



# **Second Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum**

**Forum Report No. 15**

**November 1997**





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■ This symbol indicates where a recommendation is made in the Report.



# Foreword by the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D.



I am delighted to make a few brief remarks at the beginning of this *Second Periodic Report*. In it, the Forum provides a very full and useful account of the work it has been engaged in over the last two years, assesses the impact of this on the policy decisions taken by successive Governments, and draws conclusions from this, including in some instances, the submission of a number of additional recommendations for further action.

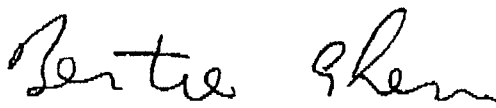
It will be clear from this, as well as from its earlier *First Periodic Report*, that the Forum is continuing to make its own distinctive contribution to the policy formulation process, particularly in the key areas of equality and social inclusion. This input is all

the more strengthened and authoritative by the very wide range of interests and practical experiences represented on the Forum and will be fully taken into account by the Government in implementing the specific commitments we have made in our *Action Programme for the Millennium*, in relation to disadvantage and the creation of a more inclusive society.

The establishment of the Forum in 1993 represented an important step at that stage to widen and deepen the social partnership process, through the inclusion of a number of groups who up to then had not been part of the consultative process between the Government and the Social Partners. This was, of course, taken a significant stage further last Autumn, with the establishment of the four pillars structure, in the negotiation of *Partnership 2000*.

As we approach the completion of the current terms-of-office of both the Forum and the NESC at the end of the year, this is an opportune time to review the strengths and weaknesses of our present social partnership arrangements and institutions and, in this regard, I look forward to receiving the Report on a *Framework for Partnership*, which I understand is at present being finalised by the Forum.

Finally, on behalf of the Government, I would like to convey our appreciation and thanks to the Forum's Chairperson, the Chairs of its two Standing Committees, the Forum Members themselves, and the Forum Secretariat, for all their hard work and the commitment which they have given to the work of the Forum over the last two years.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Bertie Ahern". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Bertie Ahern, T.D.  
Taoiseach



# **Executive Summary**



# Executive Summary

1. This is the second in a series of Periodic Reports which the Forum will be publishing from time to time for the purposes of outlining the work it has been engaged in, establishing its impact on the policy formulation process and drawing any lessons from this for its future work.
2. It deals with six of the Reports which the Forum has published over the last two years. The more important conclusions in the Report are summarised below.

## **Forum Report No. 6 on the Quality Delivery of Social Services**

- It is too early to pronounce definitively on the adequacy of the follow-up action taken on this Report, given that the response has largely been in planning terms at the national level and there has as yet been little significant change on the ground from the client's point of view. To achieve greater progress in some areas, improvements to customer services should now be given a higher priority in the allocation of public expenditure. At the same time, equality targets and principles should be strengthened and made more explicit components of the SMI process.
- The Forum looks forward to its other recommendations being acted on in the eventual decisions to be taken on the Government's Green Paper on the Community and Voluntary Sector and to its other more detailed recommendations on the delivery of individual social services in the Customer Action Plans which are at present in the course of preparation. Finally, the base-line survey of Civil Service customers should now be published for public information and debate.

## **Forum Report No. 7 on the Jobs Potential of the Services Sector**

- The Forum welcomes the action taken by Government in implementing the bulk of its recommendations. However, one of the key areas which remains to be addressed is that of the Report's recommendations on childcare services. The Working Group, which has now been established, under the provisions of *Partnership 2000*, will attempt to resolve the obstacles to progress in this area.

- Another area of concern is that of better progression and integration into the labour market for the long-term unemployed and this will be considered in an Opinion, which the Forum is at present preparing, under the provisions of *Partnership 2000*.
- The priority for further income tax reforms should concentrate more resources on lower to middle income earners, by way of increasing personal allowances.
- The Working Group on the Social Economy should be asked to expedite its work. Finally, the *Jobs Initiative* should now be extended to rural areas.

### **Forum Report No. 9 on the *Jobs Potential of Work Sharing***

- Despite the Government's decision in January last, no practical steps have yet been taken to ensure that suitable job opportunities in the public service (whether arising from job-sharing or otherwise) are opened up to the long-term unemployed. This should be addressed as a priority item through the introduction of mechanisms and targeted measures for this purpose.
- The review which is to be undertaken of the public sector's role as an employer in furthering the integration of the long-term unemployed should be expedited. The Forum is disappointed at the lack of progress in the private sector and it urges that the Government, in consultation with the Social Partners, should now give priority and impetus to the development of a work sharing strategy, as called for in its Report.

### **Forum Report No. 10 on *Equality Proofing Issues***

- The Forum is disappointed at the delays and action taken to date on its recommendations. While the Employment Equality and Equal Status Bills are broadly in line with its own recommendations, a clear timeframe now needs to be given by Government for amending these Bills to comply with the Supreme Court judgements and for their enactment.
- A key issue is to retain disability and provision for "*reasonable accommodation*" in both these Bills.
- Another area of concern is that no specific action has yet been taken to strengthen equality proofing under the NAPS.
- Equality targets and principles also need to be strengthened and made more explicit components of the SMI process, as already mentioned above.

- Action is also required on a number of its other outstanding recommendations and the Forum will be pursuing this in the Opinion on equality issues which it is at present finalising as part of its remit under the *Partnership 2000* monitoring arrangements.

### **Forum Report No. 11 on Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment**

- The Forum is encouraged with the Government's positive response to its recommendations. However, the lengthier time-scale decided on by Government for eliminating early school leaving should be reviewed, given the sizeable investment now planned, with a view to achieving more rapid progress.
- In the meantime, the specific arrangements envisaged for Traveller children and those who will continue to fall through the net need to be defined.
- The Department of Education and Science should put mechanisms in place for disbursing the funding allocated for childcare costs on all youth and adult education programmes and access measures should have a higher priority in planning such provision.
- Finally, the policies now in place should be actively monitored and evaluated on an on-going basis.

### **Forum Report No. 12 on Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion**

- The Government's response in announcing the preparation of a White Paper is welcomed as are the commitments on rural development in the new Government's *Action Programme for the Millennium*.
  - The Department of Agriculture and Food should take the necessary steps to ensure that equality-proofing mechanisms and procedures become standard features in its on-going evaluation of EU Operational Programmes.
3. In its overall conclusions (Section VIII of the Report), the Forum considers that its influence on the development of public policy has been consolidated during its second two-year work cycle. The provisions on social inclusion and equality in *Partnership 2000* embrace issues and themes which the Forum has been actively promoting and also of particular note is the developmental role assigned to the Forum through its being asked to providing opinions at six-monthly intervals in this area.

4. The Forum believes that it has made important progress in strengthening the focus on unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, in facilitating a wider participation in policy making, of producing practical and actionable reports and in stimulating public debate on policy options and choices. In this regard, it is reasonably satisfied and encouraged with the responses received and the actions taken by successive Governments in acting on its recommendations. But much more work needs to be done as evidenced, for example, in the case of long-term unemployment which remains this country's major economic and social problem.
  
5. Finally, the co-operation and assistance given by Government Departments and Agencies in the preparation of this Report is very much appreciated by the Forum.

Section I

**Introduction**





# Introduction

## Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This is the second in a series of Periodic Reports which the Forum will publish from time to time for the purposes of:
- outlining the work it has carried out over a particular period;
  - evaluating the extent to which its policy recommendations have been acted on;
  - amending or adding to these, as considered appropriate, in the light of the responses to its initial recommendations; and
  - drawing any lessons and conclusions from this experience, with a view to enhancing its input to the Government's decision – making processes on economic and social policy issues.

## Structure of the Report

- 1.2 This Report deals with six of the Reports which have been published over the period since the Forum's First Periodic Report<sup>1</sup>. Two further Reports, one on the theme of "*Unemployment Statistics*" and the other on "*Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion*", will be dealt with in the next Periodic Report.
- 1.3 Each of these six Reports are covered in individual Sections of this Report, in a uniform presentation and sequence with a brief outline of the Report's main features; follow-up action taken by Government on the recommendations as communicated by the relevant Departments concerned; and the Forum's conclusions, including also, where considered appropriate, revised and/or further recommendations to Government.

## Forum's Role and Membership

- 1.4 The Forum was established by the Government in 1993 to contribute to the formation of a wider national consensus on issues such as job creation, long-term unemployment, disadvantage and equality and social justice in our society. A particular focus of its work is to develop initiatives to combat unemployment.
- 1.5 Membership of the Forum is unique and drawn from three broad strands. It includes, for the first time, representatives of the Government, of the Opposition Parties, the traditional Social Partners (business, trade unions and farmers) and a third strand representing voluntary and community groups such

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<sup>1</sup> *First Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum*, (May, 1995).

as the unemployed, women, the disadvantaged, people with a disability, youth, older people and environmental interests who had previously been outside the consultative process between the Government and the Social Partners. These groups set up the Community Platform as a mechanism to organise the participation of the sector in the discussions which led to the negotiations and ratification of *Partnership 2000*. The sector is now one of the four pillars to this partnership process.

- 1.6 The Forum's initial two-year mandate was renewed by the Government in mid-1995 for a further period up to December next. In their Press Statement announcing this decision, the Government acknowledged the important contribution the Forum had made to the development of public policy in a relatively short period of time and to its role in facilitating a wider participation in democracy, through the voice given to the aspirations and concerns of those who up to then had no formal access to the policy formulation process.

### **Forum's Work Programme**

- 1.7 The Forum works in two-year cycles. The main themes and indicative issues included in its current 1995/1997 Work Programme are outlined in Box 1 at the end of this Section. Particular account was taken in drawing up this Programme to avoid duplication with the work of other bodies such as the National Economic and Social Council. It was submitted to Government in late 1995 for their information and attention and, in their response, the Government assured the Forum of their full support and co-operation in the carrying out of its work and in ensuring that its recommendations would be taken into account in the formulation of policy. The Government also asked that the National Anti-Poverty Strategy be added to the list of topics to be addressed in the Work Programme. In addition, the Work Programme has now been further extended with the Opinions which the Forum will be preparing at six-monthly intervals under the monitoring provisions of *Partnership 2000*.

- 1.8 A major on-going concern for the Forum in implementing its Work Programme is for more decisive action to be taken in tackling unemployment, inequality and disadvantage issues in our society. This is reflected throughout its work and all the Reports and Opinions which it prepares are addressed within an equality proofing framework.

