National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016

Report of Social Inclusion Forum 2014

'Inclusive Growth - Building a Fairer Ireland'

An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection
www.welfare.ie

Social Inclusion Forum 2014

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Section 1
Introduction

Introduction

The Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) was established by the government as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007- 2016. The Department of Social Protection has been given responsibility by government to convene the Social Inclusion Forum, which is a key element of the government's commitment to consult with all relevant stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty and the groups that represent them in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The Forum provides an opportunity for engagement between officials from government departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty. The 2014 Forum was organised with the assistance of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland and the Community Worker's Co-operative (CWC).

The objectives of the 2014 Social Inclusion Forum were to:
- Review progress on the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Target agreed as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy;
- Seek input and views on key policies and implementation issues;
- Identify barriers and constraints to progress and how best these can be tackled;
- Provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

This report provides a summary of the 10th meeting of the Forum which took place on Wednesday 1st April 2014 at the Croke Park Conference Centre, Dublin.

The theme of the 2014 Forum was: **'Inclusive Growth - Building a Fairer Ireland'**.

The report includes inputs by guest speakers, which provided an outline contextual framework for the discussions in the four parallel workshops. The report highlights the common themes which cut across all of the workshops. In addition; a number of overarching recommendations are highlighted for the attention of policy makers. The report will be submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform and laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Section 2
Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

The Department of Social Protection acknowledges the support and assistance of the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and the Community Worker's Co-operative in the organisation of the Forum and for the preparatory workshops which they jointly organised to enable individuals experiencing poverty to consider their contribution to the work of the Forum. Sincere thanks and appreciation is also extended to all those who participated and contributed on the day.

Appreciation is extended to the workshop facilitators and note-takers: Oonagh Mc Ardle, Anne Costello, Margaret O'Riada, Frances Byrne, Joanne Mulholland, Deirdre Bodkin, Ciaran Diamond and Caroline Corr. Their contribution in steering the discussion and recording the key discussion points has contributed greatly to the compilation of this report on the outcomes of the 2014 Forum.

Sincere thanks is also expressed to the Rapporteur, Aiden Lloyd, who managed to convey the many voices so succinctly on the day and subsequently in compiling this report.

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

Section 3
Key Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Key Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

- **Alignment of Local Government and Local Development.**

  The impact of severe cuts and radical realignments on community development infrastructure raises questions about the sustainability of a key element of civil society which has contributed greatly to the modernisation and development of the state over many decades. Community development addresses poverty and exclusion by engaging with marginalised groups and communities, mobilising around their needs and advocating for policies that meet their needs. The state is now assuming a more directive role in community development and a series of measures have been implemented to this intent under the alignment and local government reform processes. Whatever the intent, (it has been suggested that) the effect has been to dampen advocacy, restrict independent action and curtail the development of innovatory responses.

  Community development now operates with severely diminished resources, in a landscape of increased poverty and deprivation, with no distinct national community development programme, under the mantle of a department that wishes it to operate as a sub-set of local government. The concern and anger arising within the Social Inclusion Forum on this matter comes from the experiences of local community groups who believe that their viability as civil society actors addressing social exclusion has being systematically undermined and will be fatally inflicted by the measures underway under Putting People First.

  A dialogue needs to be initiated by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government with the community development sector and other statutory and non-statutory stakeholders to develop a framework agreement outlining the principles and parameters governing the relationship between the state and the community sector, together with a roadmap of actions to reinstate trust and respect and rebuild the relationship.

- **Homelessness Policy**

  The numbers of people experiencing homelessness has now reached crisis point and is likely to worsen as demand for housing greatly outstrips supply. This has resulted in a widening gap between private sector rents and the allowances payable under the Rent Supplement Scheme or Housing Assistance Payment.

  While the government's housing led strategy is a correct and sustainable approach in a functioning housing supply situation, it is entirely insufficient in the crisis driven, post-building collapse circumstances that now exists. The private housing sector has been unable to provide sufficient supply since 2007 and social and public housing provision is inadequate.

Section 3: Key Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Matters are exacerbated by increases in the incidence of personal debt, the reduction in welfare payments to young people and the inadequacy of rental support allowances.

Government is committed to increasing the supply of public and social housing but this will take some years to deliver. The situation calls for a contingency strategy converting available housing into viable units of accommodation, maintaining and bolstering emergency accommodation, reviewing rent allowances and reconsidering the impact of reduced social welfare payments on young people's homelessness.

- **National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy**

  The persistently poor status of Travellers and Roma in relation to health, education, employment and accommodation indicates a widespread failure to improve matters, even where there is substantial good intent on the part of state actors. The range and interconnectivity of deprivation factors affecting Travellers and Roma means that specific department-led initiatives are insufficient and unlikely to lead to the type of radical breakthrough required to improve matters. Integrated whole-of-government approaches afford a better opportunity but require an implementation mechanism that overcomes the administrative silo factor of departments. Locating strategic responsibility within the Department of the Taoiseach, as the department with a sufficiently overarching brief, and appointing senior staff with responsibility within each department would introduce an effective implementation regime for a (new) National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy.

Section 3: Key Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

- ## Healthy Ireland Strategy (making its impact real for communities)

  Developing health strategies that take sufficient cognisance of structural inequalities and the needs of disparate target groups are required to generate the outcome in terms of an equitable raising of national health levels. In order to make its impact real for communities Healthy Ireland must address the social determinants of health, including food poverty, which lead to health inequalities. The participation of marginalised groups in the planning and implementation of health strategies is crucial. Similarly, given the disparities in health levels between the disadvantaged and the majority population there is a need for targeted sub-strategies for those whose needs are both urgent and necessary to quality of life. Travellers, Roma, families experiencing poverty (especially children in poverty) and those who are vulnerable and living in rural and urban isolation are obvious targets.

  It is impossible to separate overall policy paradigms from resulting outcomes. Neither is it possible to describe these outcomes as an unintended consequence of policy. Health policy needs to operate from a vision of equality of outcome for everybody and to shift its focus from models of delivery or compatibility with the marketplace. The endurance of health inequalities, the poor return on investment and the failure of organisational remedies point to the need for a radical reassessment of health policy.

Section 4
Welcome and Opening Remarks

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Ms Simonetta Ryan, Assistant Secretary, Department of Social Protection and Chairperson for the proceedings welcomed people to the Socil Inclusion Forum (SIF) and thanked everybody for their attendance, especially those who travelled some distance to attend.

The Forum provides an opportunity whereby those responsible for policy making and its implementation and members of community and voluntary organisations that work at national and local level with people experiencing poverty, can get together to listen to each other, share information and to learn about the challenges and priorities in implementing the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016.

The Department of Social Protection is pleased to convene the Forum.

Ms Ryan said that following a review of SIF, one of the recommendations arising was to re-schedule the event from its traditional November slot in the annual calendar to February or March each year. One of the primary reasons for this switch is to have better alignment with EU SILC poverty data produced by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). Unfortunately, the latest SILC data are delayed and therefore current poverty statistics are not available to consider at this meeting. The Social Inclusion Monitor (SIM) is an official report on progress towards the national social target and associated indicators. The inaugural Monitor for 2011 was published in March 2013. The Monitor for 2012 will be prepared following the publication by the CSO of the results of SILC 2012.

Ms Ryan felt that, the Social Inclusion Division along with event partners, the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and the Community Workers Co- operative had put together an interesting and challenging programme, which she hoped would provide ample opportunity for meaningful discussions on some of the key social inclusion policies that directly affect the lives of people.

