> <p>It remains the objective of TIG to implement the majority of the recommendations in the Report by 2011.</p>
<p>Segregated provision at primary and post-primary level will be phased out to ensure that Travellers are integrated into mainstream schools by 2009.</p>	<p>Though progress has been made in phasing out segregation, it may not be possible to integrate all traveller children into mainstream education by the deadline proposed (2009) in the Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy.</p>

	<p>The closure dates for remaining JECS in Milltown, Athlone and Clonshaugh and the Wicklow Travellers' Primary School (St. Kieran's) have yet to be negotiated with VECs, School BoMs and other partners etc. A crucial date yet to be determined is when 'the segregated providers' will cease to enrol new students.</p>
<p>Pre-schools for Travellers will be integrated over a longer period with current and new pre-school provision, so that young Travellers may experience an inclusive integrated education from an early age.</p>	<p>Government policy as set out in the 2006 Traveller Education Strategy is to phase out segregated pre-school provision over a 5–10 year period. That process has started with Traveller pre-schools closing down where there are alternative places available in pre-schools in the community or where the BoM of the pre-school consider that the pre-school is no longer viable. A further 6 or 7 pre-schools are due to close in 2008.</p> <p>Dormant Accounts funding is being made available to encourage the enrolment and retention of Traveller Children in community or private pre-schools and to support pre-schools with the integration of Traveller children. Full details of how the scheme will operate will be available by June 2008.</p>
<p>An education strategy for all children in high support, special care and Children Detention Schools is being prepared to provide a continuum of education and training opportunities for these children before, during and after any periods in special care or detention.</p>	
<p>Department of Social and Family Affairs The review of child income supports by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, informed by the NESC study on a second tier child income support, will be completed in 2007.</p>	<p>Work is ongoing. A detailed analysis of recipients of Family Income Supplement is almost complete, while a project on FIS take-up levels has commenced.</p>

9. Key Developments relating to Children (reported in the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010)

Addressing the challenge of reducing child poverty involves a two-fold approach, which will take account of the practical implications of the diversity of children:

- (i) Further development of coordinated, integrated and targeted policies and services designed to lift households with children out of poverty (to be addressed mainly under the other three priorities), and
- (ii) A range of services and supports specifically targeted at vulnerable children, to bridge gaps in their development compared to children generally.

The main policy measures being prioritised to achieve the goal of reducing child poverty are:

Early Childhood Care and Development

A National Childcare Strategy has been designed to provide for early childhood development and care. It contains policy measures that will apply over the period 2006 to 2010.

The early childhood education needs of children from areas of acute economic and social disadvantage are being targeted under Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan for educational inclusion. Within DEIS the commitment given to Early Years education is that 'The Department will work in partnership with other Departments and agencies to complement and add value to existing childcare programmes in disadvantaged communities, with a view to ensuring that the overall care and education needs of the children concerned are met in an integrated manner.' The model of intervention proposed is being finalised. Part of this plan concentrates on early education for children who will subsequently attend urban primary schools serving the most disadvantaged communities.

The National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP) has been incorporated into the Social Inclusion Programme of the NDP. It will be rolled-out over the course of the Plan. A review of the NCIP 2006-2010 will be undertaken prior to its conclusion in consultation with the social partners. This will assess the progress made to date to address childcare needs with a view to developing new policy responses and successor programme(s) appropriate to emerging needs in childcare.

Improving Education Outcomes for Children

Under the DEIS action plan, supports to both primary and second-level schools include:

- additional capitation allocation based on level of disadvantage;
- access to School Meals Programme and funding for School Books Grant Scheme commensurate to level of disadvantage;
- access to Home/School/Community Liaison services;
- access to a range of supports under the School Completion Programme.

Improving Health Outcomes for Children

Areas targeted for tangible improvement include prevention, early intervention and treatment services within the health sector, food, the environment and lifestyle related risk factors. The NAPinclusion 2007-2016 contains a number of targets aimed at providing access to a healthy and affordable diet. Commitments in relation to food and nutrition include a National Nutrition Policy to address children's food poverty and obesity. This will be launched shortly by the Department of Health and Children. The Department of Health and Children has also been working closely with the Department of Education and Science to develop appropriate guidelines on nutrition for post-primary schools. These guidelines will be launched in the near future and will build on work to date in this area in the pre-school and primary school settings.

It is a criterion of the school meals schemes for children in disadvantaged areas funded by the Department of Social and Family Affairs that funding is used for healthy, nutritious food only and schools are encouraged to include fruit with each meal. In addition, the Department is involved with a Healthy Food for All initiative to develop a code of best practice for school meals.

Income Support for Children

The policy focus is to substantially increase income support payments targeted at children and to structure the payments to remove employment disincentives for parents and the key specific measures are outlined in Annex 2.3.

Child income supports which avoid employment disincentives are being reviewed as a priority and the report is due to be completed by end 2008. The review will be informed by a National Economic and Social Council (NESC) study on a second tier child income support. It will include a study of the operation of the Family Income Supplement (FIS) and the still relatively low, but increasing take-up of benefits under the scheme. The feasibility of the introduction of a second tier child income supplement in place of the FIS and the Child Dependent Allowances is also a key feature of the review.

Children and their Families

Child well-being is crucially dependent on the family. A key priority is to strengthen the system of supports available to families with children through the following:

- The development and delivery of family support initiatives to strengthen child welfare and protection services;
- Strengthening services under the Teen Parent Support Initiative, which supports teen parents during pregnancy until their child reaches two years of age; and
- Implementing the Youth Homelessness Strategy with the objective of reducing and, if possible, eliminating youth homelessness through preventative strategies.

The Children Act 2001 was commenced in full in 2007. The Act is a major piece of legislation which provides a new framework for the development of the juvenile justice system and makes provision for addressing the needs of out-of-control non-offending children, who have been appearing in the High Court in recent times.

Growing Up in Ireland: The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (NLSCI) is the most significant study of its kind to be undertaken in this country. 10,000 infants aged 9 months and 8,000 children aged nine are being recruited to participate in this study and the initial contract, spanning almost seven years, will facilitate two major data collection sweeps for both cohorts.

Coordination Arrangements

Special arrangements are now in place to facilitate new and more integrated ways of designing and delivering services for children. These are

- Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA)
- Irish Youth Justice Service
- Integrated Services and Interventions for Children at Local Level

Gender Perspective and Wider Equal Opportunities

The gender perspective highlights the following. A much higher proportion of boys (15.6%) leave school early than girls (9%) (2006). This is reflected later in relation to low educational attainment, where the rates for males are higher across all age groups than for females. The development of policies for early childhood education and for improving educational outcomes are more generally for children under 15 and reflect the reality and the diversity that goes beyond gender.

Indicators and Monitoring Arrangements

Children up to age 15 are identified as a group in relation to the main poverty indicators and progress in reducing child poverty will be regularly monitored by the Office for Social Inclusion. Other indicators used will include those on early school leavers, literacy and educational attainment which will be monitored by the Department of Education and Science.

Resources Allocation

The NCIP was allocated a provisional budget of €575 million. This forms part of the overall National Childcare Strategy which is expected to involve the spending of €2.65 billion between 2006 and 2010. Spending on child income support in 2008 is estimated at over €3.1 billion.

10. Budget 2009 Update

This Government remains committed to delivering on its commitments in the NAPinclusion, as resources permit. Even in these difficult economic times, the Government has prioritised delivering real increases in social welfare payments. The Budget provides for increases of between 3 per cent and 3.8 per cent in the basic rates next year, ahead of the projected rate of inflation for 2009, which is 2.5%. Priority will continue to be given to ensuring that the most vulnerable groups in our society are protected in the current difficult economic conditions in line with the objectives of the NAPinclusion, although the pace of progress will be slower until economic conditions improve.

- **General:** Social welfare expenditure has increased substantially since 1997 when spending was €5.7 billion to €17 billion in 2008. Next year total expenditure will be €19.6 billion. This represents an increase of €2.6 billion or 15.5%.
- Despite the current economic difficulties, the Government has ensured that increases in the basic rates of social welfare payments will be ahead of the projected rate of inflation and in line with the wage increases agreed by the social partners in the 2nd phase of the National Pay Agreement. As a result, the real value of social welfare payments will be maintained. This increased provision for social welfare is an unambiguous statement of the Government's intent to protect the vulnerable and less well-off in society.
- The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education will be closed. The work of ensuring quality education provision within pre-school services will be led by the Early Years Education Policy Unit of the Department within the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

- State investment in early education provision has taken place through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme and the National Childcare Investment Programme. The Department of Education and Science has concentrated on the quality dimensions of early childhood education with the publication of *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and an Early Learning Curriculum. The closure of the Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education does not signal the cessation of work in the area of early childhood education policy. It is envisaged that 2 former CECDE staff will be contracted to work within the Department on the implementation of *Síolta* and on improving quality provision within early childhood settings.
- The early childhood education component of the DEIS programme was not sanctioned and will not now be implemented in any pre-schools in DEIS areas.

11. Details of relevant websites where further information is available in relation to the above

Office for Social Inclusion
www.socialinclusion.ie

Department of the Taoiseach
(*Towards 2016* and New Programme for Government)
www.taoiseach.gov.ie

National Development Plan
www.ndp.ie

Workshop on Facilitating Employment Participation for those Vulnerable to Exclusion from the Labour Market

The Note includes information on:

- Social inclusion strategies which have been put in place since last year's Forum;
- The overall Vision for People of Working Age as set out in *Towards 2016*, the social partnership agreement reached in June 2006;
- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016;
- High Level Goals in the NAPinclusion relating to People of Working Age;
- Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006–2007;
- Key developments (reported in annual Social Inclusion Report);
- Progress on High Level Goals;
- Progress on detailed NAPinclusion targets;
- Key Developments relating to People of Working Age (reported in the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010);
- Budget 2009 Update;
- Details of relevant websites where further information is available in relation to the above.

1. New Strategies for Social Inclusion

Since the last Forum took place, the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSSPI) was submitted to the European Commission in October 2008. The NSSPI has the following four social inclusion priority policy objectives:

- Child Poverty
- Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities (Activation Measures)
- Access to Quality Services
- Integration of our Migrant Population.

Objective 2 relates to activation measures, with a particular focus on activation measures for lone parents and people with disabilities.

2. *Towards 2016*

2.1 Vision for People of Working Age

The vision as set out in *Towards 2016* for people of working age is of an Ireland where all people of working age have sufficient income and opportunity to participate as fully as possible in economic and social life and where all individuals and their families are supported by a range of quality public services to enhance their quality of life and well-being.

To achieve this vision, the Government and social partners have pledged to work together over the next ten years towards the following long-term goals for people of working age:

- Every person of working age should be encouraged and supported to participate fully in social, civic and economic life;
- Every person of working age would have access to lifelong learning, a sense of personal security in a changing work environment and an opportunity to balance work and family commitments consistent with business needs;
- Every person of working age would have an income level to sustain an acceptable standard of living and to enable them to provide for an adequate income in retirement;
- Every person of working age on welfare will have access to supports towards progression and inclusion, access to quality work and learning opportunities, encouraging a greater degree of self-reliance and self-sufficiency;
- Every person, irrespective of background or gender, would enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination;
- Every family would have access to health and social care, affordable accommodation appropriate to their needs and a well functioning public transport system;
- Every person with caring responsibilities would have access to appropriate supports to enable them to meet these responsibilities alongside employment and other commitments.

The *Towards 2016* Review and Transitional Agreement 2008-2009, published in September 2008, reaffirms the willingness of both the Government and the Social Partners to work together during this difficult period of economic transition and uncertainty to ensure that the vision and Goals set down in *Towards 2016* can still be achieved.

3. National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016

The NAPinclusion, which was published in February 2007, sets out a wide-ranging and comprehensive programme of action to address poverty and social exclusion. The Plan is intended to set out a coherent and comprehensive approach for the next ten years using a lifecycle approach, as set out by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in its report, *The Developmental Welfare State*, and adopted by the national partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. The lifecycle approach places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery by assessing the risks facing him or her and the supports available at key stages of the lifecycle.