### **Forum's Structures and Working Arrangements**

- 1.9 The Forum has its own independent Chairperson and Secretariat. Following a review and an assessment by the Forum in 1995 of its internal structures and working arrangements and a report which was commissioned from Price Waterhouse – who also acted as facilitators in this process – a number of changes were introduced to increase its overall effectiveness and functioning. As a result, the Forum now works through:

- **Plenary Sessions** of its full 49 Members which debate policy issues and adopt Reports from the Standing Committees; these Sessions normally take place in Dublin Castle – 20 Plenary Sessions have been held to date – and are in public, with the media present; Ministers, officials and outside experts also attend from time to time to assist the Forum in its work;
- a **Management Committee** (of 13 Members, who are also members of either of the two Standing Committees) which meets on a regular basis to co-ordinate and monitor the work of the Forum and to take decisions on organisational and procedural matters; and
- two **Standing Committees** of equal status and size and drawn from the full membership, with balanced representation between the Three Strands; all Members belong to either one of these Committees; the former distinction between having an economic policy committee and a separate social policy committee has been abandoned to reflect the emphasis in the Forum's work of integrating economic and social policy issues; the Forum's Reports are prepared initially by these Committees, each of which has its own independent Chairperson; these Committees meet mostly in private.

1.10 The Forum's work process centres on the production of Reports. These are submitted to Government, with a delay of 2/3 weeks to allow time for their consideration and the issuing of Press Statements setting out the Government's reactions, following which the Reports are published and circulated to the Houses of the Oireachtas, Government Departments and other bodies and interest groups concerned.

1.11 During the period covered by this Report, the Forum also initiated a new work process of preparing Opinions on particular policy issues. Relative to its Reports, these Opinions are shorter documents designed to provide a more rapid response to, for example, requests from Government such as the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, or provide an input at short notice to particular developments viz. the negotiations last Autumn which eventually led to *Partnership 2000* being ratified or monitoring issues where it had previously submitted a more detailed Report such as Government initiatives on long-term unemployment or the Government's Employment Equality Bill.

## **Forum's Financing**

1.12 With the re-organisation last July by the incoming Government of Ministerial responsibilities, the Forum is now under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and is funded through a Grant-in-Aid.

**Box 1**

**The Forum's 1995/1997 Work Programme  
Main Theme and Indicative Issues**

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- *Quality Delivery of Social Services* – relationship between the citizen and the State, better co-ordination and integration by service providers, information and rights of consumers.
- *Jobs Potential of the Services Sector* – importance of the sector and its growth potential, barriers to job creation and gaps in State policies and supports.
- *Jobs Potential of Work Sharing* – potential of work sharing to contribute to a more equitable distribution of work, a better balance between family and working life and job creation (viz reducing overtime, job sharing and career breaks).
- *Equality Proofing Issues* – equality objectives, equality proofing mechanisms (legislation, administrative procedures, codes of practice etc.) and equality agencies and institutions.
- *Long-term Unemployment* – monitoring and evaluation of new initiatives, extending the Local Employment Service and improving its effectiveness and quality of service delivery.
- *Post-PCW Negotiations* – Forum's input on core elements, key policy areas and options to ensure greater participation by the voluntary and community sector in the partnership process.
- *Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment* – causes of early school leaving, links to long-term unemployment and strategies to tackle both these problems.
- *Rural Development and Social Exclusion* – deficiencies in present policies, better targeting and delivery of public services, institutional issues and a more supportive strategic framework.
- *Self-employment and Enterprise* – barriers faced by disadvantaged groups and potential of these groups to set up in self-employment.
- *Welfare to Work* – evaluation of the effectiveness of existing programmes and delivery mechanisms.

Section II

**Forum Report  
No. 6 on the  
*Quality Delivery  
of Social Services***



# **Forum Report No. 6 on the Quality Delivery of Social Services**

- 2.1 This Report called for major reforms to ensure that the customer has better and more accessible public services; that these services address the variety of relationships and interactions between clients and the staff who operate these services and that the taxpayer gets better value for money.
- 2.2 It contained over 200 recommendations to make these services more user-friendly and more responsive to the needs of the customer. These recommendations, which would particularly help disadvantaged groups such as women, people with a disability, older people and Travellers addressed, inter alia, the need for:
- greater consultation and participation by clients in the design and delivery of services;
  - the provision of better information and advice;
  - more choice and simplicity in areas such as payment methods and in the terms and conditions governing eligibility for programmes and schemes;
  - improved access to services including more client-friendly reception areas, more flexible opening hours;
  - better redress and appeal procedures; and
  - better co-ordination and integrated planning and delivery of services between agencies at national and local levels.
- 2.3 In addition, the Forum made a number of specific recommendations in relation to individual social services, namely social welfare, health, housing and the services delivered by An Post, FÁS and the Local Authorities. Finally, a series of recommendations were made also in relation to public service reform in areas such as establishment of customer-service advisory groups, performance indicators, value for money reviews and staff training.

## **Follow-up Action by Government on Forum Report No. 6**

- 2.4 The Report was seen by Government as particularly timely and welcome in the context of their own programme priorities and its dovetailing in with the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) beginning to get under way at that stage

across all Departments and Offices. The Forum's emphasis that the interests of the customer must be paramount in the delivery of services by all public bodies was fully accepted by Government.

2.5 Following their consideration of a report, which had been submitted by the Minister for Finance on the implications of implementing the Forum's recommendations, the Government decided that all Departments should:

- take on board the Forum's recommendations in relation to service improvement with a view to implementing them as far as possible, with particular priority given to the recommendations on information/advice, consultations with users, methods of redress and other recommendations which have little or no resource or cost implications; and
- draw up plans for the phased implementation of the recommendations, within existing budgetary and staff resource constraints, in the context of proposals for an initiative on service quality improvement, as set out in the Report<sup>2</sup> of the Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries under the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI).

A notable feature of the above Government decision is that progress on implementation will be reported annually to the SMI Co-ordination Group and that the Forum will be kept informed of future developments in this area.

2.6 The Report of the Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries under the SMI sets out new approaches and principles for the quality delivery of public services. The Forum particularly welcomes this development and the acknowledgement given in that Report that these principles were formulated on the basis of its own Report No. 6.

2.7 The next step was to translate these principles into operational terms as part of the implementation of the SMI and this has now been done with the publication in May last of a set of basic principles for the provision and delivery of public services. These principles are set out in Box 2.

2.8 A *Quality Customer Service Initiative*, was launched by the Government in April last, the aim of which is to ensure that all Government Departments and Offices set standards of quality service for their external customers and clients which they would commit to achieving within a specific time. The key elements of this Initiative are:

- each Department/Office is at present finalising a detailed Customer Action Plan setting out how full effect will be given to the above principles within 2 years;

<sup>2</sup> *Delivering Better Government*, (May, 1996).



**Box 2**

**Principles of Quality Customer Service  
for Customers and Clients of the Civil Service**

**In their dealings with the Public, Civil Service Departments and Offices will:**

**Quality Service Standards**

Publish a statement which outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can legitimately expect and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

**Information**

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely, accurate, available at all points of contact and meets the needs of people with disabilities.

Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures.

**Timeliness and Courtesy**

Deliver services with courtesy and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer.

Respect the rights of minorities at all times in the delivery of services.

**Complaints**

Establish a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

**Redress**

Introduce a formalised system for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions.

**Consultation**

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services.

**Choice**

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times.

Provide services for those who wish to do business through Irish.

**Better Co-ordination**

Foster a more co-ordinated and integrated approach to delivery of services.

**Access**

Provide clean, accessible public offices which ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and facilitate access for people with disabilities.

Give contact names in all telephone and written communications to ensure ease of on-going transactions.

- as indicators of best practice, statements by the Departments of Agriculture, Food and Forestry; Social Welfare and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners of their current services and the basic standards of service which customers may now expect were published; and
  - the commissioning of a base-line survey of customers of the Civil Service, the results of which have now become available.
- 2.9 In line with one of the Forum's recommendations, the Government has also decided to provide telephone access to all Government Departments and Offices for the price of a local call from anywhere in the country. This facility will be based on Telecom Éireann Lo-call 1-890 service under which callers will be charged standard local rates in contacting Government services. The facility will be introduced on a phased basis as Departments complete the necessary preparations for handling the expected increase in the level of incoming calls.
- 2.10 Finally, draft guidelines on action planning for delivery of quality services to customers were prepared and these were issued in June last to all relevant Departments. These guidelines cover:
- Leadership and Quality Service Ethos;
  - External Consultation;
  - Accessibility;
  - Training and Internal Consultation;
  - Complaints and Redress; and
  - Setting Standards for Quality Customer Service.

## **Forum's Conclusions and Recommendations on its Report No. 6**

- 2.11 The Forum notes the action taken to date by Government on some of the recommendations which were contained in this Report through, for example, the Charter of Rights for Farmers and the establishment of customer panels around the country by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.
- 2.12 However, and given the lead-in time involved and the timescale required to improve the way in which social services are delivered, it is too early at this stage for the Forum to pronounce definitively on the adequacy of the follow-up action taken on its Report. To date, the response has largely been in planning terms at the national level and there has as yet been little significant change from the client's point of view in the quality of service delivery on the ground.

- 2.19 These issues are outlined in the Government's Green Paper on the Community and Voluntary Sector<sup>3</sup> and the Forum expects that its recommendations will be taken into account in the new framework which is to be established for developing the relationship between the statutory and voluntary sectors, in the light of the public debate on this Green Paper.
  
- 2.20 The results of the base-line survey of Civil Service customers should now be published for public information and debate.
  
- 2.21 The Forum particularly welcomes the Freedom of Information Act, the Public Service Management Act (which provides the legislative framework to underpin the Strategic Management Initiative) and the Privilege and Compellability of Witnesses Act. These provide an unprecedented opportunity for change in the way the public service does its business, establish a new basis for a more balanced relationship between the citizen and the State and mark an important step forward in meeting the expectations and demands of the public for more accessible and responsive public services. The Forum also welcomes the extension of the remit of the joint management/union gender-equality group to address the issue of equality of opportunity in the Civil Service.
  
- 2.22 Finally, and on the more general question of modernisation of the public service under the SMI, the Forum notes that measures in train include Statements of Strategy (now published and business plans have been formulated by most Departments), and human resource and financial management initiatives such as performance management, recruitment and training and multi-annual budgeting.

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3 A Framework for Partnership - A Green Paper on the Community and Voluntary Sector and its Relationship with the State, (May, 1997).

2.13 The Report did not contain any specific recommendations to increase public expenditure – indeed, in many cases what the Forum proposed would involve the more efficient and effective deployment of existing resources to ensure that both the client got a better service and the taxpayer would also get better value for money. At the same time, however, and as its subsequent discussions with Departments have confirmed, some of its recommendations would be costly and it would take at least a number of years to have them implemented.

■ 2.14 In the circumstances, the Forum is concerned by the Government's decision to give priority to those recommendations "*which have little or no resource or cost implications*". It considers that this decision should be reviewed and, as a minimum, improvements to customer services should be given a higher priority through the reallocation of resources from other policy areas.