A report of the event will be prepared and submitted to policy makers via the Senior Officials Group on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform, and the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform.

The event theme this year is **'Inclusive Growth-Building a Fairer Ireland'**. The implications and new opportunities for social inclusion and inclusive growth during this post-bailout period can be debated during the workshops.

The opening session comprised a number of short presentations covering social inclusion issues from a national and EU perspective.

Setting the Context

Mr Jim Walsh, Principal Officer, Social Inclusion Division (SID) - provided a summary of recent and current social inclusion developments in a national and European context. He began by referring to the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction. Discussion of progress toward the Target is central to the Forum and one of the innovations introduced to this end is the Social Inclusion Monitor (SIM), which measures progress towards the Target and supporting indicators, for debate at the Forum.

The most recent SIM was based on the results of the CSO 2011 SILC. Regretfully as the 2012 returns are considerably overdue the Monitor has not yet been updated. This was very unsatisfactory for all concerned. The fact that we are going through a major economic crisis makes the production of data on the social impact even more important. The Department has conveyed its concerns about this situation, as timely data is necessary to keep the achievement of the Target at the forefront of policy.

There is however, some progress to be reported in relation to the promised child poverty sub-target, to reflect specific policy concerns relating to children in poverty, especially sustained poverty. A proposal for a child poverty target has been developed following consultation with stakeholders and submitted to government. It is expected that this will be set out in the forthcoming Children and Young People's Policy Framework. The roll out of the new area-based approach to child poverty and the publication of European Commission recommendations highlighting the need for prevention and early intervention will be important mechanisms in the achievement of the child poverty target.

Another innovation has been the introduction of an integrated social impact assessment process incorporating poverty impact assessment. This provides a mechanism whereby the social impact of decision making processes can be given more prominence. This is particularly important in a context where government is obliged to reduce expenditure and increase taxes. The Department of Social Protection has led this process by publishing a social impact assessment of the welfare and tax budgetary measures in 2013 and 2014. This sets out the combined impact of these fiscal measures on different income levels and social groups and provides evidence to inform policy debates. The department also produced a report which sets out the social impact assessment of a wide range of possible welfare reforms, including suggestions made at the Pre-Budget Forum in 2013. The Department is working with the Departments of Environment, Community and Local Government and Health to expand social impact assessment.

The Department also published a number of important research reports in the last year,

Section 4: Welcome and Opening Remarks

including a study of the role of social transfers in alleviating poverty and two smaller studies on intra-household sharing of resources and on household economic stress during the crisis. Further research reports are planned for the year ahead.

The Europe dimension of policies to reduce poverty has grown with the adoption of the Europe 2020 poverty target, keeping the social aspect of European policy to the fore. Member states, including Ireland make an important contribution to social policy debates through the European Council of Social Affairs. The European poverty target is supported by two national reports, the National Reform Programme (NRP), and the National Social Report (NSR).

The National Social Report is a new EU reporting tool, which covers social inclusion, social protection, and health and long-term care policies. The draft report is now being finalised following consultation with national stakeholders and will be brought to government for approval. Both the NRP and NSR will be submitted together to the EU, giving an enhanced recognition to the social dimension of the European Monetary Union (EMU).

An important upcoming event will be the mid-term review of the European 2020 targets, including the poverty target. Europe, like Ireland, has struggled to make progress on the poverty target because of the impact of the economic crisis.

Mr Walsh concluded his overview by underlining the importance of the Forum, which results in a comprehensive report of the deliberations and main messages for government.

Ms Sorina Gabor, Outreach Worker, Cork City Partnership gave an account of her experience in attending the 2013 Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion as part of Ireland's delegation. The Convention, which draws participants from 40 countries, is one of the flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy to lift 20 million people out of poverty. [1]

The Convention focussed on the implementation of the reforms needed in the Member States to reduce poverty and to confront the increasing social challenges that Europe is facing. It touched on different aspects of poverty and priority areas for action, such as homelessness, child poverty and healthcare, and ensured that issues surrounding gender, discrimination, accessibility and participation were included in all discussions.

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[1] The 3rd Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion took place on 26–27 November 2013 in Brussels

Section 4: Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Convention was characterised by a 'going local' approach, highlighting the essential role played by regional and local authorities in designing and delivering social protection benefits and services.

A number of issues were examined or concluded in the workshops, including:

- The lack of capacity for early childhood education and care for children under 3 years.

- Effective access of Roma to quality inclusive education and labour markets throughout their life stages is a key precondition for successful integration.

- The overall increase in homelessness and agreement that the implementation of comprehensive housing-led strategies, reviewed eviction practices alongside prevention and early intervention were the most effective approaches for Member States.

- Ways to ensure quality health care for all, including the necessity to rebalance health systems towards greater accessibility to primary care services.

- The need for a broad, cross-sectorial approach that provides integrated and personalised support for disadvantaged young people in terms of education and training, youth employment, guidance, social services and housing.

- The relationship between social policies, economic growth and fiscal stability and the need for civil society to be an integral part of the policy dialogue.

- The difficulty of measuring the adequacy of minimum income schemes and the need to develop a common EU methodology.

Ms Anna Visser, Director of the Advocacy Initiative reported on her attendance at a European peer review to evaluate the Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.[2] The Belgian Platform is a bit like this Social Inclusion Forum, a place to hear about the realities of poverty and explore solutions. Nine countries came together to look at what could be learned from their own and the Belgian experience. The bottom line is that no country is getting it right. Everyone is failing, though some are failing better than others.

Every country has a different approach. Belgium and Ireland have open processes that anyone could come to; others are more formal and restricted to specific representative bodies. Some like today's Forum are once a year opportunities, others e.g. Belgium are more frequent - though Greece has no regular process for participation at all. Countries such as Malta focus exclusively on EU policies, others struggle with how to integrate the European dimension.

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2   The peer revie of Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion EU 2020, took place in Brussels, 14-15 January 2014

Section 4: Welcome and Opening Remarks

Some countries have reasonable levels of political support while others need more political status. Some have direct input into policy, others are advisory. France and Belgium actively support those experiencing poverty to participate, in others (like Bulgaria) people experiencing the problems are not directly involved. Some, like Finland, are actively looking at how to use technology to support participation; others struggle to send out notice of meetings on time! Every example demonstrated failures. No-one is getting it right, but all the countries are learning as they go, or at least they should be.

Europe has been requiring countries to involve people in the development of social policies for decades - though unfortunately participation seems to be losing out in many countries. This presents a question and a new challenge for the European Commission as to how they can be better at encouraging participation.

Mr Robin Hanan, Director of EAPN Ireland presented a summary of the preliminary workshops that were organised by the EAPN and the CWC at various locations across the country. He said that EAPN and CWC believe that these preliminary workshops bring a measure of reality to the Forum and he thanked all those for their participation.

Key messages point to the need for a whole-of-government approach to addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and the need to address the gap between EU/national goals, including recommendations coming from the Forum, and the implementation of policy commitments to meet these goals. A particular call coming from the meetings was for a report on progression on previous Forum recommendations to be an integral part of proceedings.

Mr Hanan spoke of the unanimous consensus that the current policy of local government reform, as it effects local development and community development, is destructive of grassroots community development and social inclusion. He also reflected widespread concerns about the route to privatisation being opened up by the introduction of competitive tendering for the new social inclusion programme, citing the principle that community funding should be spent by the community, for the community, in the community.