These key lifecycle groups are: Children; People of Working Age; Older People and People with Disabilities; and their Communities. The adoption of the lifecycle approach offers a comprehensive framework for implementing a streamlined, cross-cutting and visible approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

To ensure that a decisive impact on poverty is made, the Government believes that significant interventions are required to prioritise a small number of high level goals. These targeted actions and interventions are designed to mobilise resources to address long-standing and serious social deficits with the ultimate aim of achieving the objective of reducing consistent poverty.

The overall goal of the NAPinclusion is:

To reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition.

Within each section of the lifecycle, a number of high level goals are being prioritised to achieve this overall goal. These are detailed below for people of working age.

4. High Level Goals in the NAPinclusion

4.1 People of Working Age

Given the key role that employment plays in combating poverty and social exclusion, the main high level goals for this life stage aim to facilitate those who are furthest from the labour market by providing them with the supports necessary to take up employment. For those outside the labour force, it is important that income supports are provided to sustain an acceptable standard of living. These two aspects are covered as follows:

Goal 5: Employment and Participation

Introduce an active case management approach that will support those on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment. The target is to support 50,000 such people, including lone parents and the long-term unemployed, with an overall aim of reducing by 20% the number of those whose total income is derived from long-term social welfare payments by 2016. This target will be reviewed in the light of experience.

Goal 6: Income Support

Maintain the relative value of the lowest social welfare rate at least at €185.80, in 2007 terms, over the course of this Plan, subject to available resources.

4.2 Targets and actions

These high level goals are accompanied by over 150 more detailed targets and actions across all stages of the lifecycle. The Plan contains twenty-eight further targets and actions relating to people of working age, covering issues such as literacy, second chance education and equality. In addition, a number of cross-cutting targets in the Communities chapter of the NAPinclusion will impact on people of working age.

A copy of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion is available from the Office for Social Inclusion at (01) 7043851 or on our website at www.socialinclusion.ie

5. Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006-2007

As part of a more streamlined and efficient monitoring and reporting process agreed in the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, the Office for Social Inclusion has been given an expanded role to coordinate and prepare an annual Social Inclusion Report.

The annual report: reviews each stage of the lifecycle; provides a detailed assessment of progress towards set targets; identifies new issues arising or issues that might benefit from a more co-ordinated, joined-up approach; and reports on stakeholders' views emerging from various fora. The report also covers the social inclusion elements of *Towards 2016* and the NDP, ensuring that the reporting processes for all three strategies are streamlined.

6. Key developments

(reported in annual Social Inclusion Report)

6.1 National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP)

The NDP commits to investment of some €5.7 billion in the people of working age programmes over the period 2007-2013 which will be directed towards education, training and justice programmes for this group. In addition to this investment under the Social Inclusion Priority of the NDP, some €7.7 billion has been allocated under the Human Capital Priority for training and supports to groups outside the labour market and training and upskilling for people in employment.

6.2 Programme for Government

The Programme for Government 2007 contains commitments which will benefit people of working age including PRSI reform, upskilling of low-skilled workers, adult education, improved opportunities in further and higher education with a special focus on disadvantaged areas, a range of reforms for lone parents and improvements in GP and Medical Card eligibility.

6.3 National Women's Strategy 2007–2016

The National Women's Strategy was launched by An Taoiseach in April, 2007. This "all of Government" Strategy aims to achieve "an Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life".

In fostering the achievement of this vision, the Strategy aims to be comprehensive and contains twenty key objectives and over two hundred planned actions. These objectives and actions have been clustered together under the following three key themes:

- Equalising socio-economic opportunity for women;
- Ensuring the wellbeing of women; and
- Engaging women as equal and active citizens.

The NDP details a package of €128 million to implement the National Women's Strategy and to fund a second programme of positive actions under the Equality for Women Measure. Some of the funding under the Equality for Women Measure will focus on women from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities.

7. Progress on High Level Goals

Goal 5: Employment and Participation

This goal is being pursued on a cross-Departmental basis and progress has been reported as follows:

- The national target within FÁS for 2008 is to increase participation and engagement of target groups (refugees, people in receipt of one-parent allowance, Travellers, people with a disability and women returners) within FÁS programmes and services by 2%, using 2006 data as a baseline.
- The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has established a Consultative Forum on an employment strategy which includes representatives from Government Departments, social partners, and the National Disability Strategy Stakeholder Monitoring Group. It provides a channel for members to consider strategic issues that impact on the lives of people with disabilities, with regard to the delivery of vocational training and employment services. The Forum will consider issues around job retention, job supports and job preparation.

- The need for conducting a systematic review of current job retention and return to work practice following a disability acquired in the workplace has been identified by the Consultative Forum as a key strategic element of a comprehensive employment strategy. WRC Social and Economic Consultants have been commissioned by the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment to carry out the review.
- A proposal submitted by the Department of Social and Family Affairs to the ESF for a cross-agency programme to develop and assess new approaches to promoting participation in the economy on the part of people with disabilities has been accepted. The initiative will concentrate on people with disabilities who are of working age and in receipt of a social welfare disability payment but who are not progressing into or within employment, accessing training, education or other progression opportunities.
- A High Level Group jointly chaired by the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and the Department of Social and Family Affairs and with FÁS representation has been convened to drive the activation process forward.
- A Social Partners' Group on Activation for People of Working Age has been established. The process of implementing a wider activation agenda under the NDP is currently taking place in the Department of Social and Family Affairs. In addition funding under the ESF has been secured to undertake specific projects to support the progression of people with disabilities to social and economic activity.
- Under the *Towards 2016* Review and Transitional Agreement 2008-2009, a High Level Group comprising Social Partners and key Government Departments will be established to address labour market and related issues, in particular increases in unemployment and the position of people outside the workforce.

Goal 6: Income Support

The Department of Social and Family Affairs reported that:

Budget 2009 provided for an increase of €6.50 per week in the personal rate payable to recipients of the various social welfare schemes for persons of working age. This brings the level of the lowest rate of social welfare payment to €204.30 per week, thereby ensuring that the value of this rate was maintained in line with the commitment in the NAPinclusion.

8. Progress on detailed NAP inclusion targets

Target	Progress
<p>The Rural Social Scheme (RSS) allows low-income farmers and fishermen to earn a supplementary income while, at the same time, benefiting rural communities by maintaining and improving local amenities and facilities. Expenditure of some EUR214 million will be provided between 2007 and 2013 to benefit some 2,600 households. It is an aim of the scheme that over the medium-term all participants will be facilitated with their preferences with regard to both location and type of work.</p>	<p>There are currently 2,600 households participating in the scheme, with 130 supervisors, which is consistent with the commitment in the Programme for Government to expand the scheme.</p> <p>Total funding of €49.323m is available to the Rural Social Scheme for 2008, which includes €0.5m towards capital funding.</p>
<p>To achieve and surpass the Lisbon targets: to increase the overall employment rate to 70% by 2010; to continue to increase the female employment rate above 60%; and to continue to increase the employment rate of older workers* above 50%.</p> <p>* age 55-64</p>	<p><i>Employment rates Q2 2008:</i></p> <p>Overall: 68.1% Female: 60.5% Older Workers: 53.9% (age 55-64) Source: CSO, QNHS.</p>
<p>The extension of the Employment Action Plan process to those who are three months unemployed (previous threshold was six months) and those who are aged 55-64 will enable the provision of increased and earlier engagement.</p>	<p>Referral under the Employment Action Plan process at 3 months commenced from mid-October 2006. This is in line with a commitment in <i>Towards 2016</i>. In addition the EAP was extended in July 2006 to those aged 55 and under 64 years.</p>

Target	Progress
<p>The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment will invest some €2.8 billion between 2007-2013 to improve training for people in employment, to help upskill those who may be affected by industrial restructuring, to improve and enlarge the apprenticeship system and to provide progression opportunities for school leavers.</p>	<p>DETE has increased the resources spent in upskilling those in employment from €55m in 2006 to €77m in 2008. It is expected that this investment, which is channelled primarily through FÁS and Skillnets, will allow approximately 85,000 people in employment to benefit from publicly funded training this year. A total of €130.4 million will be invested in the apprenticeship system this year. The additional €15 million that was allocated to the apprenticeship system in 2007 to expand capacity has now come on-stream and it is expected that this will provide spaces for approximately 900 apprentices.</p>
<p>A National Skills Strategy will be implemented to increase the skills levels of those at work, based on the Forfás Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Study.</p>	<p>The National Skills Strategy was published by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs last year. The focus has now turned to implementing the vision and objectives as contained in the Expert Group study. An InterDepartmental Committee has been established consisting of senior officials from the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Education and Science, and Finance. The Committee will be chaired by Minister of State Seán Haughey T.D. The Committee will be responsible for drafting an implementation plan and overseeing its activation. The Committee met for the first time on 23 April 2008. It established a Senior Officials Group, which will comprise officials from these three Departments, and which will meet on a more frequent basis than the Committee. It will prepare documents for the consideration and approval of the Committee. The Group met for the first time on 8 May.</p>
<p>The Workplace Basic Education Fund will register 2,000 learners during the period 2007-2010.</p>	<p>Last year a total of 2,054 people received training from the Workplace Basic Education Fund. It is expected that given that the budget was increased by 50% in 2007 and now totals €3.11 million that the fund is on track to achieve this target.</p>
<p>The proportion of the population aged 16-64 with restricted literacy will be reduced to between 10%-15% by 2016, from the level of 25% found in 1997 (restricted literacy being defined as Level I on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) scale, or equivalent).</p>	<p>Funding for 3,000 adult literacy places was provided in 2007 under the 'Towards 2016' Social Partnership Agreement. In 2007, over 44,000 learners availed of adult literacy tuition. A provision of €1 million was made for an additional 500 places in 2008. This expansion did not take place as the Department decided to focus on maintaining the existing level of service due to the downturn in the economy. The remaining 3,500 places, provided under "Towards 2016", due to be funded in 2009 will not be funded as the Department will continue to focus on maintaining the existing level of service next year.</p> <p>In January 2008, the Department decided to participate in the initial developmental phase of the OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) which is an international survey of literacy and numeracy due to be undertaken in the years 2010/13. The Department attended two meetings of the development phase to date in 2008 and will attend a third in early November.</p>

<p>As part of the general national literacy service, the Vocational Education Committees will provide an additional 7,000 places by 2009, from the current level of 35,000 participants annually. There will be a particular focus on increasing the number of migrants receiving an English language service.</p>	<p>In 2008, additional funding of €1m was provided to expand the adult literacy service by a further 500 places and the service is due to be expanded by a further 3,500 places under “Towards 2016” by the end of 2009.</p> <p>The expansion in 2008 and next year will not be funded as the Department will continue to focus on maintaining the existing level of service.</p>
<p>A family literacy project is also being put in place under the DEIS action plan.</p>	<p>In 2007, its initial phase, the project was piloted in 7 projects. Funding of €140,000 was provided. In 2008, an applications process was held, 12 new projects and five existing projects from the first round have recently been approved for funding, totalling €200,000.</p>
<p>The Back to Education Initiative, providing support for adults who did not complete upper second-level schooling, will be expanded by an additional 2,000 places by 2009, in addition to the 8,000 places currently provided.</p>	<p>The number of BTEI places was expanded by 1,000 in 2007 to bring the total number of places available to 9,000. Funding is being made available for a further 500 places in 2008 to bring the total number of BTEI places to 9,500.</p> <p>As part of a prioritised approach to expenditure in 2009, it was necessary to reduce the number of places on the BTEI by 500, returning it to the 2007 level of 9,000. This reduction should be seen in the context of the significant increase in expenditure on the BTEI in the last five years, up from €6m in 2002 to €18m in 2007.</p>
<p>In consultation with the Department of Education and Science, the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education will set goals and targets and develop baseline data for the participation of students with a disability, mature students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including Travellers and other minorities over the period 2007-2013. Grant support to students will be provided through the Fund for Students with a Disability, the Student Assistance Fund, the Millennium Partnership Fund, and the financial resources of higher education institutions.</p>	<p>The National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education in consultation with the Department of Education is in the process of allocating funding under the Dormant Accounts Fund (education disadvantage strand) for access-based initiatives in the Institutes of Technology to enhance the support mechanism for disadvantaged students.</p> <p>In January 2008, the Higher Education Authority (HEA) launched a website www.studentfinance.ie, which is a comprehensive, user-friendly guide to student grants and supports.</p> <p>A new National Action Plan for equity of access to higher education for 2008-13 was launched in July 2008. Among the targets were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — All socio-economic groups will have entry rates of at least 54 per cent by 2020 (‘Non-manual’ group at 27 per cent and ‘Semi-skilled and unskilled manual’ group at 33 per cent in 2004).