2.15 The process of reform in the delivery of services will require on-going direction and encouragement and the Government's decision to assign responsibility in this area to the SMI Implementation and Co-ordination Groups will, it is hoped, ensure that the momentum of change is maintained and that uniform results are achieved throughout all public services. A further helpful step is the Government commitment that progress on implementation will be reported annually to these Groups and that the Forum will be kept informed of future developments in this area.

■ 2.16 In this regard, the Forum urges that its more specific recommendations in relation to social welfare, health, housing, postal, training and local authority services should be taken into account and acted on in the context of the Customer Action Plans which are now in the course of preparation by relevant Government Departments. For example, in the social welfare area, action is needed in relation to phasing out the use of Garda stations for signing-on purposes, publication of the guidelines on how the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) Scheme operates (the "*exceptional needs*" guidelines were published but those for "*urgent needs*" and "*rent supplements*" were not) and the introduction of an appeals procedure for the SWA Scheme (regulations were drawn up but no resources have been allocated so that no appeals system is yet in operation).

■ 2.17 At the same time, and given that the SMI is being used as the mechanism for achieving improvements in services delivery, equality targets and principles should be strengthened and made more explicit components of the SMI process.

2.18 The voluntary and community sector plays an important role also, of course, in the provision of advice, advocacy and, in some cases, in the direct delivery of social services on behalf on the State. The Forum again wishes to highlight the recommendations made in its Report to enhance that sector's input in policy-making, service delivery and criteria for statutory funding of the sector.

Section III

**Forum Report  
No. 7 on the  
*Jobs Potential of  
the Services Sector***



# **Forum Report No. 7 on the Jobs Potential of the Services Sector**

- 3.1 This Report focused on a number of strategic policy measures to boost employment growth in the services sector. This sector offers the greatest potential for job creation, including a wide variety of job opportunities for the long-term unemployed, but was relatively neglected and received less favourable treatment up to recently.
- 3.2 The Report recommended a range of policy changes and an integrated strategy to accelerate the sector's employment performance, action to tackle employment barriers and a more effective approach to new areas of potential growth such as information technology, financial services and the social economy in areas such as personal services, childcare and services to improve the quality of life, particularly in communities and areas experiencing disadvantage. The more specific recommendations made and the action taken by Government on these recommendations are outlined beneath.

## **Follow-up Action by Government on Forum Report No. 7**

### **(i) General Recommendations**

- 3.3 The main thrust of the Forum's Report was the need for a reassessment of policy in the services sector and that the sector required a higher profile in State enterprise policy. This was accepted by Government and in March last the then Minister for Enterprise and Employment published a comprehensive policy strategy for the sector<sup>4</sup>. This strategy was designed to take into account the recommendations of the Task Force Report on Jobs in Services, the Task Force Report on Small Business and the Forum's Report No. 7.
- 3.4 The strategy represents a change of policy orientation in favour of services so that their growth potential can be more fully exploited and their employment potential maximised. It involves a targeted approach with a basic level of access to support for all firms with growth potential, access to selected financial and other supports for selected services companies and access to the full range of agency supports for internationally-traded firms in designated sectors.

<sup>4</sup> A Government Strategy for Services - Employment Initiatives for the Millennium, (March, 1997).

(ii) **Specific Recommendations**

3.5 Action taken by Government on the Forum's more specific policy recommendations are outlined beneath.

*Forum's  
Recommendations on  
Taxation*

- further reductions in income tax and the PRSI burdens for low income earners and greater integration between the tax and social welfare systems;
- a selective and lower tax regime for certain designated labour-intensive services and extension of the lower 10 per cent corporation tax to a wider range of internationally traded services, with a proven employment potential; and
- other taxation issues such as the relative treatment of the self-employed and the PAYE sectors, the withholding tax, compliance costs for smaller firms, maintenance of the reduced VAT rate for certain labour-intensive services and simplification of VAT collection procedures.

*Tax Wedge*

3.6 The Budgets introduced over the period 1995/1997 have made progress in reducing the tax wedge with a view to providing greater incentives to social welfare recipients to take up employment. These measures included increases in personal allowances, a 1% reduction in the standard rate of income tax, a similar reduction for certain PRSI contributors, increases in the weekly income allowance for disregard in the calculation of employee PRSI and in the earnings limit below which the health and employment/training levies are exempt, a reduction in the standard rate of employers PRSI and increases in the threshold below which the lower rate applies and an increase in the PAYE standard rate bands.

3.7 The above income tax and PRSI changes significantly improve the rewards of working, particularly for workers on low pay and are reinforced by complementary welfare schemes designed to decouple low-income support from employment status to ease the transition from unemployment to employment. The take-home pay position of workers has been improving, as the tax wedge has decreased, and has increased faster than gross pay. Thus, in the period from 1989 to date, employee take-home pay was 13 per cent greater than gross wage increases, for both a single earner and a single earner couple



with two children (persons on two-thirds the average industrial wage). The tax wedge as a percentage of total labour costs to an employer, decreased from 24 per cent to 14 per cent for a single earner couple with two children, and from 34 to 25 per cent for a single earner.

- 3.8 In addition, a number of the interim recommendations of the Expert Working Group on the Integration of the Tax and Social Welfare Systems have already been implemented. The Group identified two main priorities to address work disincentives and poverty traps viz. reform of child income support and substantial increases in personal tax allowances. Progress on each of these was made in last January's Budget.

#### *Corporation Tax*

- 3.9 As regards corporation taxes, these have been lowered significantly over recent budgets. With effect from 1 April, 1995 the standard corporation tax was reduced from 40 per cent to 38 per cent and, in the 1996 Budget, a new lower 30 per cent rate was introduced in respect of the first £50,000 of profits. In this year's Budget, the higher 38 per cent rate and the lower 30 per cent rate were reduced to 36 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. It is considered that these reductions will have a significant impact on the growth and development of small firms in the services sector.

#### *Other Taxation Changes*

- 3.10 As regards other taxation changes recommended by the Forum, the position is as follows:
- progress was made in the 1994 Finance Act in extending the PAYE Allowance to children of proprietary directors and self-employed, who are full-time employees in their parents' business;
  - the retention of the reduced VAT rate of 12.5% for labour-intensive services is constrained by EU law but, in the context of decisions on the definitive EU VAT regime, the Minister for Finance will be pressing the option for Member States to maintain the current transitional rating arrangements on a definitive basis; and
  - the Revenue Commissioners have already made progress in alleviating compliance costs; for example, VAT collection procedures have been simplified insofar as firms with a liability for VAT of under £6,000 have a facility to account for VAT on an annual basis and monthly direct debit facilities, without a requirement for completing any paperwork, is available in respect of PAYE/PRSI, VAT and preliminary tax.

*Forum's  
Recommendations  
on State  
Aids/Supports:*

- more effective EU restrictions on State aids should be actively promoted;
- State support services should be more fully available (notably the services of the Trade Board in developing speciality packages in areas of potential export growth such as education, health and consultancy);
- international certification of standards for education and health services; and
- an integrated package of measures to attract international services investment (especially R & D and headquarters staff of foreign companies already located here) and encouragement for firms involved in import substitution and in improving linkages between foreign-owned companies here and domestically provided services.

3.11 This country has long had concern at the high level of aid historically offered throughout the EU, and particularly by the wealthier Member States, which place us at a competitive disadvantage in the market for mobile foreign direct investment (FDI) projects. We have, therefore, taken a stance in all fora discussing State Aids, that the high levels of aid per job created, which is currently permitted, should be reduced. Ireland will continue to press for reductions in aids which apply in other Member States where they place us at a competitive disadvantage. This is in line with the Forum's recommendations and was also recommended in the Culliton Report.

3.12 As regards the Forum's recommendation that the services of the Trade Board should be made more available to the services sector, this has been addressed in the Board's 1996 Strategy Programme for increasing services exports from a 1994 base of £635 million to £1.6 billion by the year 2001. Of the Board's benchmark companies, about 19 per cent are services companies. It is currently creating a Services Development Programme to give even sharper focus to its efforts in this area and also works closely with the Irish Direct Marketing Association and with the International Education Board which focuses on marketing education services.

*Forum's  
Recommendations  
on Competition,  
Regulatory  
Framework and  
Competitiveness:*

- elimination of barriers to entry, restrictive practices, licensing requirements etc. which cannot be justified on grounds of public safety or the 'common good';
- curtailing artificial monopolies in the public or private sectors;
- the proposed strengthening of the Competition Authority (including provision for stiff court penalties and with sufficient resources) should be acted on as soon as possible;
- establishment of consumer charters, performance indicators etc. for all public services and State companies, as recommended in Forum Report No. 6; and
- a more positive approach to sustainable development and job creation.

3.13 Existing competition policy has been considerably strengthened by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 1996. This provides for public enforcement of competition law and fines for proven breaches of the law. The establishment of a public 'enforcer' and the threat of stiff penalties for offenders in the Courts will greatly enhance the prospect of achieving a pro-competitive environment in which enterprise can be fostered and provide employment opportunities.

3.14 The Strategic Management Initiative sets out a number of principles that will, when implemented, ease compliance costs on small business and services firms as recommended by the Forum and provide for the delivery of a quality service to customers, including the specifications of standards. The Working Groups set up to develop a framework for implementation of the Strategic Management Initiative include the areas of Regulatory Reform, Quality Customer Service and Open and Transparent Service Delivery (see Section II of this Report). A Code of Practice for the delivery of services to customers of commercial State companies was also recently launched. The Forum's input, through its Report No. 6, in the developments in this area has been specifically acknowledged and highlighted by Government.

*Forum's  
Recommendations  
on Education and  
Training*

- addressing the needs of the long-term unemployed and those who have left school without any qualifications as already recommended in Forum Report No. 4;
- redressing the imbalance in FÁS training provision for the services sector;
- increased emphasis on language training and improving technological skills;
- greater development of management and marketing skills; and
- a unified system for the certification of vocational training.

3.15 The Government's decisions last year – whereby 75 per cent of CE places will be reserved for those over 21 years and unemployed for at least twelve months, with the 25 per cent balance of CE places going to people over 35 years of age and unemployed for three years or more and the new *Jobs Initiative* – are designed to ensure that the long-term unemployed get the maximum benefit, provide sponsored employment for those less likely to get jobs in the short-term and whole-time contract jobs of longer duration for those who have the poorest prospect of finding jobs. A Green Paper on Adult Education will be published before the end of the year while the Minister of State at the Department of Education and Science has recently announced his intention of establishing a committee on adult literacy so as to identify the reasons for educational failure in terms of people slipping through the system. The issue of early school leavers is discussed in Section VI of the Report.