On the growing homelessness issue Mr Hanan said that the hardest thing about being homeless is that people are invisible and have no voice. He pointed to the lowering of social welfare rates, the gap between accommodation support and rental cost, and the urgent need for a programme of social housing construction as priority issues for government.

The preliminary workshops also highlighted that the Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy is not fit for purpose following assessment by the EU which placed it in the bottom third of Member State strategies. Mr Hanan said that the Irish State needs to be held accountable for progress on Traveller and Roma issues; recognition of Traveller ethnicity and a re-examination of the Habitual Residence Condition would be important starting points.

Section 4: Welcome and Opening Remarks

Community sector reaction to the goals of the Healthy Ireland Strategy was that austerity and the enormous cuts to health care are making health inequalities worse and are having a particular impact on mental health. The poor level of awareness on the ground points to the need for a much greater profile among people experiencing poverty if it is to address health inequalities.

Mr Hanan said that there was a lot of concern about employment schemes undermining the income value of employment. Participants in the preliminary workshops were aware that the 44,000 places on the Government's Pathways to Work Programme are not included on the Live Register figures. He suggested that the latest of these schemes, Gateway, breeches international labour law and will increase social exclusion. He suggested that the scheme also facilitates public sector job displacement. He asked: is it pathways to work or a pathway to poverty?

A whole-of-government approach to poverty and social inclusion was called for by participants in the preliminary workshops, who identified the need for a department with responsibility at national and EU level for poverty and social inclusion. The splitting of this responsibility between the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) brings a lack of cohesion and effectiveness in combating poverty and social exclusion.

In conclusion, Mr Hanan drew attention to two cross-cutting issues that had emerged from the preliminary workshops:

- The need to be cognisant of the (sometimes inadvertent) disproportionate impacts of poverty experienced because of gender, disability and ethnicity;
- The effects of consultation fatigue and the need for government to be accountable back to those participating in the Forum. He recommended a return session in six months and the compilation of a comprehensive report on progress on the Forum recommendations for the 2015 Forum.

Sideline Events on the Day

The Showcase of Social Inclusion Innovation Projects

The extended lunchtime break provided an opportunity to visit the Social Inclusion Innovation Projects which various community and voluntary organisations have on display in the mezzanine communal area. The projects were visited by the Tánaiste where she was informed briefly about the work that they were doing. Projects were invited to the Forum to highlight some of the excellent work that is happening to address social exclusion at local level around the country. Additional information on these projects, all of which display good practice in combating poverty and social exclusion, was made available in the conference packs.

The break also provided an opportunity for people to view a short video produced by the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs under an EU process entitled Structured Dialogue. The video showed the results of their substantial consultations with young people on the theme of social inclusion over the past 18 months.

Young Social Innovators (YSI)

Presentation Secondary School, Warrenmount Dublin 8, the 2013 winners of the **Young Social Innovators (YSI)** Poverty Challenge 'Making Our World More Inclusive and Poverty Free', sponsored by DSP, made a short presentation of their award winning project which focussed on alleviating loneliness in elderly people 'Treat them the way you would like to be treated'.

Rachel Collier, CEO of Young Social Innovators outlined the belief behind YSI that young people are a powerful and largely untapped force for change in their local communities and in wider society. YSI focuses on empowering young people to use their own talents to be social innovators so experiencing and developing their innate sense of justice, responsibility and capacity to create a fairer, more caring and equal society.

Section 5
Workshops

Workshops

Participants chose one of four parallel workshops to discuss key issues under a set of themes relevant to NAPinclusion. Two of the workshop themes covered wide-reaching policy matters - the alignment of local government and local development and the implementation of the Healthy Ireland Strategy. The second two workshops focussed on National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy and on homelessness policy.

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

What are the main issues for people/communities experiencing poverty, social exclusion & inequalities in relation to the theme?

How will the policies/implementation impact on people experiencing poverty, social exclusion and inequality?

What and where are the opportunities for the target group/community to get involved in the development and implementation of the policy?

Initial presentations were made in each workshop to set off discussion on key points. The findings from each workshop were presented to the final plenary session by the Forum rapporteur. The presenters and facilitators of the workshops are outlined below:

● **Alignment of Local Government and Local Development** facilitated by Ms Oonagh Mc Ardle. Presentations by Mr David Dalton, Assistant Principal Officer, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government; Ms Ann Irwin, Community Workers Co-Operative.

● **Healthy Ireland Strategy: Making its Impact Real for Communities** facilitated by Ms Anne Costello. Presentations by Dr Diarmuid O'Donovan, Director of Public Health, HSE and Senior Lecturer in Social and Preventative Medicine, NUI Galway; Ms Sinead Keenan, Project Coordinator, Healthy Food for All.

● **National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy** facilitated by Ms Margaret O'Riada. Presentations by Ms Linda Grealy, Principal Officer, Department of Justice and Equality; Ms Ronnie Fay, Co-Director, Pavee Point.

● **Homelessness Policy** facilitated by Ms Frances Byrne. Presentations by Mr Aidan Culhane, Special Advisor, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government; Mr Pat Greene, Head of Strategy and Development, Dublin Simon Community.

Workshops 5.1:

Alignment of Local Government and Local Development

Presentations

Mr David Dalton, Assistant Principal Officer, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, outlined the overall policy context framing the reform and development of local government as outlined in the White Paper "*Putting People First*"[1] . Management oversight of local and community development will be through the Local Community Development Committees (LCDC) and there will be a new framework to enable (improved) citizen and community participation in local government. Mechanisms for LCDCs will be legally enforceable.

Mr Dalton outlined the purpose of the LCDC, its functions and composition. The development of a Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP), which will improve local co-ordination and collaboration at local level, will be a key function of the LCDC. There will also be statutory provision for a mechanism for the selection of members of communities to participate in local authority decision-making. The LCDC will not be implementing actions but will have an oversight, coordination and planning role - identifying priorities, outlining actions to address needs in a comprehensive plan and monitoring delivery of these actions. The Local and Community Development Programme (LCDP) and the Rural Development Programme will remain in place and it is expected that the LCDP will be more community development focused than in the past.

The requirement to put in place a tendering process for the implementation of locally delivered programmes is based on the advice of the Attorney General and requirements associated with the new public spending code/value for money. While it will be a competitive process it is in the interest of all parties for the expertise of local and community groups to be retained.

The development of a Policy Framework for Local and Community Development and the establishment of an Inter-Departmental Group on Local and Community Development will provide a coherent policy and implementation framework for the effective operation of the local-level process. An initial draft of the Policy Framework has been produced for the Inter-Departmental Group. A broader consultation will take place with local and community groups within the timeline set by the introduction of the new Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in January 2015.

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1   Putting People First Action Programme for Effective Local Government (2012): DEC&LG

Ms Ann Irwin, Community Workers Co-Operative, outlined the series of changes experienced by the community sector over the past number of years, including the integration of most of the 180 independent community organisations funded under the Community Development Programme into Local Development Companies - who were themselves reduced from 94 to 52. She said that severe and disproportionate cuts were also imposed on the community sector during this period. All of this happened against a backdrop of increasing poverty and deprivation. It was a widely shared view within the community sector that those changes were undermining of the community sector and that they were imposed without consultation or engagement with the sector.