Target	Progress
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Mature students will comprise at least 20 per cent of total full-time entrants by 2013 (13 per cent in 2006). — Mature students will comprise 27 per cent of all (full-time and part-time) entrants by 2013 (18 per cent in 2006). — Non-standard entry routes to higher education will be developed so that they account for 30 per cent of all entrants by 2013 (estimated at 24 per cent in 2006). — Ireland will reach EU average levels for lifelong learning by 2010 and will move towards the top quartile of EU countries by 2013. — The number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in higher education will be doubled by 2013.
<p>Positive actions will be set out in the forthcoming National Women's Strategy 2007-2015 to further increase the number of women in the labour market, to foster the advancement of women in the workplace and to address the gender pay gap.</p>	<p>The National Women's Strategy was launched by An Taoiseach in April, 2007. This 'all of Government' strategy aims to achieve "an Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life".</p> <p>In fostering the achievement of this vision, the strategy aims to be comprehensive and contains twenty key objectives and over two hundred planned actions. These objectives and actions have been clustered together under the following three key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Equalising socio-economic opportunity for women; — Ensuring the well-being of women; and — Engaging women as equal and active citizens. <p>A funding package of approximately €59 million has been allocated under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 to implement the National Women's Strategy.</p> <p>Additional funding has been provided under the NDP for a second programme of positive actions under the Equality for Women Measure 2008-2013. Some of the funding under the Equality for Women Measure will focus on women from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities.</p>

The Probation Service will continue to advance initiatives designed to address patterns of criminal behaviour associated with social exclusion, with an emphasis on restorative justice initiatives. In particular, there will be support to extend the Linkage Programme to increase the number of offenders successfully placed in employment, education or Community Employment schemes. Referrals by the Probation Service to the Linkage Programme are expected to result in a rise from 614 placements in 2005 to 900 placements a year by 2016.

Between February, 2000 and December 2006 the Linkage Programmes placed 2,364 persons referred through the Probation Service who engaged with the Training and Employment Officers. In the same period there were 1,290 referrals to the Linkage Programme from prisons.

In 2008 the Probation service will continue to advance initiatives to address offending behaviour. Funding has been provided by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform through the Probation Service to the Linkage Programme to engage additional Training and Employment Officers in the community, to further enhance the important and valuable work of the Linkage Programme. By the end of 2008, Linkage will have 24 staff comprising one Training and Employment manager, two assistant Training and Employment managers, 19 Training and Employment Officers and two administration assistants. The Probation Service is on schedule to fulfil its target.

The Department through the Probation Service also provides funding to two Restorative Justice projects, one in Tallaght and one in Nenagh, Co Tipperary. Further developments in this area will be informed by the findings of the Commission on Restorative Justice.

9. Key Developments relating to People of Working Age (Reported in the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008 – 2010)

Key Challenges – Priority Policy Objectives and Targets.

Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities:

The working age group account for most of the population and overall are economically better off. As a result of the high levels of economic growth in Ireland since the early 1990s there has been a major reduction in unemployment both short-term and long-term. A considerably higher proportion are in well paid jobs and a major increase in female participation in the workforce has led to more two income households. The substantial improvement in incomes and standards of living among those of working age, however, has been uneven. The standard of living of certain groups, although benefiting from significantly improved social provision, have not kept pace with that of the population generally. Those most vulnerable include those who are jobless or in low income employment, mainly due to family responsibilities or disabilities, and the long-term unemployed. Many of these households have children. Social protection alone, including income support, is not sufficient to enable them keep pace with the scale of improving living standards. For that reason facilitating access to quality work and learning opportunities with appropriate incentives is a major priority. This involves:

- (i) active engagement with the unemployed/inactive to achieve increased employment participation, and
- (ii) improving access to learning opportunities.

These measures are informed by Ireland's National Reform Programme. Action under this policy objective is informed by the National Skills Strategy, which was published by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs in 2007.

Priority is being given in Ireland's labour market schemes to the long-term unemployed, those unemployed aged 15–24, 'non-progression ready' unemployed, and other groups including lone parents, Travellers, people with disabilities and others that are marginalised from the labour market¹¹.

¹¹ The main such labour market schemes are:

- the National Employment Service and the Local Employment Services
- the National Employment Action Plan (including the Prevention and Activation and Expanding the Workforce Programmes), High Supports, Bridging/Foundation and Pathways to Employment processes, and
- other training and employment programmes.

Increasing employment participation among marginalised groups remains a key priority. This involves ensuring all people of working age have sufficient incomes and opportunity to participate fully in economic and social life, and improving access to quality learning opportunities for those in low-skilled employment. A number of strategic responses have been developed focusing on lone parents, people with disabilities, the unemployed, workers on low incomes, Travellers, the homeless, and migrants and ethnic minority groups and include:

- Removal, as far as practicable, of barriers to employment, to education and training, and to key services; and the
- Introduction of a new active case management approach that will support those on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment.

Women disproportionately face barriers to labour market participation, especially lone mothers and mothers of larger families. The labour market participation of lone mothers is similar to those who are married, but their quality of employment is on average poorer, a higher proportion are unemployed, and have low education and skill levels. The employment participation rates among older women are also lower than for men, largely as a result of lower female participation in the past due to family responsibilities.

The employment participation rate for people with disabilities is low. According to the most recent Census, 9.3% of the total population had a disability in 2006, but they represented just 4 per cent of all persons at work. Of the 114,749 males age 15 to 64 years with a disability, 53,244 reported being in the labour force, a participation rate of 46.4 per cent. In comparison, of the 107,523 females aged 15 to 64 with a disability, 37,300 reported being in the labour force, a participation rate of 34.7%. These figures compare with overall participation rates of 81% for males and 62% for females respectively. Other groups that experience discrimination are Travellers, people with disabilities, gay and lesbian people and older people.

Overall equality mainstreaming within labour market services is intended to play an important role in ensuring that labour market policy and provision take account of diversity and promote equality.

The main focus of the new policies is to create more equal opportunities by removing disincentives to employment currently in social protection and other systems, and facilitating employment take-up through provision for childcare, care of older family members and those with disabilities, education and training, job search and job placement.

Under the Social and Economic Participation Programme, the Department of Social and Family Affairs is in the process of developing a wider activation agenda. This approach involves treating all people of working age in a similar way, whether they are unemployed, lone parents, people with a disability or in some other category. The aim is to facilitate progression regardless of the circumstances that led the person to require income maintenance. It also builds on the Department's existing experience and income maintenance relationship with the people concerned, in co-operation with other relevant service providers such as FÁS (the national training agency), Vocational Education Committees (VECs), Health Service Executive (HSE) and other local agencies. A High Level Group jointly chaired by these Departments and including representatives of the National Training Authority (FÁS) has been convened to drive the activation process forward.

Targets

The target for employment and participation is to support 50,000 such people, including lone parents and the long-term unemployed, with an overall aim of reducing by 20% the number of those whose total income is derived from long-term social welfare payments by 2016. The general aim in the case of lone parents and other parents excluded from the workforce is to significantly increase participation, training and quality of employment.

The specific measures for priority groups currently being considered by Government are as follows:

Lone Parents

Proposals in a recent Discussion Paper being considered include:

- reforming income supports for lone parents and other low income families to remove barriers and create incentives to employment participation;
- expanded availability and range of education and training opportunities for lone parents; (see below section on lifelong learning);
- significantly improved access to childcare;
- extension of the National Employment Action Plan to lone parents and other parents on low income. This includes attaching conditions to receipt of the new payment, with progressive activation as the child gets older; and
- increased funding for the Community Services programme, which targets lone parents among others. The objective of this programme is to support local community activity to address disadvantage, while providing employment opportunities for priority target groups such as lone parents. Some €52 million was provided for the programme in 2007 and this will rise to €72 million by 2009.

Persons with Disabilities

Promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the open labour market supported by enhanced vocational training, employment programmes and further development of supports. Accordingly, the following actions will be

progressed:

- Increase the employment of people with disabilities who do not have a difficulty in retaining a job. The immediate objective is to have an additional 7,000 of that cohort in employment by 2010. The longer term target is to raise the employment rate of people with disabilities from 37% to 45% by 2016, as measured by the Quarterly National Household Survey. The overall participation rate in education, training and employment will be increased to 50% by 2016.
- Targets will be reviewed in the light of experience and the availability of better data;
- By 2010, a comprehensive employment strategy for people with disabilities will be developed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. The Social and Economic Participation programme, being introduced by the Department of Social and Family Affairs, will also be of major importance for this group;
- Proposals by the DSFA for a cross-agency programme to develop and assess new approaches to promoting participation in the economy on the part of people with disabilities have been accepted for ESF funding;
- The initiative will concentrate on people with disabilities who are of working age and in receipt of a social welfare disability payment but who are not progressing into or within employment, accessing training, education or other progression opportunities.

Lifelong Learning and access to quality work and learning opportunities

Policy measures will focus on:

- Low-skilled workers through enhancing opportunities to access education and training;
- Adults from disadvantaged communities, including those in rural areas, with particular emphasis on basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills;
- Providing guidance/counselling services to those on literacy programmes, language learning, the Back to Education Initiative and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme;
- Expanding the Back to Education Initiative to build on the adult literacy services, community education, Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Programmes, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and Post Leaving Certificate courses.

To this end the following actions are being progressed:

- The Workplace Basic Education Fund will register 2,000 learners during the period 2007-2010;
- Work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20-24 completing upper second level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013;

- Work to ensure that flexible learning opportunities are available to adults in disadvantaged communities to enable them to return to learning;
- Work to ensure that the Adult Education Guidance Initiative, AEGI, provides a guidance service to help adults to make informed educational, career and life choices throughout their lives;
- Provision of an additional 500 places under BTEI this year to build on the 1,000 places allocated in 2007;
- A further 1,000 Youthreach places will be provided by 2009, on top of the existing 2,700 places provided by Vocational Education Committees;
- The Back to Education Initiative, providing support for adults who did not complete upper second-level schooling, will be expanded by an additional 2,000 places by 2009, in addition to the 8,000 places currently provided;
- A National Skills Strategy was published in 2007 to increase the skills level of those at work, based on the Forfás Expert Group on Future Skills Needs Study. An InterDepartmental Committee has now been established consisting of senior officials from the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Education and Science, and Finance and will be responsible for drafting the implementation plan and overseeing its activation.

Childcare

A National Childcare Strategy has been designed to provide for early childhood development and care. It contains policy measures that will apply over the period 2006 to 2010.

The early childhood education needs of children from areas of acute economic and social disadvantage are being targeted under Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan for educational inclusion. Within DEIS the commitment given to Early Years education is that 'The Department will work in partnership with other Departments and agencies to complement and add value to existing childcare programmes in disadvantaged communities, with a view to ensuring that the overall care and education needs of the children concerned are met in an integrated manner.' The model of intervention proposed is being finalised. Part of this plan concentrates on early education for children who will subsequently attend urban primary schools serving the most disadvantaged communities.

The National Childcare Investment Programme 2006-2010 (NCIP) has been incorporated into the Social Inclusion Programme of the NDP. It will be rolled-out over the course of the Plan. A review of the NCIP 2006 -2010 will be undertaken prior to its conclusion in consultation with the social partners. This will assess the progress made to date to address childcare needs with a view to developing new policy responses and successor programme(s) appropriate to emerging needs in childcare.

The provision of quality childcare, and an increase in the number of childcare places (of all types) by 100,000, over the period to 2016 is a key target under both the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* and the NAPinclusion. The NCIP will create 50,000 of these places, including 10,000 pre-school (3-4 year olds) and 5,000 after-school places. By the end of December 2007, €134m in capital grants had been approved to childcare providers under NCIP. Capital grants totalling a further €39m and €4.7m were approved in January and April 2008 respectively. These approvals are expected to lead to the creation of almost 24,000 new childcare places as well as supporting nearly 6,000 existing places to further develop quality childcare provision. In addition the NCIP continues to support City and County Childcare Committees and the National Voluntary Childcare Organisations as part of its broader approach to developing the infrastructure for childcare.