3.16 In general terms, the recommendations of the Forum are broadly a reflection of current policy in the sector. Teastas – the Irish National Certification Authority – was established on an ad-hoc basis with responsibility for validation of standards, the certification of educational levels and the establishment of ladders of progression in the non-university sector. The White Paper on Education *Charting our Education Future* addresses many of the education issues raised by the Forum. Greater emphasis will be placed on the development of languages and technological training.

3.17 FÁS has taken a number of initiatives in relation to the services sector. Advisory Committees have been established for the Software and Retail sectors. Major studies have been conducted including a recent study of the foreign language requirements of the telemarketing sector. The major financial support

mechanism operated by FÁS for existing employees is the Training Support Scheme. The extension and enhancement of the Mentor Programme is currently being examined.

- 3.18 In response to identified skills needs in the software and telemarketing/teleservices sectors, a substantial proportion of the additional 6,000 places being made available up to the end of the century is being dedicated to software graduates. In addition, to ease short-term pressures, funding for an additional 450 places under the EU assisted Advanced Technical Skills Programme is being provided. The Department of Education and Science is also approving, following consultations with IDA Ireland, new courses in teleservices within the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme (PLCs).
- 3.19 The White Paper on *Human Resource Development* seeks to underpin competitiveness by promoting investment in the skills and knowledge of the workforce, including languages and broad science and technology literacy. One of the key policy objectives of the White Paper is the improvement of the level of management training and development, particularly in small firms.

*Forum's  
Recommendations  
on the Social  
Economy:*

- a range of measures to support pro-actively the social economy's role and potential such as access to the full range of official programmes of assistance (e.g. County Enterprise Boards, Area-based Partnership Companies and FÁS) and the development of appropriate support packages and effective local delivery mechanisms;
- the revamping of the Community Employment Programme as recommended in Forum Report No. 4; and
- the development of household services (e.g. childcare, cleaning, house repairs and maintenance) through various incentives, along the lines of the approach initiated in Denmark.

- 3.20 *Partnership 2000* includes a specific commitment to establish a Working Group to undertake a detailed examination of the social economy. The recommendations of the Forum will be taken into account by the Working Group, which has now been established and comprises representatives from relevant Government Departments and the Social Partners.

3.21 It is envisaged that appropriate support mechanisms for the social economy will be provided in the light of the Working Group's recommendations. A number of the measures already adopted by the Government in the interests of labour market efficiency, such as the reduction of the tax wedge for low wages, will be of assistance in this respect. Given demographic trends indicating an ageing of the population in coming years, the implications for health and care services provides a key area for development of opportunities in the Social Economy.

#### *Community Employment*

3.22 Community Employment (CE) is the main intervention by the State in respect of the long-term unemployed and other special categories such as people with a disability and lone parents. While its purpose is to provide temporary work experience together with training to assist in accessing mainstream employment, it is the major existing State support for the social economy.

3.23 Its recent restructuring (as outlined in paragraph 3.15 above), largely following the recommendations of the Forum in its Report No. 4 as elaborated by the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment, will also be of assistance in the development of the Social Economy. The introduction of the *Jobs Initiative* Scheme, whereby 1,000 full-time places of three year duration have been made available, represents another important policy change.

#### *Progression from CE*

3.24 The Forum is concerned lest the social economy becomes identified with low paid, scheme jobs. Along with its role in supporting the social economy, CE plays a role in assisting long-term unemployed people to progress on to training or other forms of employment in all sectors of the economy, including more secure jobs in the social economy. A 1997 survey by FÁS on progression rates for CE workers into jobs indicated that, of those who had left CE in the period April-July 1995, 39 per cent had obtained a job, and, at the time of the survey, 34 per cent were in employment (24 per cent full-time, 5 per cent part-time and 5 per cent self-employed). A further 33 per cent were on a FÁS programme or in education. Of the 39 per cent that got jobs, the majority were in the services sector. Of those who had got a job, 12 per cent had received payment under the Back to Work Allowance Scheme, while the figure for those self-employed was 34 per cent (the latter figures are based on a small sample size and must, therefore, be treated with caution).

*Recommendations  
on Childcare  
Services*

- The social economy's potential in developing these services should be based on a number of principles viz.:
- they should be affordable, accessible and responsive to the needs of both parents and children;
- they should be regulated to ensure proper safety and supervisory standards; and
- providers of these services should be trained to a nationally recognised standard.

3.25 Under the provisions of *Partnership 2000*, an expert Working Group, under the chair of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, has now been established to devise a national framework for the development of the childcare sector, with a target deadline for development of the framework by end-1998. Over the coming months the Group, whose remit includes examination of the issues covered by the above recommendations, intends to draw on the experience of current activities in this field and to support the development of other initiatives as resources permit. This includes the *Equal Opportunity Pilot Childcare Initiative*, which is also the responsibility of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, and which has received £2.15m in resources to date.

### **Forum's Conclusions and Recommendations on its Report No. 7**

3.26 The Forum welcomes the above detailed response and the action taken by Government to implement the bulk of its recommendations. As a result, and for the first time ever, there is now a clear policy framework for the development of the services sector. But it will be essential to ensure that this strategy is pursued actively and the results are regularly monitored so that the sector's wealth creation and employment potential are exploited to the full.

■ 3.27 While there has been an increased emphasis in recent Budgets on tax reform measures for those on low pay, nevertheless, those on higher pay have benefitted most in absolute terms. This imbalance should now be addressed and, in this respect, the Forum agrees with NESC's conclusion<sup>5</sup> that the priority for further reforms should concentrate more resources on lower to middle income earners by way of increasing personal allowances.

<sup>5</sup> *Strategy into the 21st Century*, NESC No. 98, (October, 1996).

- 3.28 In its forthcoming Opinion, under *Partnership 2000*, on targeted employment and training measures, the Forum will be looking again at a number of key issues such as better progression and integration into the labour market for the long-term unemployed, increasing the focus on quality skills training and work experience opportunities so that the long-term employed can more realistically compete for the jobs that are now becoming available. This Opinion will also revisit a number of issues which are still outstanding from its earlier Opinion<sup>6</sup>, including the provision under *Partnership 2000* to increase targeted employment measures by an additional 10,000 places.
- 3.29 The development of the Social Economy should be given a higher priority and the Forum urges that the Working Group be asked to expedite its work, particularly in view of the delay of over two years in getting it off the ground. Another area of concern is the promotion of this country as a location for research and development and headquarters staff of foreign companies already located here and progress in this regard should be monitored closely.
  - 3.30 Finally, the Forum reiterates its earlier recommendation<sup>7</sup> that the *Jobs Initiative* should be extended to rural areas and targeted at areas with significantly high levels of unemployment and underemployment.

<sup>6</sup> *Long-term Unemployment Initiatives*, Forum Opinion No. 3, (May, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> *Rural Renewal - Combating Social Exclusion*, Forum Report No. 12, (March, 1997).



Section IV

**Forum Report  
No. 9 on the  
*Jobs Potential of  
Work Sharing***



# Forum Report No. 9 on the *Jobs Potential of Work Sharing*

- 4.1 In this Report, which is linked to its earlier Report No. 4 on *Ending Long-term Unemployment*, the Forum urged that work sharing be given greater attention and priority by all the interests involved, and be examined in the light of its potential for job creation. Work sharing offers a number of other distinct advantages such as the more equitable distribution of available work, a better balance between family and working life and more flexibility in the work place.
- 4.2 The Report highlighted that the main jobs potential would arise in:
- *reducing overtime*: overtime is widespread in some sectors of our economy; even realising a quarter of this could create 10,000 more full-time jobs;
  - *job sharing*: only 5 per cent of civil servants (mostly in lower clerical grades) are at present involved; the proportion in the private sector is broadly similar, using as the basis of comparison those who are classified as part-time workers, since workers on reduced hours in the private sector are generally categorised as such; and
  - *career breaks*: more flexible and attractive arrangements are needed, both in the public and private sectors; the EU Framework Agreement on Parental Leave may provide an opportunity to increase the job potential in this area.
- 4.3 The Forum strongly recommended that work sharing should be given greater impetus and the long-term unemployed should be the main beneficiaries of work sharing initiatives. The Local Employment Service, which is being established on foot of the recommendations made in Forum Report No. 4, should have a key role to play in this regard.
- 4.4 Tackling the obstacles to work sharing was the central focus of the Report and the Forum's recommendations in this regard are summarised in Box 3.

### Box 3

#### Summary of the Forum's recommendations on Work Sharing

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- a work sharing framework strategy that has job creation as its central objective should be agreed between the Government, the Social Partners and representatives of the unemployed and of women;
- the introduction of incentives and measures to encourage employers, employees and the long-term unemployed to overcome the barriers associated with work sharing and to participate in such initiatives;
- the Local Employment Service should be instrumental in preparing and placing the long-term unemployed in vacancies arising from work sharing arrangements;
- systematic and continuous overtime should be curtailed through collective agreements at local level and implementation and adequate enforcement of the EU Working Time Directive;
- the public sector should build on its experience of job sharing and career breaks over the last decade to introduce more attractive options in the future;
- the private sector should develop attractive schemes tailored to the needs of the firm and employees, with State incentives to support recruitment of long-term unemployed people to fill vacancies; and
- obstacles to the take up of part-time work and job sharing and causes of involuntary part-time work such as inadequate childcare facilities and poverty and unemployment traps should be tackled and removed.

4.5 A key recommendation was that incentives should be provided to reconcile differing interests between employers and workers as well as to ensure that the needs of the unemployed are taken into account. These incentives should be targeted at the long-term unemployed and be financed from resulting savings in Social Welfare payments.

#### Follow-up Action by Government on Report No. 9

4.6 In keeping with their commitment to removing or eliminating any administrative, tax or welfare obstacles to job sharing, voluntary part-time working, flexible working of a seasonal or temporary character or career breaks and education leave, the Government approved in January of this year a number of changes to the general framework of the public service job sharing and career break schemes.

- 4.7 Prior to the publication of the Forum's Report, work was already under way at Inter-Departmental level on the potential for work sharing in the public service. The Forum's Report was seen as having made a very useful contribution to policy thinking in this area.
- 4.8 These changes, involve a major extension of the existing job-sharing scheme in the public service and are designed to make this scheme more broad-ranging and flexible. The main features are:
- jobs can be split into separate posts as well as shared; this means that in future, a potential job-sharer will not have to find a work partner; nor will they be limited to working half the standard full time hours of their job; this is a significant change to the existing scheme;
  - there will be greater scope for morning-only attendance;
  - public service organisations can agree a range of weekly working hours, or working time schedules, subject to a weekly minimum of eight hours;
  - public servants might work 4 days a week, or for three weeks out of four, for instance;
  - the first period for which employees can job-share will be 6 months, instead of 12; and
  - two career breaks of five years each can be taken, instead of the current one, and career breaks can be taken for the purposes of self-employment.
- 4.9 In addition, the Government approved (i) the establishment of a pilot scheme of term-time working; (ii) that temporary job vacancies created by work sharing policies should, as far as practicable, be channelled to the long-term unemployed or young people at risk of joining their ranks; (iii) that the Inter-Departmental Advisory Group on the Local Employment Service be requested to undertake a review of the role of the public sector as an employer in furthering the integration of the long-term unemployed back into the workforce.
- 4.10 While the initiatives above only apply to workers in the public service, the Government hope that these will also provide a role model for the private sector. The practical application of the new arrangements is currently under discussion with the public service unions.