Ms Irwin said that the changes introduced under Putting People First will vest the Local Community Development Committee with responsibility 'for the coordination, governance, planning and oversight of all publically funded local and community development interventions at local level'. This she regarded as a significant departure from the enabling relationship outlined in the White Paper on Supporting Community and Voluntary Activity [2].

An additional concern arises from the application of a competitive tendering process to the awarding of contracts to deliver the new Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme. Ms Irwin said this raises the prospect of this programme being delivered on a for-profit basis under the control of the local authority.

Ms Irwin said there was a unanimous view within the community sector that the new policy is regressive, prescriptive and dismissive of the need for community development addressing poverty, social exclusion and inequality to be independent of the state.

Views from participants: key points

There was a strong consensus that the community development sector has been subject to continuous contraction and reduction and this post-alignment process will continue the negative process. It was acknowledged that local government reform is needed but questionable whether this approach will achieve this. There was a view that the enhanced role for local authorities in local development and community development is to assuage them following the removal of significant functions from their control.

It was felt that the proposed reforms present a threat to local development and community development and to the vulnerable groups who are beneficiaries of these processes. Fears were raised about potential losses in terms of the innovative/pioneering approaches which brought significant benefit to the state in terms of social inclusion.

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2   White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector http://www.environ.ie/en/Community/CommunityVoluntarySupports/

A particular concern related to the capacity and commitment of local authorities, who have a central management role in community development and local development, given their poor track record on Traveller issues. In light of this experience there was a call for specific protocols and procedures to safeguard such vulnerable groups.

Sectorial independence

Participants emphasised the importance of civil society independence and the distortion introduced under the restructure, whereby the State will assume an organising role for the community sector. This was regarded as ethically unacceptable. The injustice of applying different criteria to business and farming sector representation to the LCDC which recognises their independence and autonomy was raised by some participants, who argued that the community sector needs the same recognition.

There was a belief that the alignment process has been undermining of the independence of the community development sector and may very well destroy what is a central component of social inclusion strategies - a dynamic, critical voice that informs policy, moves people closer to statutory services and brings better outcomes for the communities whose voice would otherwise be unheard.

There were concerns about the Public Participation Network outlined in the Report of the Working Group on Citizen Engagement. It was felt that resourcing the proposed college structures (social inclusion, voluntary and environment) would ameliorate some of the concerns about the independence of the community development sector.

Development of the promised National Policy on Local and Community Development was regarded as critical to the recognition of community development organisations and processes, but will require levels of consultation and information that have been lacking to date.

Consultation/information

Participants expressed a deep concern about the lack of consultation and the information gap around implementation of the social inclusion/participation elements of Putting People First. The entire process was widely viewed as prescribed rather than collaborative.

This is a far-reaching policy which requires consideration through dialogue with key stakeholders, especially the community sector which collectivises and gives voice to the most marginalised. DECLG needs to engage in meaningful consultation with community groups and organisations. The Department needs to understand the concerns of those working on the ground. Adequate space and time needs to be given to the process of developing a new national policy framework and putting new structures in place at local level.

Local structures

The reality that local development and community development are different was reiterated by stressing that both need to be reflected in the new Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) structures that are being put in place in local authority areas.

Social inclusion representation was very limited on the LCDC. Questions were raised by participants as to how communities of interest such as women's groups will fit into the proposed structures. Their lack of representation was considered to be a barrier to conveying the complexities of their social exclusion, hindering the development of appropriate and effective actions.

There was a shared concern that the balance of representation on the LCDC will shift decision-making away from the community knowledge base and result in a skewing of budgets towards majority needs and away from the participatory budgeting approaches inherent in community development and existing local development processes.

The possibility of LCDCs being the implementation body for EU rural development funding was flagged by participants from rural areas. There was a strong view that this will bring a further imbalance of power and undermine the role of local development companies and community development organisations in rural areas.

Questions were raised as to how important existing structures - policing forums, drugs task forces, children's services committees etc. - will relate to the LCDC and the Public Participation Network. Particular concerns were raised about how vulnerable groups and communities of interest can be accommodated in the new structures. Will additional funding be provided for the three colleges (social inclusion, voluntary and environment) outlined in the Citizen Engagement report?

There was a view that all of these structural changes need to be monitored, periodically reviewed and revised as necessary.

Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme

The roll out of the new Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme was generally welcomed but there was a concern about the possible loss of innovative and pioneering approaches at local and community level under the restructuring. These have provided employment opportunities to vulnerable groups such as Travellers as well as being an important mechanism to encourage agencies to provide targeted actions for specific groups.

Questions were raised about the Department of Social Protection's role in employment services and how this links with the employment and education/training goals of the new Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme.

Procurement

A particular concern raised by participants related to the tendering and procurement process demanded under EU competition law directives, which effects the contracting of the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme and LEADER. Questions were raised as to whether this will lead to privatisation of social inclusion measures and what safeguards can be put in place to prevent what some regarded as a doomsday scenario.

There was a view that exemption from the EU competition directive should be further examined as there is scope to omit certain social services from these obligations. If there is no option but to proceed with competitive tendering then the criteria need to reflect the expected expertise which community and local development groups have developed and assembled over a long period.

Workshop 5.2:

Healthy Ireland Strategy: making its impact real for communities

Presentations

Dr Diarmuid O'Donovan, Director of Public Health HSE and Senior Lecturer in Social and Preventative Medicine NUI Galway, outlined key determinants of health, focussing in on the socio-economic/political context and setting out definitions of health inequality that illustrate the link between poor health outcomes, disadvantage and injustice. Research studies show a strong correlation between deprivation and health, with factors such as unemployment, low income and housing determining levels of chronic illness and life expectancy.

The Healthy Ireland Strategy sets out a number of goals including the reduction of existing health inequalities within a framework to improve health and wellbeing. The key areas of focus are governance and policy; partnership and cross-sectoral working; empowering people and communities; health and health reform; research and evidence; monitoring, reporting and evaluation. Implementation will mean working with the DSP Social Inclusion Division and with local health partners and local authorities. Existing partnerships will be linked and supported and community-based programmes for those most at risk will be prioritised.

A number of priority health areas have been selected for implementation including research and outcomes, Early Years strategy, substance misuse and physical activity. Key enablers are a fit for purpose Health and Wellbeing Division, assembling evidence and building 'knowledge management' function and capacity, strategic communication, partnership and strengthened frameworks and infrastructure for delivery.

Ms Sinead Keenan, Project Coordinator, Healthy Food for All, outlined the *Healthy Food for All* initiative (HFfA) which supports Community and School Food Initiatives as local solutions to food poverty. HFfA also advocates at national level for policies that support people to have an adequate and nutritious diet.

Food poverty is the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability and access to food. In Ireland, 10% of the population, about 400,000 people, are living in food poverty. People living on a low-income are more than twice as likely to experience food poverty.

The type of food that people eat depends on:

- Affordability: the cost of food and how much money is available to spend on food

- Accessibility: proximity to the nearest shop, whether you have a car or are reliant on public transport

- Availability: the type of food that is promoted (special offers; convenience foods versus fresh fruit & vegetables)

- Awareness: having the confidence and skills to prepare a meal from basic materials

People on low-income choose foods that are appealing and filling. These foods tend to be cheaper, more energy rich but nutrient poor. This leads to diet-related ill-health, educational disadvantage and ultimately an inability to participate fully in society.

Many disadvantaged families are struggling to put food on the table and are unable to afford the diet recommended by health experts to meet their nutritional needs. Food is the flexible item as household bills are prioritised. As a result 1 in 5 children go to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food in the home.

