

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017

Report of Social Inclusion Forum 2017

*'National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2017
reflecting on the past and informing the future'*



An Roinn

Gnóthaí Fostaíochta agus Coimirce Sóisialaí

Department of

Employment Affairs and Social Protection

Report of Social Inclusion Forum 2017



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Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| SECTION 1 | 2 |
| 1.1 Acknowledgements | 2 |
| 1.2 Introduction..... | 3 |
| SECTION 2 | 6 |
| 2.1 Policy Pointers | 6 |
| 2.2 Prioritising the New Action Plan..... | 6 |
| 2.3 Monitoring and Accountability..... | 7 |
| 2.4 No One Gets Left Behind | 7 |
| 2.5 Committing to the Public Sector Duty..... | 8 |
| 2.6 Improving Poverty Research | 9 |
| 2.7 Importance of Early Intervention | 9 |
| 2.8 Improving Access to Social Welfare Services | 10 |
| 2.9 Recognising the Value of the Community Sector..... | 11 |
| 2.10 Engaging People Living in Poverty in the Policymaking Process | 11 |
| SECTION 3 | 10 |
| 3.1. Welcome and Opening Remarks | 10 |
| 3.2. Feedback from Regional Workshops..... | 16 |
| 3.3 Address by Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD | 25 |
| SECTION 4 | 32 |
| Forum workshops..... | 32 |
| 4.1 Workshop 1: Revision of the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction..... | 32 |
| 4.2 Workshop 2: Inclusive Labour Markets – Pathways to Work 2020 | 43 |
| 4.3 Workshop 3: Access to Quality Services..... | 51 |
| 4.4 Workshop 4: Adequate Minimum Income | 59 |
| 4.5 Summary of Workshops | 69 |
| SECTION 5 | 74 |
| 5.1 Reflections on NAPinclusion..... | 75 |
| 5.2 Flashcard Exercise..... | 85 |
| 5.3 Closing Remarks..... | 87 |

SECTION 1

Acknowledgements and Introduction

SECTION 1

1.1 Acknowledgements

The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection acknowledges the support and assistance of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland and Community Work Ireland (CWI) in the organisation of the Social Inclusion Forum and for the preparatory workshops which they jointly organised to enable individuals experiencing poverty to consider the contribution they might make to the work of the Forum.

Sincere thanks and appreciation is also extended to all those who participated and contributed to the Social Inclusion Forum on the day, including rapporteur Liza Costello who compiled this report.

Appreciation is extended to the workshop facilitators Frances Byrne, Eilís Ní Chaithnía, Martin Collins and Camille Loftus. Appreciation is also extended to the note takers for faithfully recording the content of the workshop discussions and to Derek Speirs for photography on the day.

The main conference documents and speaker presentations are available online from:

www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Social-Inclusion-Division.aspx