*Inter-Departmental Committee on Work Sharing Incentives*

- 4.11 In addition to the Inter-Departmental Committee on Work Sharing in the public service referred to above, the Government also approved the establishment in 1995 of an Inter-Departmental Committee to examine possible incentives to encourage a greater take-up of work sharing arrangements. This

Committee noted that, when employees reduce their working hours by switching from full-time to part-time work or job sharing, the operation of the tax and PRSI codes generally ensures that the proportionate reduction in their net pay is less than that in their gross pay. It also noted a number of changes to the social welfare code in recent years which had been of particular benefit to part-time workers and job sharers and their employers. These include:

- the introduction of an allowance for PRSI contributors under which the first £80 of weekly wages of full rate contributors, and £20 of the weekly wage of modified rate contributors, is currently disregarded in the calculation of the social insurance element of employee PRSI contributions;
- the exemption of workers currently earning less than £197 per week from the Health Contribution and Employment and Training levies, which amount to 2.25 per cent of reckonable earnings;
- the operation of a lower 8.5 per cent rate on employers' PRSI on earnings currently below £260 per week; and
- the extension of Family Income Supplement to job sharers.

The above reforms are in line with recommendations made in a number of Forum Reports. The Committee concluded that the stated objective of Government policy to reduce the tax and PRSI burden on lower paid workers was the most equitable and effective way to encourage the further extension of job sharing and part-time work.

4.12 The Committee also examined proposals for voluntary early retirement and paid career break schemes under which participants would be replaced by persons from the long-term unemployed or young people at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. It concluded that such schemes were practicable and that their projected cost per job year compared favourably with that of other employment programmes. It drew attention, however, to the possible knock-on effects of the schemes as well as to issues of equity, deadweight and possible abuses which, though largely outside its remit, required thorough consideration before a final decision was taken on their introduction.

4.13 In the light of these concerns, the then Minister for Enterprise and Employment and the Government decided in January last that the proposals required further examination and should not be proceeded with at that stage.

4.14 Finally, it is noted that the European Court has recently ruled that the length of service of part-time or job-sharing workers cannot be reduced compared to full-time employees for promotion purposes unless justified on grounds unrelated to gender. The implications of this case for part-time and job-sharing workers in this country is currently being examined.

*Working Time*

4.15 Another significant development has been the *Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997*, which transposes into domestic law the EU Directive on Working Time. Amongst other provisions, the Act reduces the maximum weekly working time to an average of 48 hours. This restriction will be operational from March 1st, 1998, although a transitional and voluntary opt-out will be available allowing an individual to work up to an average of 60 hours per week until February 1999 and up to 55 hours until February 2000. These limits include overtime. The possible impact on levels of employment is difficult to determine.

## **Forum's Conclusions and Recommendations on its Report No. 9**

- 4.16 The Forum notes that there has as yet been no significant increase in the level of job-sharing and career breaks in the public service as a result of the policy changes which were announced in January last. Moreover, none of the opportunities which have arisen have been taken up by people who were formerly long-term unemployed. This is despite the Government's declared intention at the time that the long-term unemployed or young people at risk of becoming long-term unemployed should be the main beneficiaries of the resulting job vacancies which would become available.
- 4.17 In the circumstances, the Forum is particularly concerned at the policy failure to take any practical steps to ensure that suitable job opportunities in the public service (whether arising from job-sharing or otherwise) are opened up to the long-term unemployed. It recommends, therefore, that targeted measures and mechanisms should be introduced as a matter of priority to ensure that this objective is realised.
- 4.18 Apart from action to implement the EU Working Time Directive, the Forum is disappointed, however, that no substantial Government action has been taken on its recommendations on work sharing initiatives in the private sector. This is all the more surprising against the background of positive support which has been expressed, both by employer and trade union organisations.
- 4.19 The Forum urges, therefore, that the Government should, in consultation with the Social Partners, now review and give new impetus and priority to the Forum's outstanding recommendations on work sharing initiatives in the private sector. In particular, the Forum urges that the Social Partners set as a priority the development of a work sharing framework strategy, as called for in its Report No. 9.
- 4.20 Initiatives for action in this area should reflect the key Forum recommendation that incentives provided should reconcile the differing interests and needs of employers and employees as well as ensure that the needs of the unemployed

are taken into account. The earlier work undertaken by the Inter-Departmental Committee should also be taken into account, with the objective of tackling obstacles to implementation as fully as possible.

- 4.21 The Forum suggests that one possible method of tackling the lack of information on the impact of job-sharing on the take-up of jobs by the long-term unemployed might be for the CSO to include a question in the quarterly Labour Force Surveys which asks “*Are you job sharing?*”.
- 4.22 The Forum is concerned at the delay in following up the Government’s decision – originally addressed to the Inter-Departmental Advisory Group on the Local Employment Service but now transferred to the Inter-Departmental Strategy Group on Employment and Unemployment – that the role of the Public Service as an employer of the long-term unemployed should be examined and it urges that this work should be expedited as a matter of priority.
- 4.23 Finally, the Forum repeats its call that the long-term unemployed should be the main beneficiaries of these initiatives and the Local Employment Service should be given, where appropriate, a key implementing role in this area.



Section V

**Forum Report  
No. 10 on *Equality  
Proofing Issues***



# Forum Report No. 10 on *Equality Proofing Issues*

5.1 This Report aimed to:

- raise public awareness and debate on equality proofing issues;
- provide an input to the employment equality legislation and the equal status legislation, which were at that stage under preparation by the Government; and
- develop other equality proofing strategies.

By way of background, the concept of equality proofing is defined as a process comprising mechanisms (e.g. legislation, administrative procedures, equality audits, sanctions, codes of practice, affirmative action, quotas etc.) and complementary equality agencies and institutions to achieve equality objectives.

5.2 The objectives which the Forum supports are:

- equality of formal rights, opportunities and access for all groups in our society;
- equality of participation and ensuring that all groups have the ability and resources to exercise that right; and
- equality of outcome for all, both in the employment area as well as in the provision of all goods and services.

The Report centred on women, people with a disability and Travellers, although the recommendations would also have a broad relevance to other target groups.

5.3 To realise these objectives, targets should be set in consultation with all the interest groups affected. The main recommendations made in the Report related to:

- Employment Equality Legislation;
- Equal Status Legislation;
- Administrative Procedures for Equality Proofing; and
- Equality Proofing Institutions.

- 5.4 The Forum accepted that some of its recommendations would require significant investment but emphasised that this should be set off against the resulting social and economic benefits. It also acknowledged that (i) its recommendations should be phased in with realistic targets and time-scales, taking account of resource implications and developments at EU level; (ii) exemptions should only be allowed in specified circumstances; (iii) particular account should be taken of the needs and potential of SMEs; and (iv) it would be more economically advantageous, in the long-term, to employ or make provision of services based on the merits of individuals, than to discriminate against them.

## **Follow-up Action by Government on Forum Report No. 10**

- 5.5 The Government's policy initiatives on equality issues, as they relate to the Forum's recommendations, are outlined in the following paragraphs.

### *Employment Equality Bill*

- 5.6 The Forum's recommendations, both in its Report No.10 and in its Opinion<sup>8</sup>, were addressed in the Employment Equality Bill which was published on 3rd July, 1996 and passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas earlier this year. Following the Supreme Court's decision that certain provisions were unconstitutional, the Government has now decided to re-submit a revised Bill which is in the course of preparation.
- 5.7 It is envisaged that the Bill will seek to prohibit discrimination at work on the following grounds: sex, marital or family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Travelling Community. Among its main features are the following:
- it will protect against discrimination at work on a wide range of grounds, radically extending the scope of the existing law;
  - it will comprehensively ban discrimination by employers, employment agencies, and vocational bodies;
  - for the first time, Irish equality law will spell out a ban on indirect pay discrimination, and a prohibition of sexual, racial and other harassment at work;
  - employers will be allowed to put in place positive action measures to promote equality at work, as well as special beneficial treatment of women in connection with pregnancy and maternity;
  - new, more effective redress procedures will be put in place, including procedures to challenge collective agreements on equality grounds;

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<sup>8</sup> *Employment Equality Bill*, Forum Opinion No. 5, (December, 1996).

- it will include a definition of sexual orientation and comprehensive powers for investigating authorities to access information;
- use of public service quotas along existing lines will be facilitated and will enable, through the work of the Equality Authority, greater recognition of workplace needs of target groups by other employees;
- positive action provision will target people with disabilities and Travellers in particular; and
- consideration will also be given to ensuring that care provision for employees will be gender inclusive.

The Bill represents the most significant step in tackling employment discrimination since the enactment of the first Employment Equality Act in 1977.

### *Equal Status Bill*

5.8 The Forum's recommendations on equal status legislation are, in essence, addressed in the Equal Status Bill as passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas. This Bill, which was subsequently found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court (see below), would:

- prohibit discrimination, both direct and indirect, on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race, colour, nationality, national or ethnic origin and membership of the Travelling community in the provision of goods, services and accommodation, in the disposal of property, in education and by firms of partners etc.;
- provide that registered clubs which discriminate against members or prospective members will not be entitled to a certificate of registration (i.e. a licence to sell drinks) and will be debarred from public funding;
- apply to services provided by public and private agencies; actions which are **required** to be done by or under statutes will, however, be exempt;
- preclude neither positive action nor different treatment which takes into account the special needs of a particular group;
- provide an exemption for "*undue difficulty*" but this is balanced by a requirement for "*reasonable accommodation*"; the definition of "*undue difficulty*" does not relate to economic costs alone; (the whole issue of "*reasonable accommodation*" for people with a disability is being examined in the light of the Supreme Court judgement on the Employment Equality Bill);
- enable the then Minister for Equality and Law Reform to make regulations requiring that commercial passenger vehicles, and bus and train stations, be made more accessible to people with disabilities;

- contain a definition of indirect discrimination which includes a requirement or practice relating to the provision of goods and services etc. which has a disproportionately adverse effect on particular groups; and
- provide for enforcement procedures (namely a Director of Equality Investigations and supporting staff and rights of access to information) which are in line with the Forum's recommendations.