Teenage children have the same nutritional needs as an adult and this should be reflected in family income supports. *Healthy Ireland* has a role in setting targets so that nutritional needs are considered when setting social welfare rates.

There is a huge imbalance in promotional spending on foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt compared with healthier produce. The Healthy Ireland Strategy can promote partnership working between food industry, relevant government departments, planning authorities, community and voluntary sector and the public to develop a national strategy on food that ensures all people can have an adequate and nutritious diet.

Availability is an issue that can be met by direct provision of food for those most in need. The implementation of the new Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived is one such initiative, food banks are another. There are opportunities to work with industry to redistribute surplus food in the food system to families experiencing food poverty. In Ireland 450,000 tonnes of food is wasted annually.

Partnership approaches, involve local communities working with local authorities and local businesses to improve eating habits through the development of community gardens, and community healthy eating projects are particularly effective. There is also a role for *Healthy Ireland* in ensuring that planning authorities consider health and well-being assessments in decision-making process.

In conclusion, supporting people to develop awareness, confidence and skills around cooking and nutrition is important but structural factors limiting food choices must be addressed in order to eliminate food poverty. Some excellent work is taking place at community level in response to growing food needs yet there is no specific funding for these initiatives. The community development approach must be supported by the implementation of the actions set out in the *Healthy Ireland* policy framework.

Views from participants: key points

Awareness

Given the centrality of socio-economic status in determining health the widespread lack of awareness about the Healthy Ireland Strategy was regarded as disappointing by participants. It was generally agreed that awareness of those most in need might have been better if target groups had been facilitated to feed into the development process. This was regarded as a missed opportunity.

There were questions about the process around the development of the strategy, especially in regard to communications. Circulation of a preliminary draft would have helped address any gaps or exclusions - certain socio-economic groups, including Roma, are not reflected in the Strategy. Discussion in the workshop raised concerns of a serious disconnect between policy makers and target communities (in poverty) in terms of understanding, process and the required strategy - i.e. the lived reality of disadvantaged people, the importance of participation/consultation, the need for effective local or targeted application. Participants pointed to the clear lessons emerging about the need to engage at local level, to develop an informed implementation strategy and to be cognisant of the need for an integrated local level approach involving schools and wider family members.

There was recognition that the strategy is to a certain extent dependent on people taking personal responsibility, which points to the need for investment by health authorities in a strong information/ education strategy.

Strategy

Participants acknowledged the merit in developing a single strategy on health; but it needs to be more inclusive in order for distinct needs to emerge.

Adopting a narrow interpretation of health and healthcare is not helpful in developing strategies, especially in relation to mental health and well-being where empathy-based therapies can be very effective.

There was strong support for the Healthy Ireland Strategy, but also recognition that it is very aspirational and requires a practical application framework with specific measures and targets.

Local partnerships need to be resourced if it is to be successfully implemented but the experience is that no additional resources are forthcoming for this purpose. It needs to be recognised that developing effective strategies means building up a bank of knowledge at local level by working through community organisations and their processes.

Vision/values framework

Universal access to health was identified as a core issue affecting health, which can only be remedied by a transfer of wealth to the poor. Targeting measures towards the most vulnerable will help to bring this about, if there are appropriate accompanying budgets to the measures.

The contradictions in promoting good nutrition while failing to provide adequate income supports was identified as a clear issue. In parallel, there was recognition that investment in jobs that improve income levels will have a positive impact in bringing about longer-term changes in health outcomes.

Whole-of-Government approach

Issues arising from the implementation of whole-of-government strategies point to the need for the appointment of a clear leader with authority in each department to drive application.

Cross-cutting policy was generally welcomed but also an accompanying need for leaders/ champions at delivery level to ensure robust implementation, monitoring and reporting. While this may involve some additional costs, these would be offset against the efficiencies achieved.

The need to ensure that organisational policies do not contradict the aims of cross-sectoral strategies was identified in the discussion - for instance, neglecting to ensure an adequate income while promoting a healthy diet. Improving employment opportunities for those experiencing poverty is the most important means of impacting on poor nutrition and associated health problems.

<u>**Workshop 5.3:**</u>

<u>**National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy**</u>

Presentations

Ms. Linda Grealy, Principal Officer, Department of Justice and Equality, gave an account of the background and development of the National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy, which came on foot of an EU Council decision to put in place an EU framework for national strategies. The National Strategy brings together key elements of existing strategies aimed at Travellers together with initiatives in place to assist the Roma Community. The National Strategy has four pillars: education, health, accommodation and employment.

The numbers of Irish Travellers in Ireland is believed to be about 30,000. This is based on a self-identification question in the Census. With regard to the number of Roma, no official count is maintained by the State. Progress reports are submitted to the EU Commission on an annual basis. The second report has been recently submitted.

The EU critique of the first report (2011) outlined a number of strengths in the Irish approach, including the strong existing approach to intercultural education, local initiatives to enhance employment and enterprise supports, a wide range of specific Traveller dedicated health services and a Traveller accommodation programme adopted by local authorities with annual targets.

Weaknesses identified include a lack of detail on existing initiatives, the absence of a long-term approach and lack of consultation with Roma/Travellers. The second report brought improvements in terms of implementation, monitoring and consultation. At a local level there are local consultative committees in the accommodation, education and health areas, while at the national level there is a National Traveller Monitoring Advisory Committee and also a High Level Group on Traveller issues.

Consideration is currently being given to improving monitoring and consultation processes and developing an implementation plan. While the Department of Justice and Equality leads in terms of coordinating strategies and reporting on progress, the implementation of the National Traveller/Roma Strategy is the responsibility of lead departments covering specific areas of social policy, such as education and health. Matters of progress or non-progress on actions and consultation with Traveller/Roma Groups in relation to actions in the National Strategy are the responsibility of the relevant department.

Ms. Ronnie Fay, Co-Director Pavee Point, provided an overview of the situation of Travellers and Roma in Ireland. With regard to numbers, Census data on Travellers is likely to be underestimated and Roma numbers are estimated at 5,000.

Discrimination against both communities is prevalent and this is borne out by data:

- Only 14% of Travellers are in employment

- 55% of Travellers complete their education by the age of 15.

- Only 1% of Travellers go on to third level education

- Travellers have a low life expectancy, the infant death rate is 3.5 times the national average and the suicide rate is six times the national average

Across Europe Roma experience high levels of discrimination, one in every three is unemployed and 90% live in poverty[3]. Many Roma are 'voluntarily repatriated' from Ireland. Those who remain cannot get employment, may not be entitled to any social protection or a medical card and live in abject poverty. The Habitual Residence Condition, which places restrictions on welfare entitlements, has a particular impact on Roma living in Ireland.

Travellers have been disproportionality affected during the course of the recession with Budget cuts on Traveller related schemes and services greatly exceeding the general level of reduction in State expenditure during this period[4]. The treatment of Travellers in Irish society is also evident in the racist attitudes they encounter[5].

The EU Framework is a response to human rights violations against Roma. It sets out the European Strategy to 2020 for addressing Roma inequalities in education, health, accommodation and employment. The EU Framework obliges each member state to submit a National Roma Integration Strategy. While the process requires that plans be designed, implemented and monitored in consultation with stakeholders groups, this process was lacking in Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy contains a number of weaknesses, including:

- It sets out strategies that already in place for Travellers in the areas of education, accommodation, healthcare and employment;
- It contains no goals, targets, indicators or related timeframes;
- Roma are largely excluded from the Strategy.