Indicators and Monitoring Arrangements

A range of indicators will be used to monitor progress. These include consistent and 'at risk of poverty' rates broken down by gender, age, and household type. Other indicators include activity status, work intensity, long-term unemployment, jobless households, early school leavers, low literacy levels and low educational attainment.

The Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Social and Family Affairs monitor the plans, in liaison with the Office for Social Inclusion.

Resources Allocation

A total of €1 billion will be invested in the Post-Leaving Certificate sector over the period 2007-2013 to provide participants with specific vocational skills to enhance their prospects of securing employment and support progression to other studies.

Almost €4.9 billion is being allocated by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment over the period 2007-2013 to provide targeted training and supports to groups outside the labour market including the unemployed, people with disabilities, lone parents, Travellers and prisoners. This funding will also support the increased participation of women, older workers, part-time workers and migrants.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment will invest some €2.9 billion between 2007-2013 to improve training for people in employment, to help upskill those who may be affected by industrial restructuring, to improve and enlarge the apprenticeship system and to provide progression opportunities for school leavers.

The NCIP was allocated a provisional budget of €575 million. This forms part of the overall National Childcare Strategy which is expected to involve the spending of €2.65 billion between 2006 and 2010.

10. Budget 2009 Update

The Government remains committed to delivering on its commitments in the NAPinclusion, as resources permit. Even in these difficult economic times, the Government has prioritised delivering real increases in social welfare payments. The Budget provides for increases of between 3 per cent and 3.8 per cent in the basic rates next year, ahead of the projected rate of inflation for 2009, which is 2.5%. Priority will continue to be given to ensuring that the most vulnerable groups in our society are protected in the current difficult economic conditions in line with the objectives of the NAPinclusion, although the pace of progress will be slower until economic conditions improve.

11. Further information is available at the following websites

Further information is available at the following websites:

Office for Social Inclusion

www.socialinclusion.ie

Department of the Taoiseach

(Towards 2016 and New Programme for Government)

www.taoiseach.gov.ie

National Development Plan

www.ndp.ie

Workshop on Integrated Services for Older People

The Note includes information on:

- Recent Developments on Social Inclusion;
- The Vision for Older People as set out in *Towards 2016*, the social partnership agreement reached in June 2006;
- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016;
- High Level Goals in the NAPinclusion relating to Older People;
- Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006-2007;
- Key developments relating to Older People and People with Disabilities (reported in annual Social Inclusion Report);
- Progress on High Level Goals;
- Progress on NAPinclusion targets for Older People;
- Key developments relating to Older People (reported in the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010);
- Budget 2009 Update;
- Details of relevant websites where further information is available in relation to the above.

1. Recent Developments on Social Inclusion

The National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSSPI) was submitted to the European Commission in October 2008. The priority social inclusion policy objectives in the NSSPI are:

- Child Poverty
- Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities (Activation Measures)
- Access to Quality Services
- Integration of our Migrant Population

Objective 3 has a particular focus on older people and people with disabilities.

The material in this Note mainly covers the situation before the economic downturn.

2. *Towards 2016* Vision for Older People

The vision for older people set out in *Towards 2016* is that supports are provided, where necessary, to enable older people to maintain their health and well-being, as well as to live active and full lives, in an independent way in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

To achieve this vision, the Government and social partners in *Towards 2016* undertook to work together over the next ten years on long-term goals for older people. The context for these goals is the increased longevity, and the greater possibilities and expectations for quality of life of older people. The goals are:

- Every older person would be encouraged and supported to participate to the greatest extent possible in social and civic life;
- Every older person would have access to an income which is sufficient to sustain an acceptable standard of living;
- Every older person would have adequate support to enable them to remain living independently in their own homes for as long as possible. This will involve access to good quality services in the community, including: health, education, transport, housing and security, and;
- Every older person would, in conformity with their needs and conscious of the high level of disability and disabling conditions amongst a proportion of older people, have access to a spectrum of care services stretching from support for self-care through support for family and informal carers to formal care in the home, the community or in residential settings. Such care services should ensure the person has opportunities for civic and social engagement at community level.

The *Towards 2016* Review and Transitional Agreement 2008-2009, published in September 2008, reaffirms the willingness of both the Government and the Social Partners to work together during this difficult period of economic transition and uncertainty to ensure that the vision and Goals set down in *Towards 2016* can still be achieved.

3. National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016

The NAPinclusion, published in February 2007, sets out a wide-ranging and comprehensive programme of action to address poverty and social exclusion. It uses a lifecycle approach which places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery by assessing the risks facing him or her and the supports available at key stages of the lifecycle. The key lifecycle groups are: Children; People of Working Age; Older People, People with Disabilities; and their Communities. Adoption of the approach offers a comprehensive framework for implementing a streamlined, cross-cutting and visible approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

To ensure that a decisive impact on poverty is made, the Government believes that significant interventions are required to prioritise a small number of high level goals. These targeted actions and interventions are designed to mobilise resources to address long-standing and serious social deficits with the ultimate aim of achieving the objective of reducing consistent poverty.

The overall goal of this Plan is:

To reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition.

Twelve high level goals are being prioritised to achieve this overall goal. Two of the high level goals, directly relevant to older people, are set out as follows.

4. High Level Goals in the NAPinclusion relating to Older People

Community care services are essential to enable older people to maintain their health and wellbeing, in order to live active, full independent lives, at home for as long as possible. Income also has a key role to play in alleviating poverty in old age. Therefore, two of the twelve high level goals in the NAPinclusion relate to this life stage aimed at making a decisive impact on the lives of older people.

Goal 7: Community Care

Continue to increase investment in community care services for older people, including home care packages and enhanced day care services, to support them to live independently in the community for as long as possible; and

Goal 8: Income Support

Maintain a minimum payment rate of €200 per week, in 2007 terms, for all social welfare pensions over the course of this Plan and, if possible, having regard to available resources and the Government's commitment in *Towards 2016*, to enhance this provision. The overall pension structures and system to provide income supports for pensioners will be reviewed in the light of the forthcoming Green Paper on Pensions¹², to be finalised at end March 2007. This will review all the pillars of pension provision.

These high level goals are accompanied by over 150 more detailed targets and actions across all stages of the lifecycle. 18 of those targets and actions relate to services for older people including income supports, long-term care, housing and accommodation, education and employment, transport and participation and activation. In addition, a number of cross-cutting targets in the Communities chapter of the NAPinclusion will impact on older people and people with disabilities.

A copy of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion is available from the Office for Social Inclusion at (01) 704 3851 or on our website at www.socialinclusion.ie

¹² Green Paper on Pensions was launched on 17 October 2007

5. Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006-2007

As part of the monitoring and reporting process set out in the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, the Office for Social Inclusion is responsible for producing an annual Social Inclusion Report.

The first annual report under this commitment provided a detailed assessment of progress towards targets in the NAPinclusion and the social inclusion elements of *Towards 2016* and the NDP.

6. Key developments relating to Older People (reported in annual Social Inclusion Report)

6.1 National Development Plan 2007-2013

The NDP commits to investment of some €9.7 billion in the older people programme over the period 2007-2013. The focus of this investment will be on services which enable older people to live independently in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Funding will also be directed to residential care services.

6.2 Minister of State for Older People

The Government has appointed a Minister of State with specific responsibility for older people. Based in the Department of Health and Children, the new Minister of State, Ms. Maire Hctor, will also focus on issues relating to older people under the remit of the Departments of Social and Family Affairs and Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

6.3 Programme for Government 2007-2012

The Agreed Programme for Government, A Blueprint for Ireland's Future, envisages social welfare pensions increasing to €300 per week by 2012.

7. Progress on High Level Goals

Goal 7: Community Care

The Department of Health and Children has reported that:

- An investment of €120 million over the period 2006–2008 has resulted in over 4,700 care packages being available in 2008. These packages will benefit an estimated 11,000 clients this year.
- In 2008, approximately 12.2 million home help hours will be provided.
- A Steering Committee, comprising representatives of the Department of Health and Children, the HSE, and other relevant Departments was established in July 2007, and is progressing the evaluation process of the Home Care Packages.
- An extra €3.6 million has been allocated for day/respite care in 2008. This will allow over 1,200 new clients avail of respite care this year, and will bring the total projected day care provision in 2008 to over 21,300 places.

Goal 8: Income Support

The Department of Social and Family Affairs has reported that:

- From January 2008, the State Pension (Non-Contributory) personal rate of payment increased by €12 per week, bringing the weekly rate to €212;
- The State Pension (Contributory) personal rate of payment increased by €14 per week, bringing the weekly rate to €223.30;
- The Invalidity Pension personal rate of payment increased by €12 to €203.30 per week for Invalidity Pension recipients aged under 65 years;
- From January 2008 an increase of €12 to €197.80 per week benefited recipients of the following payments: Illness Benefit; Disability Allowance; Blind Pension; Injury Benefit and Incapacity Supplement;
- The Green Paper on Pensions was published on 17 October 2007. An extensive consultation process will now commence. The Government is committed to initiating and responding to the consultation by developing a framework that comprehensively addresses the pensions agenda over the longer-term. It is expected that this framework will be finalised by the end of 2008.

8. Progress on NAPinclusion targets for Older People

Target	Progress
<p>In relation to long-term residential care, €88 million has been provided for the cost of 2,300 additional public and private long-stay beds. This comprises €28 million for the full-year implementation of 1,050 beds provided in 2006; €32 million and €22 million in 2007 and 2008 respectively for the provision of an extra 1,250 beds; and €6 million to strengthen nursing home inspections.</p>	<p>Work is ongoing in relation to the provision of additional long-term residential bed capacity. To date, all additional private beds have been provided. Of the planned public provision, it is now anticipated that 147 beds will not be in place until 2009.</p>
<p>The Health Act 2006 provides for the establishment of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services within HIQA. The Chief Inspector will have statutory responsibility for inspecting and registering children's residential services, residential centres for people with disabilities, residential centres for older people and private nursing homes. The Chief Inspector will inspect these services against standards set by HIQA and regulations made by the Minister for Health and Children.</p>	<p>Completed. The Health Act was enacted in April 2007. HIQA was established on a statutory basis in May 2007. The Act provides for the registration and inspection of all nursing homes – public, private and voluntary. Inspections will be carried out by the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services, part of HIQA.</p>
<p>A total of €2 million has been allocated to the National Implementation Group on Elder Abuse to address the issue of elder abuse over 2006 and 2007. This is also being incorporated into professional training courses including gerontology courses. A review of Protecting Our Future will be carried out in 2007. It is expected that the review will consider issues not included in the original report on elder abuse including self-neglect and institutional abuse.</p>	<p>The HSE established an "Elder Abuse Sub Group on Awareness Raising and Media". The Group will propose a programme of awareness raising efforts targeting 1) health and social care staff across public, voluntary and private agencies and 2) the general public.</p> <p>Some preliminary work on financial abuse was circulated to all relevant Government Departments and the Irish Banking Federation for consideration.</p> <p>Organisations providing medical and nursing undergraduate and post-graduate courses have been contacted in relation to the inclusion of elder abuse as part of the curricula.</p> <p>Review still being examined with a view to expanding its terms.</p>

<p>Future Housing Action Plans will address special needs in a more strategic manner when the current plans come to an end in 2008.</p>	<p>Guidelines on the preparation of the next round of action plans are due to issue this summer. Current action plans end in December 2008.</p>
<p>From 2007 any amount of social welfare pension received by those over 65 years, in excess of the SWA rate, will be disregarded when determining entitlement to rent supplement.</p>	<p>This change came into effect in January 2007.</p>
<p>The earnings disregard for non-contributory social welfare pensions, introduced in 2006 to encourage recipients to take up or continue in employment, will be increased to €200 in 2007.</p>	<p>This change came into effect in January 2007.</p>
<p>The Disabled Persons, Essential Repairs, and Special Housing Aid for the Elderly grant schemes have been reviewed. Proposals to improve equity and targeting were announced in the Government's new Housing policy statement – Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities.</p>	<p>The Schemes were implemented in November 2007 and are being monitored to ensure effective targeting. An independent evaluation of the revised framework will be carried out following the first year of implementation.</p>
<p>Adequate central heating systems will be made available in all local authority rented dwellings provided for older people by the end of 2008.</p>	<p>Significant progress was made in implementing this scheme with some 5,000 installations to the end of 2007. This scheme will end in 2008.</p>