5.9 Following its passage through the Oireachtas, the President referred the Bill to the Supreme Court under Article 26 of the Constitution for a decision as to its constitutionality. As two technical provisions of the Bill mirrored provisions of the Employment Equality Bill, which had earlier been found to be unconstitutional, the Supreme Court inevitably found the Equal Status Bill to be unconstitutional on these two points also. The (outgoing) Government authorised the drafting of a new Equal Status Bill along the lines of the Bill struck down by the Supreme Court and subject to necessary modifications to comply with the Court's judgement. The issue of reasonable accommodation as it relates to both the Equal Status Bill and the Employment Equality Bill will be examined at the drafting stage with a view to securing the maximum appropriate protection which the Bill can afford to people with a disability.

*Administrative Procedures for Equality Proofing*

5.10 There has been a general recognition in recent years that all policy initiatives proposed by Government should be gender proofed. Gender proofing is intended to overcome the potential for indirect discrimination and to contribute towards greater equality of opportunity. It was decided in 1993 that all policy proposals put forward for decision by Government should include an assessment of the probable impact on women of the proposed policy change.

5.11 In addition, the Government recognises the need for the increased use of codes of practice in employment and non-employment areas. A code of practice on sexual harassment in the work place, which was published by the then Minister for Equality and Law Reform in 1995, is now widely used by employers and trade unions. It is intended that statutory recognition will be given to such codes under forthcoming equality legislation. Moreover, all of the programmes under the National Development Plan are gender proofed.

5.12 It is hoped that the above Government initiatives should have the effect of encouraging private sector and voluntary and community sectors to do likewise and to begin to think in terms of equality proofing in developing their own strategies.

5.13 The establishment of the Irish Council for People with Disabilities, a permanent body to represent the interests of people with disabilities, will

ensure that these issues are to the forefront in future deliberations by policy-makers. The on-going work of the Inter-Departmental Monitoring Committee on the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities is likely to encourage consultation on equality proofing with disability organisations.

- 5.14 Finally, *Partnership 2000* contains a commitment, in the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, to the strengthening of administrative procedures for equality proofing, having regard to the recommendations of the Forum.

#### *Equality Proofing Institutions*

- 5.15 The Government's equality legislation provides for the establishment, in place of the Employment Equality Agency, of an Equality Authority, which will cover both employment and non-employment areas. This is broadly along the lines recommended by the Forum.
- 5.16 The Authority will have responsibility for investigating and reviewing trends and practices in the public and private sectors to determine whether or not they create conditions for discrimination. The Authority will also prepare codes of practice for the public and private sectors and provide advice to employers on ways to promote inclusion of target groups into the workforce. It will also assist and advise those taking complaints under the legislation and it may also finance test cases. Like the Employment Equality Agency at present, the Authority will undertake or sponsor research on appropriate equality topics.
- 5.17 Consideration is likely to be given to the participation of target groups in the organisational structure of the Authority. The intention is that the new organisation will be given the resources required to operate effectively and to develop the strategies necessary to tackle discrimination and to promote equality.
- 5.18 The establishment of a new Office of Director of Equality Investigations addresses the Forum's recommendations that an alternative means of redress in equality cases should be made available. This Office will provide an informal service dedicated to the investigation of allegations of discrimination, with powers to apply sanctions against those who do not comply with the law.
- 5.19 The Constitutional Review Group will be appraised of the new consensus on equality issues in our society and will be asked to take this into consideration in the context of its overall deliberations.

#### *Other Equality Issues*

- 5.20 A Gender Equality Monitoring Committee, which includes representatives of Government Departments and Agencies, social partners and women's organisations, has been established to examine general equality issues in the

light of the recommendations of the Second Commission on the Status of Women and the strategic actions agreed at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The Committee's brief is to make recommendations to accelerate implementation of the above Reports and to draw up reports for submission to Ministers on progress made. The First Report on Implementation of the UN (Beijing) Platform for Action was published in December last.

- 5.21 As regards gender balance on State Boards, the Government's objective is to achieve such a balance, with a minimum target of 40 per cent representation of women and men. As at end-March last, 27.4 per cent of member on State Boards and 34.9 per cent of Ministerial/Government nominees on such Boards were women. The corresponding figures in 1992 were 15 per cent and 17 per cent respectively.
- 5.22 The Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities was published in November last. Equality constituted one of the principles underpinning the Report which is, itself, an equality strategy aimed at removing the barriers which stand in the way of people with disabilities who want to live full and fulfilled lives.
- 5.23 The issues raised by the Forum concerning equality for people with disabilities are addressed in the Report in the course of its 402 recommendations. These recommendations are being considered by an Inter-Departmental Task Force which has been asked to draw up a Plan of Action on the rights of people with disabilities, based on the Report.
- 5.24 In the aftermath of the Supreme Court finding in May of this year that the disability provision of the Employment Equality Bill was unconstitutional, the Government has asked the Task Force for a recommendation on how the concept of "*reasonable accommodation*" could be managed in the context of addressing discrimination against people with disabilities in employment equality legislation.
- 5.25 In addition to the Task Force, a Monitoring Committee has also been established to oversee implementation of the Commission's recommendations. This Committee is representative of people with disabilities, their families and carers, service providers, the social partners and Government Departments.
- 5.26 The Government strategy in response to the Task Force Report on the Travelling Community is being implemented and monitored. Organisations representing the Traveller Community are consulted on relevant issues. People from these organisations will be among those from whom the Equality Authority will be appointed when the relevant legislation is in place. In



addition, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform will put in place a mechanism to monitor actively the implementation of the Task Force Report.

## **Forum's Conclusions and Recommendations on its Report No. 10**

- 5.27 While progress has been made over the last few years in *initiating* legislative, administrative and institutional changes designed to address the inequalities and discrimination faced by disadvantaged groups in our society such as women, people with disabilities and Travellers, there have been frustrating delays in achieving concrete results and the Forum is disappointed in the action taken to date on its recommendations.
- 5.28 The Employment Equality and Equal Status Bills are broadly in line with the Forum's own recommendations. Following the Supreme Court's Judgements, the Governments's legislative programme should now indicate a clear timeframe for the publication of the amended Bills and for their enactment by the Oireachtas. A key issue is to retain disability and provision for "*reasonable accommodation*" in both these Bills.
  - 5.29 But legislative changes are not sufficient in themselves to the achievement of greater equality in our society and must be accompanied at the same time by an integrated and systematic approach to ensuring that discriminated and marginalised groups are provided with the necessary means and resources to participate in society as equal citizens. This in turn means that equality-proofing administrative procedures and other special measures need to take their particular needs and interests into account in the policy-making process and in the on-going evaluation and implementation of economic and social policies. One particular area of concern is that the Forum's recommendation that gender proofing of expenditures in this country under the EU Structural Funds should be broadened to an equality proofing, which would cover all groups protected under equality legislation, has not yet been adopted.
  - 5.30 The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) offers one potential avenue to further pursue equality issues. Equality and guaranteeing the rights of minorities were among the issues raised by the Forum in the Opinion<sup>9</sup> it submitted when the NAPS was in the course of preparation and these were eventually accepted for inclusion in the set of principles which have been adopted by Government to underpin the Strategy. However, the Forum is concerned that no specific action has so far been taken to implement commitments on strengthening administrative procedures to promote equality proofing under the NAPS.

<sup>9</sup> *National Anti-Poverty Strategy*, Forum Opinion No. 2, (January, 1996).

- 5.31 As already highlighted in Section II of this Report, equality targets and principles also need to be strengthened and made more explicit components of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) process.
  
- 5.32 *Partnership 2000* contains important provisions on a range of equality issues – some of which have been raised above – and the Forum is at present finalising an Opinion on the development of these provisions, as part of the remit given to it under the social partnership monitoring arrangements. The Forum will be encouraged in its work in this area by the equality commitments which are outlined in the new Government’s policy document, *An Action Programme for the Millennium*.
  
- 5.33 Finally, it will be essential to ensure that, and with the remarkable buoyancy in our economy and the unprecedented and sustained levels of growth being achieved, adequate resources are provided to achieve the equality objectives and commitments which are contained in the *Partnership*.

Section VI

**Forum Report  
No. 11 on *Early  
School Leavers  
and Youth  
Unemployment***



# Forum Report No. 11 on *Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment*

- 6.1 In this Report, which is linked to its earlier Report No. 4 on *Ending Long-term Unemployment*, the Forum made a wide-ranging set of recommendations to tackle more effectively the problems of early school leaving and youth unemployment. The Report was aimed at both:
- halting the flow into early school leaving; and
  - dealing with the existing number of young unemployed.
- 6.2 Although the number of early school leavers (i.e. those leaving before the end of the junior cycle of second level) has been falling in recent years, to around 3,000 in 1995, the process of “*qualification inflation*” and the fall-off in traditional job opportunities for the unskilled has made their situation more critical. Traveller children form a high proportion of early leavers. Unemployment rates for early school leavers were two to three times higher than others in the 15-24 age-group in 1995, while their long-term unemployment rate was around 30 per cent (compared to 10 per cent for those with qualifications) and is one of the highest in the EU. The Report also highlighted the fact that over half of early school leavers came from families where the father was unemployed and that rural areas had the highest level of educational disadvantage. Around 90 per cent of poor households are headed by early school leavers.
- 6.3 The Report considered the education system in detail, together with the nature and availability of training and employment opportunities for those who leave school early. A conceptual model of pathways and transitions was used to identify potential crisis points and areas of difficulty in a child’s life, such as the transition from home to school and from primary into second level education. Drawing on the detailed recommendations made in the Report, the Forum recommended six priority areas for action, as outlined in Box 4.

#### **Box 4**

#### **Forum's Main Recommendations on Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment:**

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- the elimination of early school leaving (i.e. before the Junior Certificate) in the next five years through targeted interventions at pre-school, primary and the junior cycle of second level education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, together with reform of curricular content and the monitoring and tracking of those who leave early; an important aspect of this requires that specific objectives and targets for achievement of Traveller children be set (i.e. the same rates of retention and achievement as other children);
- the provision of 1,000 extra places for those with no qualifications on *Youthreach* and the reform of that programme to make provision for recognised certification, guidance counselling and progression either to other FÁS training courses or return to the formal education system; provision for childcare costs for participants on these programmes should also be made;
- the establishment of a new pilot scheme to provide 750 Community Employment and 300 VTOS places for those aged between 18-21 with no qualifications;
- the targeting of second-chance education at the very disadvantaged, especially lone parents, people with a disability and the long-term unemployed;
- the establishment of a high-level Inter-Departmental Group to implement the recommendations of the Report and to co-ordinate the broad range of issues involved in the link between poverty and educational disadvantage; and
- the promotion of a *Whole Community* approach involving parents, schools, community groups and employers on a partnership basis in the delivery of education and training services.