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3   The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States (2012): EU Fundamental Rights Agency
4   Travelling with Austerity (2013) Pavee Point: Harvey, B
5   Emancipation of the Travelling People (2010): MacGreil, M

These deficiencies were noted by the European Commission in its review of the Strategy. Five actions were identified by Pavee Point to strengthen the Irish Strategy:

- **Establish** a cross-departmental steering group (by Department of Justice and Equality) with an independent Chair and Traveller and Roma civil society representation to revise the existing National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy;

- **Ensure** the strategy has achievable national goals with targets for Traveller and Roma integration. These goals should address, as a minimum, the four EU Roma pillars relating to access to education, healthcare, accommodation and employment;

- **Ensure** the strategy explicitly addresses racism towards Roma and Travellers;

- **Ensure** the strategy includes time frames, funding mechanisms and strong inclusive monitoring and evaluation methods.

- **Ensure** the involvement of Travellers and Roma in the development and implementation of the National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy.

To drive the implementation of actions in this regard a dedicated National Traveller and Roma Unit should be established given the cross-cutting nature of the problems experienced by Travellers and Roma.

Views from participants: key points

Human rights

Participants were agreed that Roma and Traveller organisations pursue Roma and Traveller Rights because they are fundamental Rights associated with being human, regardless of ethnicity. Many people pointed to Ireland's poor human rights record in relation to Travellers which is illustrated by the statistical data, especially in relation to health, education and employment. These demonstrate both quantitative and qualitative differences in outcome compared with the general population.

National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy

The lack of consultation in the development and monitoring of the National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy was regarded as disappointing. Stakeholder groups should be part of the process of strategic planning and monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy, which is undertaken at official level without the participation of Traveller and Roma organisations.
There was a call for accountability to clearly identify responsibility for implementing actions within departments and agencies.

Participants voiced their concerns that halting sites and appropriate accommodation are not being provided by local authorities and that many byelaws criminalise Traveller's culture. This was interpreted as an attempt to assimilate Travellers into the settled community.

New Direction

Disaggregated data should be collected to inform the development of a National Implementation Plan, which should be developed in participation with Roma and Travellers. Participants said that the prevailing lack of data could be addressed by introducing an ethnic identifier.

A Roma and Traveller Unit within the Department of the Taoiseach to drive forward a policy agenda to meet the needs of these most marginalised groups was regarded as necessary. This was especially important in light of the limited progress that has been made to date on health, education, employment, the Habitual Rights Condition, social protection, ethnicity and discrimination.

Roma issues would be best addressed through a closer integration with Traveller strategies because of their shared experience.

Accommodation continues to be a major issue. Local authorities are not providing halting sites or appropriate accommodation. Trespassing bye-laws and other imposed restrictions are exacerbating matters.

Given the wide disparities in health related outcomes, a new Traveller health strategy is long overdue. It was suggested that updating the All Ireland Traveller Health Study would provide the data to focus the strategy.

An education strategy for Travellers and Roma should address the language issues of Roma children, whose education is likely to be otherwise set back. The whole area of education and training, which is crucial in combating poverty and exclusion, requires meaningful engagement with Travellers if there is to be significant improvement in outcomes.

Community Development

A lot of concern was expressed about the alignment process of Local Government and Local Development (See workshop 1). Bringing funding under the remit of local authorities may endanger the very survival of existing Traveller groups.

Independent community development work at national and local level needs to continue to be supported and strengthened through the National Traveller Partnership or a National Programme in order to avoid being subsumed into local authority structures.

Workshop 5.4:

Homelessness Policy

Presentations

Mr Aidan Culhane, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government referred to the commitment in the Programme for Government to ending long term homelessness by 2016 by implementing a 'housing first' approach that places access to permanent housing as the primary response to homelessness. This moves the focus away from expensive emergency or shelter type accommodation, making better use of scarce resources. Implementation is monitored by an Oversight Group which reviews the approach, measures progress, identifies obstacles and proposes solutions to the Tánaiste. Current strategy is concentrated on preventing homelessness; eliminating the need to sleep rough; eliminating long-term occupation of emergency accommodation; providing long-term accommodation solutions; ensuring effective services and better coordinated funding arrangements.

A review of policy indicated that the principles and fundamentals remain valid. The review highlighted the need for data to measure the effectiveness of interventions and pointed to high levels of statutory funding which were not delivering satisfactory outcomes. The need for a greater supply of appropriate housing was underlined.

The housing-led approach centres on a rapid provision of secure housing with supports available as needed to ensure sustainable tenancies:

- Supply - availability and supply of secure, affordable and adequate housing
- Prevention - action to prevent, as far as possible, the occurrence or reoccurrence of homelessness
- Support - promoting independent living, with supports as appropriate

The Oversight Group Report maintains that the 2016 goals can be reached if (a) housing policy accepts the 2016 objectives and does more to meet them than at present; (b) actions are re-oriented to settlement, support and sustaining people in permanent housing rather than shelter-based services; and (c) there is an increased emphasis on prevention.

Mr Pat Greene, Dublin Simon Community said that Simon is welcoming of the housing-led approach as part of a range of responses, which should enhance but not replace current good practice. The approach needs a 'road map', an adequate budget and greater clarity about where the homes will come from.

Mr Greene said that homelessness needs to be viewed against a backdrop of increased poverty and material deprivation, according to the Household Budget Survey 2009-2010 there has been an increase in household weekly expenditure since the previous study in 2004-2005, with many people unable to afford necessary food items.

CSO figures for 2011 counted 3,808 as homeless or sleeping rough. There are indications that matters have deteriorated since then with the 2012 Simon Annual Review reporting an increase of 24% in those using Simon services. In these circumstances particular challenges emerge around access to appropriate housing, the provision of ongoing/open ended health and social care support and the reduced budgets available to organisations in having to do more with less. It is important that funding is not diverted away from emergency provision until the above matters are progressed.

Reductions in central funding for social housing and in the HSE Homeless Budget, reduced availability of rental accommodation, disparities between rents and housing supplement levels and the impact of welfare cuts on the under 25s are all impacting negatively on homelessness.

Mr Greene concluded that ending homelessness by 2016 is possible if there is a strong adequately resourced government response and a range of housing options sourced to meet long-term housing needs. Barriers preventing people moving out of homelessness, such as rent supplement and the reduced welfare payment to under 25s must be removed. Open-ended ongoing support is critical and must continue to be planned for and resourced. Finally, effective joint working practices will be essential to the success of housing-led services.

Views from participants: key points

Key issues affecting homeless people

Particular issues mentioned by participants as affecting homeless people include addiction, mental health, loneliness/isolation, poor self-esteem and stigmatisation. Cuts in services have compounded problems - e.g. cuts imposed on the Rural Transport Scheme have brought increased isolation and mental health problems. There is a need for a particular focus on child welfare and children living with homelessness in the current economic climate.

Participation

There is a need to listen to those affected by homelessness and those who work with homeless people, and to rediscover and enhance partnership approaches between the state and the NGO sector as an effective and efficient way of addressing the problem. This would bring a better focus on high risk groups - young people leaving care, ex-prisoners, single people, those affected by domestic violence situations, drugs/alcohol. Partnership approaches would also help to address hidden homelessness - e.g. sleeping in cars - and lead to a better understanding of the impact of the reduction of social welfare payments on youth homelessness.