Target	Progress
<p>The continued participation of older people in the labour market will be encouraged and facilitated to meet the challenge of an ageing society. Training and advisory services, including those provided by FÁS, will assist older people who wish to return to or remain in the workplace. These services are being provided within FÁS' overall services, particularly through the preventative process and through training and upskilling.</p>	<p>Referral under the Employment Action Plan was extended in July 2006 to those aged 55 and under 64 years.</p>
<p>Services to provide enhanced home security, energy conservation and other measures for vulnerable older people will continue to be a priority activity within the Community Supports for Older People. It is intended to fund applications for some 5,000 people per year.</p>	<p>10,764 elderly persons assisted under the scheme, Community Supports for Older People. €3.6m expended under the scheme in 2007.</p> <p>€1.2m provided in first 3 months of 2008, providing assistance to in the region of 3,000 Older persons.</p>
<p>4 pilot Community Intervention Team projects were in place by the end of 2006. Based on progress, they will be rolled out in 2007 to other areas.</p>	<p>Four Community Intervention Teams were developed in 2006. Full implementation of services has commenced in each of the 4 HSE areas. 3,068 referrals were made in 2007.</p>

9. Key developments relating to Older People reported in NSSPI (the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010)

Transport

Accessibility of transport for older people and other vulnerable groups is vital in terms of accessing health services, social networks and for remaining active. Initiatives to address this issue include:

- A new Rural Transport Programme (RTP) was launched in February 2007. The target of the RTP is to develop community-based transport to redress social exclusion related to unmet needs for public transport in rural areas. Some €11 million was provided for the RTP in 2008, which will support the provision of improved and additional RTP services together with pilot cross-border rural community transport services at present under consideration in the North South Ministerial Council. It is planned that by end-2008, RTP Groups will be operational in every county and will be working towards maximising coverage in their operational areas;
- The NDP commits some €90 million to the RTP over its full term. Funding is also available to the RTP from the Department of Social and Family Affairs in respect of the Free Travel scheme and from other interests that support the initiative; and
- The All Ireland Free Travel Scheme for senior residents in all parts of the island, was introduced on foot of a commitment in the previous Programme for Government (2002–2007). The scheme enables seniors (over 66) resident in the Republic to travel free of charge on all bus and rail services in Northern Ireland (NI). Likewise, seniors (over 65) in NI can travel free of charge on bus, rail and ferry services participating in the Free Travel scheme in this State. This measure now benefits over 40,000 older people resident in the State who have received Senior Smartpass cards in the first year of the All Ireland Free Travel Scheme.

National Carers' Strategy

In December 2007 the Government agreed to the establishment of a working group to develop a National Carers' Strategy. That group, chaired by the Department of An Taoiseach was established in early 2008 and is now working on developing the strategy. The group includes officials from the Department of Social and Family Affairs (which provides the secretariat to the group); the Departments of Finance, Enterprise, Trade & Employment; Health and Children, as well as the HSE and FÁS. Other Departments and Agencies are also being consulted.

The focus of the strategy is on all informal and family carers in the community, not just those in receipt of a social welfare payment. The strategy will cover the period 2008 to 2016.

A carer's consultation meeting took place in January 2008 with representatives of 12 groups and 9 Government Departments and agencies in attendance. Key issues were recognition for carers and their work, accessing suitable health services, income support (including pensions) and access to training and employment. An update in relation to the strategy was provided to the social partners' Plenary session in February and the first of two consultation meetings was held in May 2008. In addition a public consultation process ran from March 2008 until April 2008.

Living Alone and/or Requiring Care

A majority of older people living alone or requiring care are women. Due to their greater longevity they can also be financially vulnerable. They may lack pension cover in their own right, as a result of on average lower employment participation and lower paid employment. In rural areas older men living alone are a particularly vulnerable group.

10. Budget 2009 Update

This Government remains committed to delivering on its commitments in the NAPinclusion, as resources permit. Even in these difficult economic times, the Government has prioritised delivering real increases in social welfare payments. The Budget provides for increases of between 3 per cent and 3.8 per cent in the basic rates next year, ahead of the projected rate of inflation for 2009, which is 2.5%. Priority will continue to be given to ensuring that the most vulnerable groups in our society are protected in the current difficult economic conditions in line with the objectives of the NAPinclusion, although the pace of progress will be slower until economic conditions improve.

- **General:** Social welfare expenditure has increased substantially since 1997 when spending was €5.7 billion to €17 billion in 2008. Next year total expenditure will be €19.6 billion. This represents an increase of €2.6 billion or 15.5%.
- Despite the current economic difficulties, the Government has ensured that increases in the basic rates of social welfare payments will be ahead of the projected rate of inflation and in line with the wage increases agreed by the social partners in the 2nd phase of the National Pay Agreement. As a result, the real value of social welfare payments will be maintained. This increased provision for social welfare is an unambiguous statement of the Government's intent to protect the vulnerable and less well-off in society.
- **Pensions:** The maximum personal rates of payment for State Pension Contributory and Non-Contributory and State Pension Transition are being increased by €7 per week. The new rates for the State Pension (Contributory) and State Pension Transition will be €230.30 while the State Pension (Non-Contributory) will be €219.

- Since 2005, the level of the State Pension (Contributory) has increased by 37.7% while the level of the State Pension (Non-Contributory) has increased by 42.2%. In comparison the Consumer Price Index increased by 12.3% over the same period.
- **Fuel Poverty:** The value of the fuel allowance is being increased by €2 to €20 per week, or 11%. The duration of the fuel season is also being extended by another two weeks from April 2009, bringing it to 32 weeks in total.
- These improvements to the fuel scheme will cost almost €30 million extra in 2009 and will benefit nearly 300,000 households.
- **Medical Cards:** Budget 2009 ended the automatic entitlement to a medical card for the over 70s. However the income thresholds for the means test have been sufficiently raised, meaning 95 per cent of people over 70 will still qualify for the card.

11. Further information is available at the following websites:

Office for Social Inclusion

www.socialinclusion.ie

Department of the Taoiseach

(Towards 2016 and New Programme for Government)

www.taoiseach.gov.ie

National Development Plan

www.ndp.ie

Workshop on the Provision of Housing and Accommodation

The Note includes information on:

- Recent Developments on Social Inclusion;
- Provisions on Housing set out in *Towards 2016*, the social partnership agreement reached in June 2006;
- National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016;
- High Level Goal 10 in the NAPinclusion relating to Housing;
- Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006-2007;
- Key developments relating to Housing and Accommodation (reported in Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006-2007);
- National Development Plan 2007-2013;
- Programme for Government 2007-2012;
- Key developments relating to Housing (reported in the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010);
- Recent Developments on Homelessness;
- Budget 2009 Update;
- Details of relevant websites where further information is available in relation to the above.

1. Recent Developments on Social Inclusion

The National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSSPI) was submitted to the European Commission in October 2008. The NSSPI has the following four social inclusion priority policy objectives. Objective 2 includes targets in relation to people with disabilities while objective 3 has a particular focus on older people and people with disabilities.

- Child Poverty
- Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities (Activation Measures)
- Access to Quality Services
- Integration of our Migrant Population

2. Towards 2016 Provision on Housing

Towards 2016 states the following with regard to **Housing**:

Housing Policy Framework – Building Sustainable Communities

The longer timeframe of a ten-year framework agreement allows for pathways to be developed to transform the Irish housing environment: to improve not only responsiveness of services but also quality of services. In this context, the core objective of housing policy is to enable every household to have available an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment and, as far as possible, at the tenure of its choice.

The Government and the Social Partners endorse the important principles set out in the Housing Policy Framework – Building Sustainable Communities, which provides a vision of the kind of high quality, integrated sustainable communities that are worth building. This also aims to take into account other factors in the areas of balanced regional and rural development, planning, physical and social infrastructure and environmental sustainability, and the development of social capital. Working through the Housing Forum, the Government and the Social Partners will focus on five main areas to achieve the objectives of creating sustainable communities:

- Continuing improvements in the quality of houses and neighbourhoods, including improvement of consumer information in relation to housing;
- Providing tailored housing services to those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs;
- Developing inter-agency cooperation where there is a care dimension;
- Maintaining the impetus for the delivery of housing at affordable prices to the market, including through State-supported schemes, and other appropriate innovations, such as measures to support first time buyers;
- Progressing the social housing reform agenda set out in the Housing Policy Framework.

The approach seeks to ensure that all housing is seen as being on an equal footing whether provided fully by the State or supported in some way. The parties acknowledge the view taken in the NESC report on housing that an additional 73,000 social housing units should be provided in the period 2004 to 2012.

The Government is committed to expanding the social and affordable housing options over the coming years and have indicated that increased investment will meet the needs of some 50,000 households over the three years to 2008. Further households will benefit from the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

- The Government is committed to providing additional investment over the period 2007-2009, which will provide an expanded range of housing options to households who cannot afford to provide for their accommodation needs from their own resources. This includes

- The commencement/acquisition of an additional 4,000 new housing units over the period 2007 to 2009 for such households [through a combination of local authority (2,000), voluntary and co-operative housing (1,000), and RAS long-term contractual arrangements for new supply (1,000)]. This will bring the total number of new commencements/acquisitions in the period to 27,000 units;
- In addition, further households will benefit from full implementation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme, involving contractual arrangements with landlords, for existing properties transferring from rent supplement;
- Implementation of the Local Authority Traveller accommodation programmes.

The current affordable housing measures will deliver some 17,000 units over the period 2007 to 2009 through a more streamlined approach currently under development, and the Affordable Homes Partnership is also undertaking initiatives to increase the supply of affordable housing in the Greater Dublin Area.

In addition, the Affordable Homes Partnership while maintaining its focus on delivery in the Greater Dublin Area where affordability problems are most acute, will build on its growing experience to assist the roll-out nationally of campaigns in relation to affordable housing matters, common approaches by local authorities in relation to Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000-2004, and application systems for affordable housing.

As a result of the various social and affordable housing measures the accommodation needs of some 60,000 new households will be addressed over the period 2007-2009. The multi-annual action plans in place at local authority level, supported by active land management strategies announced by the Government last year, are key instruments in delivering this ambitious programme. These will be bolstered by the following measures:

- Active engagement with the voluntary and co-operative housing sector to increase their role in delivering on needs, through a rationalisation, early in the first phase of the agreement, of administrative and approval arrangements to ensure the earliest possible delivery of suitable quality projects, improvement in funding arrangements and measures to enhance governance of the sector, and an expanding role for the sector under the RAS;
- To further assist the voluntary and co-operative sector in the context of the programme as outlined, the Government will arrange through local authorities for additional land/units to be provided under this Agreement for the purpose of meeting identified housing need. It will be expected that units/sites sufficient to supply some 3,000 dwellings will be identified and made available over the period 2007-2009;
- The National Building Agency will establish with immediate effect a dedicated unit to support local authorities in undertaking regeneration and remedial programmes to help bring all social housing accommodation up to the best possible standard;

- Minimum standards regulations for the private rented sector will be updated by the Dept of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and effectively enforced by Local Authorities.

The Housing Forum will play an important role in inputting to policy development and evaluating outcomes over the period of the ten-year framework agreement, including housing issues in both the urban and rural environments. Progress will be reviewed following the first phase (during 2008) of the ten-year framework agreement.

The *Towards 2016* Review and Transitional Agreement 2008-2009, published in September 2008, reaffirms the willingness of both the Government and the Social Partners to work together during this difficult period of economic transition and uncertainty to ensure that the vision and Goals set down in *Towards 2016* can still be achieved.