#### **Follow-up Action by Government on Report No. 11**

6.4 The Government welcomed the Forum's Report as an extremely important contribution to the development of policy in this area. The high-level Inter-Departmental Group, which had been recommended by the Forum, was established to consider the feasibility, implications and costs of implementing the Forum's proposals. Following submission of that Group's report, the Government agreed in June last that the various Government Departments involved should take on board the recommendations made by the Working Group with a view to their implementation.

6.5 The Working Group agreed with all of the recommendations made in the Forum's Report, with two exceptions. Firstly, it considered that the proposed target to eliminate early school leaving within the next five years was too optimistic. Instead, it proposed that this should be halved by 2000 and eliminated by 2006. Secondly, the Group felt that the proposed pilot programme for 18-21 year olds would be better tackled through a *Special Measures* approach, with access to a full range of education and training options, instead of through CE and VTOS as proposed in the Forum's Report No. 11.

6.6 Following discussions with the relevant Departments and Agencies on follow-up action since Report No. 11 was published, the more important policy changes which have been introduced are:

- an extra 450 places will have been put in place in the *Youthreach* programme by the end of this year;
- an additional allocation of over £20m in Structural Funds to education and training programmes; this includes the provision of a minimum of 1,000 additional places in the *Youthreach* training programme (250 of which will be ring-fenced for Year 2 Traveller provision) bringing total provision in 1998 up from 4,425 places to 5,525, which will continue to be targeted at the very educationally disadvantaged;
- a further 350 *Youthreach* places are planned for 1999;
- the existing complement of 625 progression places from *Youthreach* Foundation Level will be expanded by 750 places in 1998; an extra £1.48m is being provided for a further 440 places which will develop a new approach to progression, giving a total complement by end-1998 of 1,815 progression places;
- certification is now well underway with NCVA qualifications and the FÁS Integrated Assessment System of Certification nation-wide in *Youthreach* and Traveller Training Centres;
- 17 Advocates have now been taken on to provide guidance for young people progressing from the foundation phase of the *Youthreach* programme; an additional £1m has been earmarked to strengthen guidance and counselling services on *Youthreach* and Traveller training programmes;
- a 'Whole Community' approach is being adopted in a new initiative, costing £2.22m, which is aimed at 8-15 year olds at risk of leaving early; a Working Group within the Department of Education and Science is currently overseeing arrangements for implementation of this initiative, with a key condition being that funding applications must be submitted by a consortium of local groups and organisations; and

- FÁS and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs are collaborating in a Youth Progression Measure for young people who are 18/19 years old and six months on the Live Register; 1,027 young people have taken up options under this measure to date; these options will include up to 400 full-time, six month places per annum on CE projects (these places will be supplementary to the overall approved CE project numbers).

6.7 Other recent policy developments include:

- an additional 51 remedial teacher posts are coming on-stream this year, bringing the total number to 1,242 such posts; an additional 26 Resource Teacher posts are also being introduced while 5 additional teachers have been appointed to the Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers and 2 additional teachers have been appointed to the Visiting Teacher Service for children with certain disabilities;
- evaluations of Breaking-the-Cycle and Early Start Pre-School Initiatives are under way;
- the Youth Work Act, 1997 requires that particular regard be had to the needs of young people with disadvantaged backgrounds and makes special provision for representation on Voluntary Youth Councils of those engaged in the provision of youth work services for Travellers;
- the operation of the Disadvantaged Areas, Home/School/Community Liaison and the Teacher-Counsellor Schemes are being monitored on an on-going basis;
- in the context of mainstreaming Youthstart, completion of the first round of evaluation projects is due later this year;
- links have been established between third-level institutions and designated second-level schools;
- draft legislation on School Attendance, currently under preparation, will introduce an effective tracking mechanism for early identification of students who are in danger of dropping out of the system.

## **Forum's Conclusions and Recommendations on its Report No. 11**

6.8 The Forum welcomes the Government's recognition of the need to comprehensively tackle educational disadvantage given the important effects, in both an individual sense (in terms of tackling social exclusion) and in an economic sense (in terms of improved productivity and competitiveness), arising from the increased investment in human capital. While the Forum recognises that the level of resources required to make this investment is



substantial and that implementation of all of the Report's recommendations will take time, it is encouraged by the above positive developments and looks forward to on-going action in this area.

- 6.9 The Forum is, however, concerned with the revised time-scale for the elimination of early school leaving put forward by the Inter-Departmental Group. Thus it regards as insufficiently ambitious and raises a number of key issues which require further elaboration viz.:
  - (i) the proposed methodology and phasing for halving the number of early school leavers by the year 2000; in particular, given that a high proportion of early school leavers are Traveller children, the specific arrangements for this group should be outlined;
  - (ii) an outline of the proposals to cater for those who will continue to fall through the net until such time as the target for elimination of early leaving is achieved in full; and
  - (iii) given the sizeable planned investment of £20m, the target date for elimination of early leaving by 2006 seems pessimistic and should be reviewed at an early stage to ensure that the most rapid progress possible is achieved.

The Forum is concerned that, unless investment in preventative measures is given equal weight with that for curative measures, the achievement of the above targets may be put at risk.

- 6.10 The Forum further considers that arrangements should be put in place now to monitor the results of training in order to evaluate outcomes and benchmark progress in future years.
- 6.11 The Forum notes that funding was allocated towards childcare costs on youth and second-chance education programmes for the three years from 1997. It is deeply concerned, therefore, at the failure of the Department of Education and Science to put in place mechanisms for disbursing this funding for the 1997/98 academic year and it recommends that the operationalisation of access measures should have a higher priority in planning such provision.
- 6.12 The Forum also considers that the Inter-Departmental Working Group should be reconvened to reconsider its time-table for implementation and to establish monitoring arrangements for the reasons set out above. The proposals put forward in the Report of the Working Group on Educational Disadvantage, set up under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, should be taken into account and kept under review by the Inter-Departmental Group.

- 6.13 It is noted that a number of commitments on education are made in the Government Programme<sup>10</sup>, including the provision of a specific budget for pre-school education, the targeting of primary education as a clear priority in the allocation of resources, a recognition of the role of parents in the schools system, a wider choice of curriculum for smaller secondary schools, more resources to be allocated to *Youthreach* and a targeted programme developed to meet the needs of the 20,000 young people who do not complete the second level cycle. These commitments are very much in line with the recommendations made in Report No. 11 and the Forum looks forward to their implementation.
- 6.14 Given the Forum's role in developing the provisions in *Partnership 2000* dealing with social exclusion and equality, and also in the implementation of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, it will be returning to these issues in its future work. A Forum Opinion on Educational Disadvantage has already been planned for the early part of next year.

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<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.*: *An Action Programme for the Millennium* (1997).

Section VII

**Forum Report  
No. 12 on *Rural  
Renewal –  
Combating  
Social Exclusion***



# Forum Report No. 12 on *Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion*

- 7.1 This Report was submitted for consideration by Government in the context of their finalisation at that stage of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Report of the Rural Development Advisory Group<sup>11</sup> which was awaited and by way of follow-up on the commitments on social exclusion in rural areas under *Partnership 2000*.
- 7.2 The Report pinpointed the distinctive features of social exclusion in rural areas and the impact of a number of key sectoral policies (notably transport, housing, health, education and labour market measures) in perpetuating such exclusion for vulnerable groups such as the unemployed, women, older people, Travellers, lone parents and people with a disability who are living in rural areas.
- 7.3 While social exclusion exists in both urban and rural areas, it has a number of distinctive features which reflect the particular circumstances of rural areas such as a high level of invisibility, depopulation, higher dependency ratios, small and non-viable farm holdings, lack of alternative employment opportunities and greater dependence on public services. It embraces not only economic and social factors but also wider issues such as isolation, powerlessness and lack of influence and participation in official decision-making fora.
- 7.4 The Report emphasised the particular importance of having a vision on the future shape and direction of rural Ireland; that the policy formulation process be informed by a common understanding of the causes; that there be agreement on underlying principles; and that clearer commitments should be given on what policies and strategies should seek to achieve in terms of promoting rural development and alleviating social exclusion.
- 7.5 A number of basic principles were identified to underpin the establishment of a socially-inclusive, multi-dimensional and integrated strategy to tackle social exclusion in rural areas. The Forum's three strategic recommendations, which are designed to address present policy weaknesses, were that:
- the Ministerial portfolio and that of his Department should be renamed as that of "*Agriculture and Rural Development*" resulting, inter alia, in direct

<sup>11</sup> This Group's Report was subsequently published in June last.

representation at Cabinet level for rural development interests and issues and in the provision of a central focus for rural development and for policies to combat social exclusion in rural areas;

- a broadly representative Standing Committee for Rural Development, reporting directly to Government, should be established to offer independent advice on policy and institutional issues; and
- a White Paper on Rural Development should be prepared by Government to set out a clearer vision of the type of rural society we wish to have and the policies, strategies and institutions needed for this purpose.

7.6 A wide range of policy recommendations were made also as part of a more supportive strategic framework. These relate to the agricultural, industry and services (notably tourism and transport) sectors as well as in the delivery of public services such as housing, health, education, training and work experience programmes. A number of other institutional recommendations were also made in the Report, as a basis to providing coherence, overall direction and support for the above policy changes.

### **Follow-up Action by Government on Report No. 12**

7.7 The Government considered this Report to be a very important contribution to the development of its policies in this area and, for that reason, referred it to the then Minister for Agriculture, Food and Forestry for further examination, in conjunction with his Government colleagues, in particular the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of State for Western Development and Rural Renewal.

7.8 On the basis of a subsequent report by an Inter-Departmental Group, which had been established to examine the Forum's recommendations, the Government decided in May last that the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Forestry should proceed with the preparation in his Department of a White Paper on Rural Development.

7.9 It is understood that preparation of this White Paper will take precedence over consideration of the other two Forum's core recommendations, viz. establishment of a lead Department and a Standing Committee, on the basis that the White Paper will consider the designation of Departmental responsibility for policy issues and related institutional mechanisms such as consultative and advisory processes and policy co-ordination arrangements.

7.10 The White Paper will also take into account other developments such as the Report<sup>12</sup> of the Rural Development Policy Advisory Group, the National Anti-

<sup>12</sup> In its Report, this Group also highlighted the need for an integrated and co-ordinated approach, and that special provision should be made to ensure that "the issues of poverty and social exclusion, particularly long-term unemployment, are to the forefront".

Poverty Strategy, the Study on Settlement Patterns being undertaken by the NESCC, the Government's local government reform programme, the importance of sustainable development and of an environment-friendly farming sector, and developments at EU level, most notably the European Commission's recently submitted "Agenda 2000" proposals. Preparation of the White Paper will be pursued at Inter-Departmental level to ensure that the issues involved are addressed in a comprehensive and sustained manner by all Departments and State Agencies.

## **Forum's Conclusions and Recommendations on its Report No. 12**

7.11 While the Government's decisions on its recommendations are not as comprehensive as the Forum would have wished, nevertheless, the commitment to the preparation of a White Paper represents an important step in the establishment of a more integrated policy framework to maintaining vibrant self-sustaining communities in rural areas.