There was acknowledgement of existing channels for homeless people/organisations to get involved in the Homeless Policy Statement through regional forums, Homeless Action Teams (with Local Authorities and HSE) and the National Homelessness Consultative Committee. The Ex and Current Users Forum provides another channel.

Housing

The length of housing waiting lists, lack of supply and the dearth of transitional housing were raised as key issues. Of particular concern was the need for a housing policy that is underpinned by legislation and recognised as a right. Participants felt that this is especially important in the context of housing shortages and the bulk of homeless spend having to be concentrated on emergency accommodation.

Difficulties in accessing the right type of housing, particularly for single people, were raised emphasising the need for different housing types.

There were suggestions for greater use of innovative solutions that address both the development needs of homeless people and the need for housing, especially renovation projects which are widely used in other countries.

Strategy and targets

Government's commitment to end long-term homelessness and rough sleeping was welcomed as a strong and definite response, but there were doubts about achieving the 2016 goal given the problem of housing supply. Housing provision issues include: housing list waiting times and a dearth of transitional housing. It is unlikely that social housing will be able to meet needs, but it is not clear whether other options - private sector, use of voids or housing associations are being contemplated.

The insufficiency of resources to provide the support needed by some homeless people - and to ensure sustainable tenancies - was highlighted. The existing policy focus on settlement could result in reduced funding for emergency accommodation, which is still needed.

Addressing issues in the private rented sector - rent supplement (which was regarded as not fit for purpose) and rent controls, deposit protection and tenancy failure/illegal evictions - should be a priority. Participants felt that despite the emphasis on protection little is being done to address problems in the private rented sector - increased rents, disparities between rents and supplement and a reluctance to accept rent supplement. The new Housing Assistance Payment scheme that transfers responsibility to local authorities was welcomed and should be rolled out nationally.

Streamlined service

Finally, there was a call for a fast-track, accessible and decentralised response to people who become homeless, thus enabling agencies to act quickly before homelessness becomes embedded and therefore, difficult to address.

Existing services were criticised for being over bureaucratic, centralised and inaccessible, with insufficient emergency accommodation, poor provision in rural areas and a lack of case management. Local opposition was also a factor inhibiting service provision.

The need for a coherent approach that concentrates on case management and key points of intervention/transition was called for, especially in terms of advancing people towards employment. This would prevent people falling through the net and going back to requiring first stage intervention.

The difficulties for NGOs in working towards the 2016 goal on decreased funding were highlighted. Participants spoke of the particular impact on rural homeless and addiction services and how organisations had to allocate resource time to fundraising, which has placed significant pressure on organisations.

Workshop 5.5:

Workshop Feedback

Mr Aiden Lloyd, Conference Rapporteur provided feedback from the workshops, highlighting some of the issues, priorities and suggestions emerging.

In the **Alignment workshop** there was a deep concern about the lack of consultation and the information gap regarding the implementation of Putting People First. The entire process was viewed as very prescribed.

There were concerns about the capacity and commitment of local authorities on matters of social inclusion, given their poor track record on Traveller issues.

A further concern related to the tendering and procurement process apparently required under EU competition law which effects the contracting of the new Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme and the implementation of LEADER. There were fears that this will lead to the privatisation of social inclusion measures and there were questions about what safeguards can be put in place to prevent this.

The very limited representation of the community sector on the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) structures that are being put in place in local authority areas was regarded as a barrier to conveying the complexities of social exclusion and the development of appropriate and effective actions.

Finally, there was a widespread belief that the alignment process is undermining the independence of the community development sector and may very well destroy what is a central component of social inclusion strategies - an autonomous, critical voice that informs policy, moves people closer to statutory services and brings better outcomes for the communities whose voice would otherwise be unheard.

In the **Healthy Ireland Strategy workshop** the widespread lack of awareness about the Healthy Ireland Strategy was regarded as disappointing and a missed opportunity to address the needs of disadvantaged groups. It was generally agreed that awareness of those most in need might have been better if target groups had been facilitated to feed into the strategy development process.

There was general agreement that there was merit to developing a single strategy on health but it needs to be more inclusive of groups experiencing significant health inequalities in order for their distinct needs to emerge.

Universal access to health was regarded as a core issue effecting health, which can only be remedied by a transfer of wealth from the wealthy to the poor. Targeting measures towards the most vulnerable will help to bring this about, if there are appropriate accompanying budgets to the measures.

The widespread belief that problems associated with the implementation of cross-cutting whole-of-government strategies could be resolved by the appointment of a clear leader with authority in each department to drive its application within that specific department. Robust monitoring and reporting was also suggested as a requirement.

In the **Traveller/Roma integration Strategy workshop** participants pointed to the deficit of Traveller and Roma Rights which is underlined by the statistical data, especially in relation to health, education and employment, demonstrating the quantitative and qualitative differences in outcome compared with the general population.

The lack of consultation in the development and monitoring of the National Traveller/Roma Integration Strategy was regarded as disappointing, with a strong belief by participants that stakeholder groups should be part of the process of strategic planning.

The need for a **Roma and Traveller Unit** within the Department of the Taoiseach to drive forward a policy agenda to meet the needs of these most marginalised groups was regarded as a necessity, especially so in light of the limited progress that has been made to date on health, education, employment, the Habitual Rights Condition, social protection, ethnicity and discrimination.

There was agreement that disaggregated data should be collected to inform the development of a National Implementation Plan, which should be developed in participation with Roma and Travellers.

There was a consensus that independent community development work at national and local level needs to continue to be supported through the National Traveller Partnership or a national programme in order to avoid being subsumed into local authority structures.

In the **Homelessness Policy workshop** the need to listen to those affected by homelessness and those who work with homeless people was emphasised, including a call to rediscover and enhance partnership approaches between the state and the NGO sector as an effective and efficient way of addressing the problem of homelessness.

Of particular concern was the need for a housing policy that is underpinned by legislation and recognised as a right. This was regarded as especially important in the context of housing shortages and the bulk of homeless spend having to be concentrated on emergency accommodation.

Addressing issues in the private rented sector - rent supplement (which was regarded as not fit for purpose) and rent controls, deposit protection and tenancy failure/evictions were identified as urgent priorities.

Finally, there was a call for a fast-track, accessible and decentralised response to people who become homeless, thus enabling agencies to act quickly before homelessness becomes embedded and difficult to address.

Section 6
Concluding Section

<u>Overarching Points</u>

The following points received specific mention because they cut across all of the workshops:

The less than wholesale acceptance by the State of the community sector as **an important section of civil society** providing a voice for the most marginalised on matters of policy and priority is a prevailing issue. Providing information and opportunities for participation should underpin the relationship between the state and the community sector and this would facilitate the formulation of appropriate and effective policies and delivery strategies. In particular the failure, evident in the Alignment process, to regard the community sector as an independent sector undermines the development of a respectful and enduring relationship.

A need to address the inequalities of particularly disadvantaged groups within general policy measures. The development of effective measures to address the poverty and social exclusion of these groups requires up-to-date **disaggregated data**. This data would enable the development of specific initiatives or the targeting of particular groups within integrated strategies in the areas of health, employment, education etc.

The need for clear and **concrete targets** to be set, so that progress can be monitored and measures adjusted on an ongoing basis. A deeper application of *impact assessment* would ensure that policies are proofed prior to being implemented and are assessed against their impact on people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

Difficulties in developing a **whole-of-government** approach need to be overcome. Departments are reluctant to break out of their areas of responsibility or to cut into the responsibilities of other departments. There should be an integrated approach to problem solving which, if successfully implemented at policy level, would filter down to the operational level.