3. National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007-2016

The NAPinclusion, published in February 2007, sets out a wide-ranging and comprehensive programme of action to address poverty and social exclusion. The Plan sets out a coherent and comprehensive approach for the next ten years using a lifecycle approach, as set out by National Economic and Social Council (NESC) in its report, *The Developmental Welfare State*, and adopted by the national partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. The lifecycle approach places the individual at the centre of policy development and delivery by assessing the risks facing him or her and the supports available at key stages of the lifecycle.

These key lifecycle groups are: Children; People of Working Age; Older People and People with Disabilities and their Communities. The adoption of the lifecycle approach offers a comprehensive framework for implementing a streamlined, cross-cutting and visible approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion.

To ensure that a decisive impact on poverty is made, the Government believes that significant interventions are required to prioritise a small number of high level goals. These targeted actions and interventions are designed to mobilise resources to address long-standing and serious social deficits with the ultimate aim of achieving the objective of reducing consistent poverty.

The overall goal of this Plan is:

To reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition.

Twelve high level goals are being prioritised to achieve this overall goal. One high level goal is directly relevant to housing, it is set out as follows.

4. High Level Goal in the NAPinclusion relating to Housing

Goal 10: Housing

Deliver high quality housing for those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs and to underpin the building of sustainable communities.

An important element will be the enhanced housing output reflected in *Towards 2016*, as at 2. above.

Housing

The core objective of the Government's housing policy is to enable every household to have an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment, and, as far as possible, at the tenure of its choice.

The Housing Policy Framework-Building Sustainable Communities, published in 2005, outlines key priorities in providing high quality, integrated sustainable communities. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has published a Statement of Housing Policy – Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities, which provides greater detail on the actions required if the goals in the framework document are to be achieved.

The Government is committed to delivering high quality social housing in mixed community settings and aims to support and build communities in which people can take pride. About €1 billion has been spent since 1997 on programmes to improve run-down local authority estates. Significant resources are being made available under the NDP to meet the commitments in *Towards 2016* to expand output of both social and affordable housing to 2009 and to continue the investment beyond these years. The planned increase in investment in social housing stock will help provide an opportunity to tackle some longstanding problems in communities that have suffered multiple disadvantage.

- As set out in high level Goal 10 the needs of some 60,000 new households will be addressed over the period 2007-2009. Under the NDP, progress towards this will be reviewed after three years of activity. However, resources reflected in the NDP will allow for a broadly similar level of output beyond 2009 resulting in the needs of some 140,000 households overall being provided for in the period 2007-2013;
- A more comprehensive and objective means of assessing need will be developed by end of 2008. This will include a focus on the provision of housing advice to allow housing supports to be tailored to reflect changing accommodation needs through a person's lifecycle;
- Investment over the period 2007-2009 will allow for the commencement or acquisition of 27,000 homes for people in need of social housing through a combination of local authority, voluntary, and co-operative housing and RAS contractual arrangements. Under the NDP, progress towards this target will be reviewed after three years of activity;
- The RAS will be implemented fully by 2009. Some 32,000 households which have been in receipt of rent supplement for over 18 months and which have a long-term housing need will benefit;

- Investment will be used to intensify efforts to rejuvenate and, where necessary, regenerate existing social housing communities. The resources available under the NDP will allow for the completion of the current phase of the regeneration of Ballymun. Further renewal schemes will be rolled out nationwide, part-funded by the resources made available through the sale of dwellings;
- It is proposed to undertake a survey of the local authority housing stock by end 2008 which will help inform housing authorities on the physical condition of the stock and provide the basis for future programmes of improvement works including rolling out a programme of regeneration for all run-down estates nationwide between 2007 and 2016;
- Arrangements will be made through local authorities for additional land and units to be provided to the voluntary and cooperative sector for the purpose of meeting identified need. Units and sites sufficient to supply some 3,000 dwellings will be identified by 2009;
- Some 17,000 new units will be delivered between 2007 and 2009 through affordable housing measures under the NDP, following which progress will be reviewed. It is expected that a broadly similar level of output will be delivered beyond 2009, resulting in the delivery of some 40,000 new units overall between 2007 and 2013;
- Minimum standards regulations for the private rented sector will be updated.

Homelessness

Measures to address homelessness have been successful in recent years with their numbers reducing from 5,500 in 2002 to slightly in excess of 3,000 in 2005¹³. The following targets and actions will address the needs of those who remain homeless:

- A revised government strategy on homelessness (published in August 2008);
- Long-term occupancy of emergency homeless accommodation will be eliminated by 2010. This will involve addressing the needs of up to 500 households;
- The involvement of the voluntary and cooperative housing sector was strengthened through the establishment of a National Homelessness Consultative Committee under the aegis of the Housing Forum during 2007.

A copy of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion is available from the Office for Social Inclusion at (01) 704 3851 or on our website at www.socialinclusion.ie

¹³ Source: National Assessment of Housing Need, 2002 and 2005. Because the homeless are a small, mobile and fluctuating population: their situation cannot be reliably captured through household surveys such as QNHS, which measures employment/unemployment, and the EU-SILC survey, which measures household income and poverty rates. The series of social portraits for each stage of the lifecycle, developed to inform this NAPinclusion, will include specific statistical data on the homeless.

5. Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006-2007

As part of the monitoring and reporting process set out in the social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, the Office for Social Inclusion is responsible for producing an annual Social Inclusion Report.

The first annual report under this commitment provided a detailed assessment of progress towards targets in the NAPinclusion and the social inclusion elements of *Towards 2016* and the NDP.

The first annual report was launched at the last Social Inclusion Forum in November 2007.

6. Key developments relating to Housing and Accommodation (reported in Annual Social Inclusion Report 2006-2007)

Goal 10: Housing

Deliver high quality housing for those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs and to underpin the building of sustainable communities.

An important element will be the enhanced housing output reflected in *Towards 2016*, as at 2. above.

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government has, on an inter-agency basis, reported that:

- A new housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, was launched in February 2007. Its housing support and policy reform agenda includes actions to support the building of sustainable communities, improve housing choice, address need and enhance personal autonomy and responsibility. It also includes actions to improve the effectiveness of housing delivery;
- A National Housing Strategy for people with a disability will be developed by 2009. The strategy is to be progressed through the establishment of a national group under the aegis of the Housing Forum. The group formally convened at the end of October 2007;
- A protocol governing liaison between the HSE and the housing authorities on the assessment of the accommodation needs of people with a disability has been developed and circulated to the local authorities and the HSE. The protocol initially applies to children under 5 years of age and will be extended to all age groups by 2011;
- A protocol governing support costs for social housing projects provided for people with a disability is currently being developed for implementation;
- A new needs assessment framework has been agreed with the City & County Managers' Association and approved by the Housing Forum. Work is currently underway to progress the implementation of the framework by housing authorities;

- An €8 million Sustainable Communities Fund was introduced in 2007 to enable local authorities to co-fund local authority spending on innovative projects to promote sustainable communities;
- The Building Control Act was enacted in April 2007 and introduces a statutory requirement for a Disability Access Certificate at design stage of new commercial buildings and apartment blocks;
- Following public consultation and an Expert Working Group review, the Building Regulations Advisory Body is due to provide a definitive draft amended Part M (Access to buildings for People with Disabilities) of the Building Regulations to the Minister for publication later in 2007.

Target	Progress
<p>Investment over the period 2007-2009 will allow for the commencement or acquisition of 27,000 homes for people in need of social housing through a combination of local authority, voluntary, and co-operative housing and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) contractual arrangements. Under the NDP, progress towards this target will be subject to ongoing annual review with a comprehensive mid-term review after three years of activity. However, resources reflected in the Plan will allow for a broadly similar level of output beyond 2009 resulting in some 60,000 homes overall being commenced or acquired through these programmes between 2007 and 2013.</p>	<p>Activity on social housing programmes increased in the first half of 2007 when over 3,960 units were commenced/ acquired by local authorities and voluntary and co-operative housing bodies.</p> <p>The number of completions/acquisitions in the same period at 3,167 units was 33% ahead of the same period in 2006.</p>
<p>The Rental Accommodation Scheme will be implemented fully by 2009. Some 32,000 households which have been in receipt of rent supplement for over 18 months and which have a long-term housing need will benefit.</p>	<p>All local authorities are implementing RAS. Some 8,632 cases, formerly on rent supplement, were transferred to RAS and other social housing options by end August 2007.</p>
<p>Investment will be used to intensify efforts to rejuvenate and, where necessary, regenerate existing social housing communities. The resources available under the NDP will allow for the completion of the current phase of the regeneration of Ballymun. Further renewal schemes will be rolled out nationwide, part-funded by the resources made available through the sale of dwellings:</p> <p>It is proposed to undertake a survey of the local authority housing stock by end 2008 which will help inform housing authorities on the physical condition of the stock and provide the basis for future programmes of improvement works.</p>	<p>Limerick Northside Regeneration Agency and Limerick Southside Regeneration Agency have been established to address issues of social exclusion and disadvantage in the Moyross and Southhill areas of Limerick City and to drive forward the regeneration of these areas. A scoping document has been completed by the National Building Agency regarding the survey of Local Authority housing stock, and project structures should be in place by year's end.</p> <p>The Department has allocated in the order of €168.1 million to Improvement Works, which is divided as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — €65 million is allocated for the regeneration of Ballymun; — €32.8 million is set aside for regeneration programmes;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — €37 million is allocated for improvement works programmes; and — €33.3 million has been set aside for the central heating programme in 2007. <p>In addition to Exchequer funding from 1 January 2007, local authorities may use income from the sale of their housing stock to fund improvement works.</p> <p>The Department continues to fund regeneration programmes nationwide, including Cork, Dublin, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Limerick, Dundalk, Sligo and Waterford.</p> <p>There is an allocation of €33.3 million for the central heating programme in 2007.</p>
<p>Some 17,000 new units will be delivered between 2007 and 2009 through affordable housing measures under the NDP which will be subject to ongoing annual review. It is expected that a broadly similar level of output will be delivered beyond 2009, resulting in the delivery of some 40,000 new units overall between 2007 and 2013.</p>	<p>1,192 affordable homes were provided under the affordable housing schemes from January-June 2007. This represents a 5% increase in output on the same period in 2006.</p>
<p>A revised government strategy on homelessness will be published during 2007.</p>	<p>Work is ongoing under the aegis of the cross-Departmental team on homelessness.</p>
<p>Long-term occupancy of emergency homeless accommodation will be eliminated by 2010. This will involve addressing the needs of up to 500 households.</p>	<p>This target is included in <i>Towards 2016</i> and is also the aim of A Key to the Door, the 2007-2010 action plan of the Homeless Agency.</p>
<p>The involvement of the voluntary and cooperative housing sector will be strengthened through the establishment of a National Homelessness Consultative Committee (NHCC) under the aegis of the Housing Forum during 2007.</p>	<p>The NHCC was established in April 2007 and meetings are ongoing. A data sub-group of the NHCC has been formed to address the issue of data collection and associated definitions.</p>

<p>Funding will be made available to local authorities to support the implementation of their second Traveller Accommodation Programme, which covers the period 2005-2008. Approximately 2,000 units of accommodation will be provided (made up of additional families accommodated in standard local authority accommodation and additional units of permanent Traveller-specific accommodation constructed).</p>	<p>1,001 units of accommodation have been provided to date in the 2005 to 2008 Programmes (consisting of Traveller Specific and standard local authority accommodation).</p>
<p>Research on Travellers' health status, being commissioned jointly with the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland in 2007, will be completed in 2009. The research will aim to assess the impact of the health services currently provided and to identify the factors which influence mortality and health status. The study will also include a detailed census of Traveller numbers on the island of Ireland.</p>	<p>The study was launched in July. It will take 2½ – 3 years to complete.</p>
<p>Local authorities spent €27.4 million on the installation of central heating in local authority rented dwellings in 2006 and a further €70 million will be allocated over the period 2007 – 2008.</p>	<p>There was an allocation of €33.3 million for the central heating programme in 2007. Expenditure at the end of June 2007 was €3.6 million.</p>
<p>A number of other fora provide valuable support and assistance, including sectoral mechanisms such as the Housing Forum and other agencies that provide advice and research in key areas of social inclusion generally.</p>	<p>The Housing Forum met in December 2006, March 2007 and October 2007. <i>Towards 2016</i> recognises the role of the Housing Forum as the platform for social partners' input into housing policy development and implementation.</p>

7. National Development Plan (NDP) 2007-2013

The NDP in its "High Level Goals for Social Inclusion: Communities: Housing" sets out to deliver high quality housing for those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs; an important element being the enhanced housing output reflected in *Towards 2016*, as at 2. above. This will embrace meeting special housing needs (the homeless, Travellers, older people and people with disabilities).