- 7.12 This framework, it is understood, will be underpinned by a full range of supporting economic, social, cultural and environmental policies, including population settlement patterns, and the Forum urges that its more detailed policy recommendations be taken into account in this regard.

7.13 On a related note, the Forum welcomes the commitments in the Government's *Action Programme for the Millennium* to introduce a comprehensive Programme for Rural Development, by providing State services at local level through decentralisation, by ensuring, as far as practicable, equality of infrastructure throughout the regions, by equalisation of utility charges as between urban and rural areas, and by an action plan to address the needs of our islands, including the access needs and the higher living costs for our island population. A number of Ministerial designations and administrative changes have already been announced to give effect to these commitments.

- 7.14 Finally, and while complimenting the efforts of the Department of Agriculture and Food in encouraging LEADER II Groups to increase women's representation on their boards and to build in equality and social inclusion dimensions into their activities, the Forum again recalls the recommendations, in its own Report No. 10, that in its on-going evaluation of the EU Operational Programmes within its responsibilities the Department of Agriculture and Food, as well as all other Government Departments and State Agencies, should take the necessary steps to ensure that equality proofing mechanisms and procedures become standard features of these Programmes.





Section VIII

**Overall  
Conclusions**



# Overall Conclusions

## Development of Social Partnership

- 8.1 Over this, its second two-year work cycle, the Forum has succeeded in producing Reports and Opinions on a wider range of economic and social policy issues. This has consolidated its influence on the development of public policy in a number of key areas, as evidenced by this Report, and this contribution has been widely acknowledged.
- 8.2 The most recent and significant development in social partnership has, of course, been the negotiation and ratification of *Partnership 2000*. This represents a considerable deepening of the partnership process through, inter alia, the direct involvement of groups from the voluntary and community sector representing the interests of those experiencing poverty and exclusion and who also participate on the Forum's Third Strand. Prior to the Forum's establishment, these groups were outside the consultative process altogether but are now themselves parties to and constitute one of the four pillars to the partnership process.
- 8.3 Strongly linked to this, there has also been a widening of the issues covered by the partnership arrangements. Of particular note in this regard are the provisions on social inclusion and inequality which are wide-ranging in scope and embrace a number of key issues and themes which the Forum itself has been consistently advocating over the last three years.
- 8.4 The Forum made its own distinctive input<sup>13</sup> to the *Partnership 2000* negotiations, as it did at the time of the PCW negotiations in the Autumn of 1993, in identifying what it considered should be the core elements and goals in these negotiations, in submitting more detailed policy recommendations on unemployment, equality and anti-poverty themes and in outlining a number of options to deepen and widen the social partnership approach.
- 8.5 In this regard, it is important to recall that the Forum has now been given an important role in providing opinions at six-monthly intervals on the development of the provisions in *Partnership 2000* regarding social inclusion and equality. The first two of these opinions, dealing respectively with equality proofing issues and targeted employment and training measures for the long-term unemployed, are in the course of preparation at present.

<sup>13</sup> *Post-PCW Negotiations - A New Deal?*, Forum Opinion No. 4, (August, 1996).

- 8.6 As part of the institutional mechanisms put in place for monitoring the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the Forum has now also been asked by Government to extend its monitoring role to include progress on implementation of this Strategy which is a key element in the social inclusion provisions of *Partnership 2000*. The Forum already submitted an Opinion<sup>14</sup> at the initial stage when this Strategy was in the course of preparation.
- 8.7 The Forum is also finalising at present a report on a *Framework for Partnership* as an input to underpinning and developing the partnership approach. It is envisaged that this Report will, inter alia, identify the strengths and weaknesses as well as distinguish a number of ways it might be developed through, for example, refinement of the structures and procedures, extension to new policy areas and improvement of implementation and monitoring arrangements.

### Forum's Overall Impact

8.8 The Forum believes that it has made important progress in:

- strengthening the focus on unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, poverty and social exclusion;
- facilitating a wider participation in the policy-making process by including those who up to then had no seat at the table;
- producing Reports with practical and actionable recommendations for Government; and
- creating and stimulating public debate on policy options and choices.

8.9 Achieving consensus among the Forum's membership of nearly fifty Members, who represent such a very wide spectrum of interests in our society, is an on-going challenge. There are no easy compromises and real conflicts of interests and viewpoints have to be acknowledged and worked on painstakingly and on an on-going basis. Despite these difficulties and differences, however, all Strands and Members of the Forum have sought to work together in a co-operative and constructive spirit of partnership and one which is grounded on the conviction that all have a common interest in ensuring that the trio of problems that are at the heart of the Forum's work – unemployment, poverty and social exclusion – are given greater priority and tackled more decisively at all appropriate policy levels.

8.10 The Forum's impact and its influence on Government decisions have already been outlined and commented on in earlier Sections of this Report, as well as in its First Periodic Report<sup>15</sup>. While its recommendations have met with a mixed response, and the Forum would obviously have wished for greater results to

<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*: Forum Opinion No. 2, (January, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*: Forum Report No. 8, (May, 1995).

have been achieved, nevertheless, it has to be accepted that Governments have their own policy priorities and are responsible to the electorate for their decisions. But having said this, the Forum wishes to formally record that, viewed in the overall, it remains reasonably satisfied and encouraged with the responses received and the actions taken by successive Governments on its recommendations.

8.11 An important new development over the period covered by this Report has been the initiatives taken by its Strand I Members to seek political support for the Forum's recommendations, both at party level as well as in the Oireachtas through tabling Parliamentary Questions, motions for debate on Forum Reports etc. while Government Ministers and Opposition Spokespersons have also attended and participated at a number of the Forum's Plenary Sessions.

## Conclusions

8.12 In many areas of economic and social policy there is now available a wide range of analysis, research results, pilot studies, demonstration projects etc. to draw from for policy purposes. Such improved information and data is a key to more effective policy formulation and implementation and what is now required is to evaluate and translate this into more targeted policy action. This will involve, inter alia, greater priority to be given to and a more effective integration and balance to be achieved between economic and social policies.

8.13 What is particularly striking in this context is the widening and opening up of the political debate at EU level to strengthen social considerations, notably the employment and unemployment dimensions, as evidenced by the outcome last June of the European Council meeting in Amsterdam. This is further reinforced by the decision to hold later this month a special EU Summit on Jobs. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly accepted at EU level that improvements in social policies and standards should be treated as key elements in competitiveness and in a society's overall efficiency and cohesiveness.

8.14 The dramatic increases in wealth creation in our economy should not distract attention from our continuing problems of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion and the Forum has an important and continuing role to play in pursuing these questions, in identifying a wider range of policy options and in stimulating public debate and a greater common understanding on the hard choices that have to be faced in our society.

8.15 Long-term unemployment remains this country's major economic and social problem. Through its Report No. 4, the Forum succeeded in placing this problem on the political agenda but this must be moved more centre stage and

given greater priority. The title of this Report, “*Ending Long-term Unemployment*”, was deliberately chosen and the Forum stands over and remains firmly of the view that this objective can be realised.

- 8.16 The challenge now is to identify and establish what are the real obstacles to making more decisive progress in this area and of ensuring that policies are regularly monitored, evaluated and adequately resourced. This will be one of the issues which the Forum will address in an Opinion which it is at present preparing under the monitoring provisions of *Partnership 2000*.

**Terms of Reference  
and Constitution of  
the Forum**

**Forum Publications**





# Terms of Reference and Constitution of the Forum

1. The Terms of Reference of the National Economic and Social Forum are to develop economic and social policy initiatives, particularly initiatives to combat unemployment, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus on social and economic matters.

The Forum will:

- (i) Have a specific focus on:-
    - job creation and obstacles to employment growth;
    - long-term unemployment;
    - disadvantage;
    - equality and social justice in Irish society; and
    - policies and proposals in relation to these issues;
  - (ii) Make practical proposals on measures to meet these challenges;
  - (iii) Examine and make recommendations on other economic and social issues;
  - (iv) Review and monitor the implementation of the Forum's proposals and if necessary make further recommendations; and
  - (v) Examine and make recommendations on matters referred to it by Government.
2. The Forum may consider matters on its own initiative or at the request of Government.
  3. The Forum will work in two year cycles and will inform Government of its programme of work within three months of the beginning of each cycle.
  4. In drawing up its work programme, the Forum will take account of the role and functions of other bodies in the social and economic area such as NESC to avoid duplication.
  5. The Forum may invite Ministers, Public Officials, Members of the Forum, and outside experts to make presentations and to assist the Forum in its work.
  6. The Forum will publish and submit all its reports to Government, to the Houses of the Oireachtas and to other Government Departments and bodies as may be appropriate.
  7. The Forum will be drawn from three broad strands. The first will represent the Government and the Oireachtas. The second will represent the traditional Social Partners. The third strand will be representative of groups traditionally outside the consultative process including women, the unemployed, the disadvantaged, people with a disability, youth, older people and environmental interests.
  8. The Forum will have an independent Chairperson appointed by Government.
  9. The term of office of members will be two years during which term members may nominate alternates. Casual vacancies will be filled by the nominating body or the Government as appropriate and members so appointed shall hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. The size of the membership may be varied by the Government.
  10. The Forum is under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and is funded through a Grant-in-Aid.

# Forum Publications

## (i) Forum Reports

Report No.	Title	Date
1.	<i>Negotiations on a Successor Agreement to the PESP</i>	November 1993
2.	<i>National Development Plan 1994-1999 – the proposed Local Development Programme</i>	November 1993
3.	<i>Commission on Social Welfare – Outstanding Recommendations</i>	January 1994
4.	<i>Ending Long-term Unemployment</i>	June 1994
5.	<i>Income Maintenance Strategies</i>	July 1994
6.	<i>Quality Delivery of Social Services</i>	February 1995
7.	<i>Jobs Potential of the Services Sector</i>	April 1995
8.	<i>First Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	May 1995
9.	<i>Jobs Potential of Work Sharing</i>	January 1996
10.	<i>Equality Proofing Issues</i>	February 1996
11.	<i>Early School Leavers and Youth Unemployment</i>	January 1997
12.	<i>Rural Renewal – Combating Social Exclusion</i>	March 1997
13.	<i>Unemployment Statistics</i>	May 1997
14.	<i>Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion</i>	October 1997

## **(ii) Forum Opinions**

<b>Opinion No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	<i>Interim Report of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment</i>	March 1995
2	<i>National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>	January 1996
3	<i>Long-term Unemployment Initiatives</i>	May 1996
4	<i>Post-PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?</i>	August 1996
5	<i>Employment Equality Bill</i>	December 1996
6	<i>Pensions Policy Issues</i>	October 1997