Finally, there has been a significant departure over the years from **communities as** *partners* **in policy to one of communities as** *contractors***.** Disadvantaged communities and communities of interest need to be involved in all aspects of policy development - planning, implementation and the monitoring of policy measures - because they have the insights to inform policy and the capacity to ensure its effective implementation.

Address by the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton T.D.

The Tánaiste expressed her great pleasure in addressing this tenth meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum. This is a significant landmark – the Forum being a successful consultation model which has endured for many years and a model of good practice that is widely emulated in Europe, with for example, a recent peer review hosted by Belgium, which participants heard about earlier that morning.

The fact that the Forum has maintained a high attendance level, shows the relevance and value of the Forum in these difficult economic and social conditions. The effectiveness of the Forum down the years is very much related to the fact that the participants, represent, or work directly with, people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

The Tánaiste thanked everyone sincerely for attending and for sharing their views and experiences.

She stated that the participants' views are hugely important to Government in informing policy making and implementation. Participants come from a wide variety of backgrounds, bringing different perspectives on the important topics discussed and the contributions are both valuable and essential.

Participants know at first hand the challenges people face in trying to cope with all the difficulties poverty brings, and in trying to achieve a decent standard of living for themselves and their families. They know the supports they need to enable them to meet these challenges.

They also know the variations in need that may arise in different parts of the country and you bring this knowledge and experience to bear on the discussions at the Forum. She said that it is particularly important that we hear about the problems being faced by particular groups, whose specific needs can be lost sight of in 'broad brush' policies and in their implementation.

The Tánaiste said that the feedback from the workshops suggested that the discussions have been as productive as in previous years and she hoped that people found the day a worthwhile and interesting experience.

Progress towards national and social recovery

The Tánaiste said steady progress was being made in restoring the economy and improving employment. She acknowledged this had not been an easy task but the sacrifices made by the Irish people have brought us to the point where we have now exited the bailout and regained our economic sovereignty.

This is an important milestone on Ireland's recovery. It is not the end in itself and there is still a major job to be undertaken to create jobs and opportunities across the country.

Economic recovery has to lift those people who are in jobless households out of welfare dependency, offer genuine hope and opportunities to our young people and ensure that joblessness does not become an inter-generational problem.

The latest data published by the Central Statistics Office shows that 61,000 more people were in jobs at the end of 2013, an employment increase of 3.3% on 2012. Unemployment has fallen by 41,400 over the course of the past two years with the overall unemployment rate falling, for the twentieth consecutive month, to 11.9%.

Although these figures are encouraging, the unemployment rate is still too high. The priority will be to ensure that the Live Register falls substantially further. To this end, this Government will continue to prioritise jobs creation and to protect the most vulnerable members of society.

Social Transfers

The Tánaiste welcomed the strong performance of social transfers in protecting those on the lowest incomes.

A recent report - *Social Transfers and Poverty Alleviation in Ireland: An Analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2004 – 2011* - shows that this performance increased from 53% in 2004 to 71% in 2011, thereby lifting almost 40% of the population out of at-risk-of-poverty in 2011.

She urged people to think about this for a moment. Basically, the research is telling us that 4 more people out of every 10 in our society would be at risk of poverty without the helping hand of social transfers.

Section 6: Concluding Section

Ireland is now at the top of the range of EU-15 countries with 90% effectiveness in reducing the poverty gap through social transfers. The report also show performance varied by life-cycle groups: in 2011, the poverty reduction effectiveness for children and for jobless households was 87%.

Future Challenges

The Tánaiste acknowledged that while we are slowly turning the corner, there are many challenges facing us in ensuring that the benefits of economic growth reach all our citizens. If we have learnt anything from our experience when we recovered from prior recessions, it is that a rising tide does not automatically lift all boats – people can get left behind when the tide turns. We must therefore ensure that we put in place policies that support those who were most affected by the crisis to access opportunities from more employment.

These policies must help those who are furthest from the labour market, such as the people who are long-term unemployed, lone parents, people with disabilities and disadvantaged youth. Many of these groups are combined to form jobless households. It is not an economically sustainable position that such a large proportion of the population are long-term welfare dependent.

When you consider that many of these jobless households contain children (accounting for a quarter of all children), then you begin to see the potential for inter-generational transmission of poverty and social exclusion.

Accordingly it is essential that we help unemployed people find a pathway to work, this is the core aim of the *Pathways to Work* strategy.

Through *Pathways*, we are introducing significant structural reform and transforming the Department into an active and engaged employment service.

Pathways represented a sea-change in how the State is tackling the issue of unemployment.

By the end of this year, the roll-out of Intreo to all 63 of the Department's offices nationwide will be completed.

European Dimension

The Tánaiste highlighted the European dimension of the fight against poverty and social exclusion, given the recent successful Irish Presidency in 2013 and the forthcoming European Parliament elections in May.

The EU has been a very important ally of Ireland in tackling its banking and fiscal crisis. But Europe has an equally important role to play in addressing the social impact of the crisis and

reducing poverty. Central to this are the Social Investment Package and the Youth Guarantee. Ireland published its Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan in January 2014.

The Plan identifies measures to build on services and initiatives already in place and to increase their impact by tailoring them to address the particular challenges of youth unemployment.

The Social Investment Package offers guidance to Member States on adopting more efficient and effective social policies in response to the significant challenges they currently face.

The Tánaiste said she believed there is a key role for community and voluntary organisations in identifying new solutions to the difficult problems we face as a society. The range of projects from all over the country at the Showcase of Social Inclusion Projects bears testament to the innovative role of community and voluntary organisations.

The Tánaiste expressed her delight in seeing the Young Social Innovators from Warrenmount Presentation College demonstrating their 2013 winning Challenge: *'Treat Them the Way You Would Like to be Treated'*. Their presentation shows the immense value and mutual benefits of inter-generational interaction.

Closing

Ms Simonetta Ryan Assistant Secretary, Department of Social Protection brought proceedings to a close. She thanked participants and the organisations represented for their participation and valuable input during a long day of constructive deliberations and discussion, with many clear messages emerging. Thanks were extended to the staff of the Social Inclusion Division who organised the event and to Croke Park Conference Centre for facilitating the smooth operation of the event. Ms Ryan thanked the speakers, facilitators and other key contributors in delivering today's programme. Finally special mention was given to the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and Community Workers' Cooperative, and to everybody that attended the regional preparatory workshops which they organised during the weeks leading up to the event.

Glossary

social Inclusion Forum Government

poverty exclusion issues summary report policies raised key final questions Children Plenary

Integration Taoiseach workshops Cabinet Session National community formally Committee submitted chaired parallel five provide

Glossary:

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016 (NAPinclusion)
The 10 year plan of the Irish Government aimed at tackling poverty.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix 1: The Social Inclusion Innovations Showcase

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

List of Projects

- ATD Fourth World

- Pavee Point

- NALA

- Open

- Community Worker Co-operative

- Healthy Food for All

- Irish Local Development Network

- Blue Drum

- Doras Buí

- Work 4 you

- Exchange House

- Little Bray Family Resource Centre

- Wexford Local Development

- Founder i - Smile International

- Young Social Innovators

- Roma: One People - Many Lives Exhibition

- Tír Boghaine

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