Housing Programme

Investment under the Housing Programme will total some €21.2 billion over the period of the Plan and will be delivered through two Sub-Programmes:

- Social Housing Provision and Renewal (€17 billion); and
- Affordable Housing and Targeted Private Housing Supports (€4 billion).

Strategic Context and Objectives 2007-2013

As an important component of national infrastructure, housing is central to social development, competitiveness and ultimately economic growth. Over the period of the NDP 2000-2006 investment in water, sewage and transport services has helped to underpin improvements in housing supply with an estimated 480,000 completions. As a result, Ireland is providing new homes at a faster rate than other countries in Europe, with about 20 new homes produced annually per 1,000 population compared with 5 per 1,000 on average in the EU. There is also relatively strong activity by first-time buyers in the market with an estimated 45% in this category in 2005. In addition, the average age of first-time buyers in 2005 was 30: this compared with a corresponding average age in the United Kingdom of 34.

The social partnership agreement, *Towards 2016*, and the Housing Policy Framework: Building Sustainable Communities, jointly set out the broad approach being taken to housing policy under the NDP 2007-2013.

The overall policy approach recognises that the market alone will not address the housing needs of all sections of the population. Less well-off households have been targeted through social and affordable housing schemes, and an expansion in the range of supported housing is being provided under the Plan.

With regard to *Towards 2016*, a critical factor in determining housing interventions is the requirement for a clear perspective as to the scale and nature of need, including local variations.

Social Housing Provision and Renewal Sub-Programme

€17.1 billion (including a provision for rent supplement) will be invested under this Sub-Programme over the period of the Plan. This investment is being targeted at the provision of an expanded range of tailored social housing support and an accelerated programme of renewal and improvement of the existing stock. Some 200,000 households currently receive housing support provided by local authorities, voluntary and co-operative housing associations or in private rented accommodation.

New Social Housing

Some 27,000 new homes for people in need of social housing will be commenced or acquired over the period 2007-2009, through a combination of local authority, voluntary and co-operative housing and RAS contractual arrangements. There will be a gradual movement from rent supplement provided under the Social Welfare Rent Supplement Allowance to RAS.

Progress will be reviewed following the first three years of activity under the Plan and will feed into the overall 2010 mid-term review. This will inform the proposed delivery under the next series of multi-annual local authority housing action plans. Overall, it is estimated that the Sub-Programme allocation will fund the provision of over 60,000 new units (comprising local authority, voluntary and RAS) over the Plan period 2007-2013. This Sub-Programme also includes substantial provision of Exchequer monies to support the provision of accommodation in the private rented sector for those with a housing need. There are two vehicles for funding this: the Social Welfare Rent Supplement Allowance (RS) operated by the Health Service Executive and the RAS run by housing authorities. In the region of 60,000 households currently receive support through these two programmes. There will be a gradual movement of households with long-term housing need from RS to RAS.

Community Sustainment and Housing Renewal

Chapter 3 of the NDP highlighted the role that investment in the regeneration of social housing estates may play in enhancing the attractiveness of the National Spatial Strategy Gateways as places of investment, often as part of wider urban renewal objectives.

Investment under this Sub-Programme will be used to intensify efforts to rejuvenate and, where necessary, regenerate existing social housing communities. It will allow for the completion of the current phase of the regeneration of Ballymun under the Master Plan for that area. Further renewal schemes will be rolled out nationwide, part-funded by the resources made available through the sale of dwellings.

Affordable Housing and Targeted Private Housing Supports Sub-Programme

A total of €4.2 billion will be invested under this Sub-Programme from Exchequer and other sources over the period of the Plan. The objective is to provide support for people seeking accommodation in the owner-occupied sector through the provision of affordable housing. It will also assist in the upgrading of the physical condition of certain categories of private housing with particular emphasis on those who are most in need, including the disabled and the elderly.

Affordable Housing

Home-ownership remains the preferred option of the majority of people and the commitment to the provision of assistance to low-income households to acquire affordable accommodation within the private sector will continue. Output under affordable housing has expanded in recent years and the Government is committed to delivering some 17,000 new units over the period 2007-2009. Progress will be assessed in the 2010 mid-term review of the Plan and any new targets will be set in the light of market development and needs. The Plan will allow for broadly similar levels of output beyond 2009, resulting in some 40,000 households benefiting from affordable housing over the period of the Plan. The Affordable Homes Partnership, established in 2005, has made good progress in the Greater Dublin Area. It will build on this experience to assist in the roll-out nationally of certain initiatives, e.g. affordable housing communications campaigns.

Exchequer funding provides subsidies to make homes affordable, while other expenditure relates to funding of mortgages by means of loans raised through the Housing Finance Agency (HFA). Local authorities will act as enablers of affordable housing provision and will be in a position to offer homes on their own lands, State lands or under arrangements with private developers at discounted prices without the need for financial subvention. The beneficiaries can access mortgage finance for their homes through a number of financial institutions.

Furthermore, a number of Public Private Partnership (PPP) type projects will be progressed over the period of the Plan under the Sustaining Progress Affordable Housing Initiative. This involves the making available of surplus State lands and property to private developers, thereby enabling the latter to provide private housing at more affordable prices.

Targeted Private Housing Support

Support will also be provided under this Sub-Programme to people with special housing needs and acute affordability problems, including people with a disability and older people.

Non-Exchequer Funding

Of the total funding under the Housing Programme of some €21.2 billion, the local authorities will fund some €858 million from their own resources and the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) will fund some €4.5 billion.

HFA Funding

While many of the 40,000 households likely to benefit from affordable housing may avail of mortgages from financial institutions, substantial resources are being made available through the HFA over the period of the Plan. This will fund loan finance for low income households.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) and Housing

There is a range of interaction with the private sector in the provision of social and affordable housing. Successful public/private partnerships, funded by private finance, have been promoted by local authorities, particularly in the area of major regeneration projects such as Fatima Mansions. This model will be used to develop other projects throughout the programme period.

More recently, PPP arrangements have been undertaken as part of the RAS. These partnering roles will be expanded under the Plan and will include investing the equivalent of some €255 million of capital funding over the period. New procurement options will also be advanced whereby social housing is provided by private companies which will be responsible for the design, construction and maintenance of units, often in co-operation with the voluntary and co-operative sector.

8. Programme for Government 2007-2012

The Agreed Programme for Government, A Blueprint for Ireland's Future, envisages social welfare pensions increasing to €300 per week by 2012. It also commits to continue the prioritisation of the interests of people with disabilities, ensuring that the National Disability Strategy (NDS) is driven from a whole-of-Government perspective. Each year, the Government will set out the objectives and outcomes to be reached in the NDS having regard to the vision and long-term goals in *Towards 2016*. This approach will be properly monitored and at least half of the NDS will be implemented by 2010.

The "**Housing**" chapter in the Programme acknowledges that a range of actions is required to ensure that the housing provided is capable of meeting the diverse needs of our population.

Overall objectives are to:

- Maintain a high level of housing construction, based on sound planning and a diversity of provision.
- Expand delivery of social and affordable housing options to meet the needs of 90,000 households.
- Plan strategically for the needs of a changed population to reflect a more dynamic population which moves more often, includes many new migrants and supports the elderly in their own home.
- Achieve a significant fall in homelessness.
- Bring a new focus on quality in the provision of housing.
- Bring forward legislation on foot of the recommendations of the All-Party Committee on the Constitution on Property Rights.

Supporting Home Ownership While Protecting House Values and Jobs

This involves implementing a series of measures to help young people and families both to buy their first home and to meet their mortgage repayments. Specifically:

- Legislate to abolish stamp duty for all first-time buyers and make this change retrospective for all deeds presented for stamping to the Revenue Commissioners on or after 30th April 2007.

Providing Affordable Housing

There were two major initiatives to increase the provision of affordable houses to 5,000 houses per annum above existing commitments:

- Extend the remit of the Affordable Homes Partnership nationwide to cover areas where affordability is a problem to accelerate the provision of affordable housing.
- Introduce new incentives for the provision of Affordable Housing.
- Put in place an appropriate tax incentive scheme to operate in these areas in association with the Affordable Homes Partnership.

Under **Social Housing** the Government was committed to:

- Ensure that all local authority housing is subject to the highest standards of design and that good community facilities are provided, especially for younger people.
- Bring a renewed focus on the regeneration of problem estates. Ballymun has shown how it can be done and we will provide the resources to tackle substandard estates in other areas of the country.
- Resource the new Sustainable Communities Fund to support communities preparing for regeneration projects and in assisting them to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- Expand the paths to home ownership to assist the maximum number of people in gaining a stake in their own home.

Management Companies

In order to address the many real problems that have emerged with the operation of management companies, the Government will:

- Introduce legislation to govern the management of apartment complexes and other similar developments. This will set out the rights and duties of management companies and agents as well as tenants. The objective will be to ensure transparency and accountability for all concerned and the protection of home-owners' investment in their property.
- Clearly set out the duties of local authorities in relation to the provision of services for all residential developments.

Travellers

The Government will continue to invest significant funds for the provision of good quality authorised sites and accommodation that meets the needs of Travellers and the community at large.

Homelessness

The focus, in line with the Homelessness Preventative Strategy, will be to assist with the long-term and sustainable housing of vulnerable people who are in danger of becoming homeless.

With necessary care support we can move people from emergency accommodation to independent living.

Land Use

Government will ensure that sufficient active land management will facilitate the delivery of housing to meet the needs of different income and demographic groups.

Quality Living Spaces: Commitments:

Introduce new urban design guidelines for building new housing developments so that future generations can look back with pride with the environment which we are building today:

- Require all new apartments and other high density developments to comply with minimum design standards dealing with space, light, noise protection, recycling and recreational facilities and so on.
- Ensure that existing public parks and recreational areas are protected and enhanced and develop a network of ‘people’s parks’ and ‘urban woods’ to enhance the experience of living in our towns and cities.
- Include in Local Area Plans (LAPs), adequate provision for green areas, play spaces and community space.

Environmentally Efficient Housing: Commitments:

- Introduce a national attic and wall insulation grant scheme to the value of €100 million,
- Reduce energy consumption,
- Maximise water efficiency and the reuse of rainwater for non-drinking purposes, and
- Ensure that noise insulation levels protect the quality of life of home owners.

9. Key developments relating to Housing and Accommodation (reported in the National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008-2010)

Housing and Accommodation:

The core objective of the Government's housing policy is to enable every household have an affordable dwelling of good quality, suited to its needs, in a good environment, and, as far as possible, at the tenure of its choice. Policy measures to achieve this objective include:

- A new housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, launched in February 2007;
- Record levels of investment across a range of programmes to address effectively the wide range of housing need in an efficient and environmentally sustainable manner, including through regeneration programmes;
- Continuing improvements in the quality of houses and neighbourhoods, including improvement of consumer information in relation to housing;
- The provision of tailored housing services to those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs, and in this way responding to the broad spectrum of housing need; and
- Progressing the social housing reform agenda set out in the Housing Policy Framework.

High Level Goal 10 of the NAPinclusion aims to deliver high quality housing for those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs. An important element will be the enhanced housing output reflected in *Towards 2016*, as at 2. above. This will embrace meeting special housing needs of the most vulnerable (the homeless, Travellers, older people and people with disabilities). However, resources provided for in the National Development Plan (NDP) will allow for a broadly similar level of output beyond 2009 resulting in the needs of some 140,000 households overall being met in the period 2007–2013.

Homelessness

Measures to address homelessness have resulted in recent years in their numbers reducing from 5,500 in 2002 to slightly in excess of 3,000 in 2005.¹⁴ The following target will help address the needs of those who remain homeless:

- A revised Government Strategy to address adult homelessness in Ireland was published in August 2008.

¹⁴ Source: National Assessment of Housing Need, 2002 and 2005.

The small population size of this group means that their situation cannot be reliably captured through household surveys such as QNHS which measures employment/unemployment, and the EU-SILC survey, which measures household income and poverty rates. The series of social portraits for each stage of the lifecycle, developed to inform the NAPinclusion will include specific statistical data on this group and data deficits.

Targets relating to Social Inclusion Policy Objectives:

Housing

- A National Housing Strategy for people with a disability will be developed by 2009. It is to be progressed through the establishment of a National Group under the aegis of the Housing Forum. The Group convened in October 2007 and work is progressing on the development of the Housing Strategy for people with a disability;
- A more comprehensive and objective means of assessing need is being developed which will include a focus on the provision of housing advice to allow housing supports to be tailored to reflect changing accommodation needs through a person's lifecycle;
- Programmed investment over the period 2007-2009 will allow for the commencement or acquisition of 27,000 homes for people in need of social housing through a combination of local authority, voluntary, and co-operative housing and RAS contractual arrangements. Good progress has been made on the delivery of social housing programmes with some 9,000 new social housing starts/acquisitions achieved in 2007. This is in line with the commitment in *Towards 2016* to achieve 27,000 starts in the period 2007 to 2009;
- The Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) for households who have been in receipt of rent supplement for over 18 months and who have a long-term housing need is at the mid point in its initial implementation period. Some 32,000 households will benefit. Activity under this Scheme has begun to accelerate since the first transfers in September 2005 and the aim is that at least 15,000 cases will have been accommodated through the Scheme by the end of 2008; and
- Making adequate central heating systems available in all local authority rented dwellings by end 2008. Some €26 million has been allocated for the central heating programme in 2008.

Homelessness

- A target was set to eliminate long term occupancy of emergency homeless accommodation by 2010. This will involve addressing the needs of up to 500 households. This target is included in *Towards 2016* and is also the aim of A Key to the Door, the 2007-2010 action plan of the Homeless Agency. In 2007, 300 households who were long-term occupants of emergency homeless accommodation were moved to more permanent accommodation. It is expected that the needs of 200 households will be addressed in 2008; and
- The involvement of the voluntary and cooperative housing sector has been strengthened through the establishment of a National Homelessness Consultative Committee (NHCC) in April 2007 under the aegis of the Housing Forum. Meetings of a data sub-group of the NHCC, which has been formed to address the issue of data collection, are now ongoing.

Resources

Total expenditure on the programmes contained in the Social Inclusion chapter of the NDP amounts to €49.6 billion. The main elements include expenditure in other areas of the NDP which is crucial to combating poverty and social exclusion, including housing, education, employment and health. Key areas include over €21 billion for housing, delivering assistance through social, affordable and voluntary housing schemes to over 140,000 households over the Plan period, including 100,000 new social and affordable units.

10. Recent Developments on Homelessness

"The Way Home: A Strategy to Address Adult Homelessness in Ireland 2008–2013" was published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in August 2008. It is the new Government strategy to address adult homelessness from 2008 to 2013. It builds on the progress achieved to date in tackling homelessness through the implementation of the Integrated Homeless Strategy (2000) and Preventative Strategy (2002) and is informed by the findings and recommendations of the Review of the Implementation of Homeless Strategies by Fitzpatrick Associates Economic Consultants in 2006, (Independent Review) so that commitments to solve homelessness nationally can be refocused and enhanced. This commitment is reiterated in the latest social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* and in the housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities*, which both contain specific provisions to address homelessness. The new strategy has been prepared under the aegis of the Cross-Departmental Team on Homelessness with input from the National Homeless Consultative Committee (NHCC).

A **Poverty Impact Assessment** and a **Health Impact Assessment** of "The Way Home" will be made available. Details of "The Way Home" can be accessed on the website: www.environ.ie

11. Budget 2009 Update

This Government remains committed to delivering on its commitments in the NAPinclusion, as resources permit. Even in these difficult economic times, the Government has prioritised delivering real increases in social welfare payments. The Budget provides for increases of between 3 per cent and 3.8 per cent in the basic rates next year, ahead of the projected rate of inflation for 2009, which is 2.5%. Priority will continue to be given to ensuring that the most vulnerable groups in our society are protected in the current difficult economic conditions in line with the objectives of the NAPinclusion, although the pace of progress will be slower until economic conditions improve.

On 14 October 2008, the Minister for Housing, Urban Renewal and Developing Areas, Mr Michael Finneran T.D., welcomed the Budget 2009 housing provision. The total Exchequer provision for housing in 2009 will be almost €1.66 billion in current and capital finance across the range of social and affordable housing supports. This equates to a provision of over €4.5 million per day in 2009 and gives a very clear signal of the continued priority attached by this Government to housing. Minister Finneran's focus for 2009 has been on utilising available resources in a way which ensures that the most vulnerable sections of society from a housing perspective – that is, the homeless, Travellers the elderly and people with a disability – are accorded very clear priority. For this reason, while the overall provision is down by 4% on this year's record provision, the social housing budget across capital and current funding is facing a reduction of just 1.7%.

Minister Finneran intends to increase funding for homeless services by over 5%, with the funding for housing supports for older people and people with disabilities increasing by 8%. Funding for Traveller accommodation programmes will be maintained at 2008 levels. Despite the adverse economic and fiscal environment, the Minister welcomed the fact that, by securing an additional €80 million of investment this year under the Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme for voluntary housing, some pressure has been taken off the programme in 2009. The provision for 2009 will enable the considerable progress in meeting the needs of households through the full range of social and affordable housing programmes to be built on. Minister Finneran also stated: "my Department will be pursuing the use of long-term lease arrangements for social housing purposes to supplement traditional local authority construction or acquisition over the coming months. This would provide a more cost effective, targeted approach, in line with the principles of the life-cycle approach endorsed by the social partners."

12. Further information is available at the following websites:

Office for Social Inclusion

www.socialinclusion.ie

Department of the Taoiseach

(Towards 2016 and New Programme for Government)

www.taoiseach.gov.ie

National Development Plan

www.ndp.ie

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government

www.environ.ie

Annex IV Social Inclusion Forum 2008: Evaluation Report

Participants were asked to complete an evaluation form on the day of the Social Inclusion Forum. This form asked them to rate the conference and workshops on the following scale:

Excellent – Very Good – Good – Fair – Poor

This form also recorded participants' views on the venue and the content of the conference.

In addition, they were asked to state their preference with regard to how they wished to be informed of the progress on the implementation of the NAPinclusion.

In total, 43 evaluation forms were completed and returned. In summary, the level of satisfaction with the 2008 conference was much higher than in 2007.

As illustrated in Table A5.1 the majority of respondents rated the conference overall as Excellent or Very Good (72%) while the remaining 28% rated it as Good.

Table A5.1 Participants' Rating of Conference

Rating	Number	%
Excellent	18	41.8*
Very Good	13	30.2
Good	12	28.0
Total	43	100

*This represented a notable improvement on the 2007 Conference when the comparable figure was 25%.

Some participants made comments on the conference that reinforced their positive ratings and also pointed to some weaknesses. Such comments included:

- Worthwhile, professional, informative, educational
- Expert speakers and good opportunity for discussion and debate
- Interesting and inclusive format
- Comfortable – easy to navigate
- Good presentations
- Roundtable discussions very useful
- Well organised

- Good opportunity to meet people from a variety of areas working on similar issues
- Some comments did not reflect the real situation
- Wind-up speeches too long after a busy day
- Minister's input should be more meaningful
- Lack of information to citizens

With regard to the workshops the majority of respondents (81%) rated the content as either Very Good or Excellent (see Table A5.2). 14% of respondents rated the workshops as Fair.

Table A5.2 Participants' Ratings of the Workshops

Rating	Number	%
Excellent	11	25.6
Very Good	24	55.8
Good	2	4.6
Fair	6	14.0
Total	43	100

Again comments were made which highlighted the views of respondents, both positive and negative, of the workshops and workshop content. Comments are thematically presented below.

Format of workshops

- Would like roundtable workshop rather than classroom style, classroom style is too formal, not conducive to discussion.
- Too large – smaller groups would be better for encouraging participation.

Organisation of Workshops

- Excellent facilitation and reporting (the housing workshop), workshop on childcare was very well chaired and organised
- Great participation (the housing workshop), excellent opportunity to have our say and debate
- Participants changed at lunchtime
- Chairing by Government Departments is not always appropriate. In one case, it ended up with the chair defending policy and decisions rather than developing discussion

Content of Workshops

- Very informative – learned lots
- Very broad topic but excellent presentations
- Discussion made some excellent points. Next steps – action is a key concern
- Presentations were too long, were informative but not all that helpful in starting discussions; discussions were more interesting
- Early child development became more about childcare issues
- Housing and accommodation not well understood
- Not enough on asylum seekers or immigrants
- Need to listen to people’s experiences to put issues in context, not just pick their brains for ideas

Other Comments

- Valuable
- Lots to think about

Almost all respondents were positive about the venue and catering. Comments made in relation to the venue included – Very comfortable, Ideal, Nice and clean, and Excellent. However, more space for the workshops that would allow for a roundtable set up and improved parking and parking signs would have been welcomed. With regard to lunch and refreshments the majority of comments were again positive and included – very good lunch, food was excellent, fruit is a great idea.

When asked what were the most useful elements of the conference, the majority of participants identified the workshops, Roundtable discussions and presentations as most useful. The opportunities to hear a variety of experiences, network and meet people working in similar areas was also one of the most welcome aspects of the Forum. Other aspects that were identified as contributing to the success of the Forum were the availability of NESF staff, the overall organisation of the event and the amount of information provided throughout the day.

Respondents to the evaluation form were forthcoming with ideas on what they would like to see changed in the future.

Plenary Sessions

- The Minister could have stayed longer and listened
- The starting time is too early and makes it extremely difficult for people travelling from outside Dublin – missed the keynote addresses which was very disappointing
- More time for Q&A in the morning Plenary
- Round (circular) tables at Plenary are unsociable, some people had to turn around to face rostrum

Workshops

- Make workshops much smaller and interactive. Change the layout from classroom to horseshoe style
- Need for PA system in workshop areas
- Sharpen topics for workshops. Perhaps send out an issues paper ahead of time – not just background paper
- Prevent workshops from becoming one dimensional (health)
- Email workshop presentations in advance
- Improve chairing and structure of workshops

Roundtables

- At roundtable discussions there were four people from same unit of a Department – stunted discussion – maybe useful to allocate tables.
- Roundtable needed more time

Other Comments

- Increase panel contribution
- More examples from the people affected by poverty issues. What works, what doesn't work?
- Was very pleased all round
- More discussion on how to implement changes
- Homelessness among elderly – 400 plus senior citizens are homeless

When asked to make suggestions for future Social Inclusion Fora, responses from participants were similar to the changes recommended above in relation to the format and content of the workshops, roundtables and Plenary Sessions. Additional comments are detailed below:

- Keep up the good work
- Provide an update on progression towards goals in NAPinclusion
- Bring the Forum down the country
- Policy-makers should engage more with Q&A session
- Clearer feedback on issues brought up in past Fora and where they ended up
- Fora needs to be part of an ongoing process with input from people experiencing poverty
- Perhaps run over two days. Lots to cover
- Clearer linkage of Forum to elected representatives in a democratic system
- Issue raised in the EAPN booklet issued should be followed up
- Address social exclusion in terms of social participation and engagement, not only in terms of employment and economic participation
- Appeal for taking those issues more fully into consideration
- Foster a sense of solidarity in working towards a better world

To conclude, participants were asked to state how they would like to be kept informed of progress on the implementation of the NAPinclusion. As in previous years the majority identified email as their preferred method of ongoing communication. Respondents suggested the use of dedicated and regular mail shots and e-newsletters, although it was less clear who should be responsible for their production, OSI or the NESF. Other suggestions included communication through websites, national and local media particularly radio, through local and national representative organisations, additional meetings and conferences, newsletters and by post.

Conference Report

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Government Sales Office

Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2.

or

The National Economic and Social Forum

16 Parnell Square, Dublin 1.

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