www.socialinclusion.ie

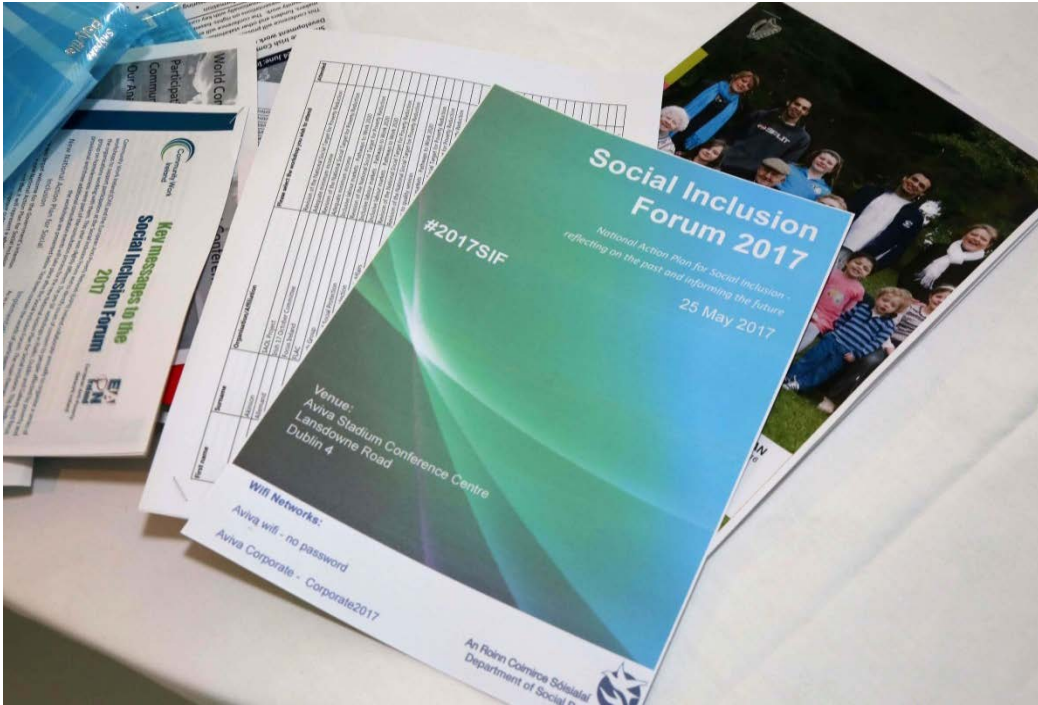
1.2 Introduction

The Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) was established by the Government as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate Ireland's *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion)*. The Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has been given responsibility by Government to convene the Social Inclusion Forum and is assisted in this work by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland and Community Work Ireland (CWI). The event provides a forum for engagement between officials from government departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty. The Social Inclusion Forum was held on Thursday 25 May 2017 in the Aviva Stadium in Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. The theme for the 2017 Forum – 'National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017 Reflecting on the past and informing the future' – reflects the fact that the timeframe for the *National Action Plan 2007-2017* has drawn to an end and that a new national anti-poverty strategy must now be developed.

This report provides a summary of this 13th meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum and includes inputs by guest speakers to the workshops, which provided a contextual framework for the discussions in each of the four parallel workshops. It captures the discussion and conclusions of each workshop. The 'policy pointers' section at the start of this report highlights some common themes which arose across different workshops as well as other presentations during the day, and which have a particular relevance for future policy development.

The report will be submitted to the Senior Officials' Group on Social Policy and Public Service Reform, and will be placed in the Oireachtas library for the information of members of both Houses of the Oireachtas.

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



SECTION 2

Policy pointers

SECTION 2

2.1 Policy Pointers

This section highlights some common themes that arose during the Forum, both in workshops and presentations throughout the day, which have a particular relevance for policy making.

2.2 Prioritising the New Action Plan

Participants emphasised the importance of the new action plan being prioritised by Government, noting that it should be at the centre of government policy. This includes ensuring that it is significantly resourced, and that an all-government strategy is taken to tackling poverty, involving all government departments.

There should be an emphasis on implementation over the course of the new plan. It was noted that Ireland has a history of being good at social policy development but poor at implementation. This can lead to local communities growing discouraged by the lack of progress and, ultimately, disheartened.

The new plan should be ambitious, drawing attention to poverty as unacceptable and a violation of human rights. It should set realistic fixed targets to reduce poverty in Ireland. The new targets must be both flexible and sustainable; they must be realistic without feeding complacency. The workshop on the national targets agreed that the overall target of 2% should be retained and supporting actions strengthened to achieve this.

In order to be effective, the new plan needs to comprise actions; it needs to be **a tool** for policy planning and evaluation, and not just be seen as a reporting system.

A review of Ireland's progress in tackling poverty, compared to other EU countries, reiterated many of these points, concluding that the past 20 years of NPSI have seen good incremental initiatives, but the issues persist, with levels of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland remaining unacceptably high. This is because we have not sufficiently changed fundamental inequalities in relation to access to resources and services.

The new plan must move social inclusion from the periphery to the centre of government economic, employment, environmental and social policy, backed with major increase in social investment. Rights need to be more at heart of all aspects of the plan – a first, necessary step towards rebalancing economic, employment, environmental and social policies and building a more inclusive and fair society.

2.3 Monitoring and Accountability

In order to ensure that the new action plan is an effective driver of policy, poverty and human rights proofing need to take place at all stages of the policymaking process – design, implementation, outcomes and evaluation – across all government departments. This obligation should be extended to any for-profit company involved.

It was suggested that a social inclusion council, modelled on the Labour Market Council, should be established to monitor progress regarding the plan's implementation.

2.4 No One Gets Left Behind

Up to now, the approach has been to target specific population groups, such as older people and ethnic minority communities. It was noted that while it is important to target groups vulnerable to poverty, this approach can risk ignoring individuals or subgroups outside of these groups who may also be at risk of poverty. Some questioned the value of the lifecycle

approach specifically, which they felt was insufficiently nuanced, making targeting difficult. At-risk groups should be targeted (for children, young single men, lone parents, homeless people, Travellers, migrants, people with disabilities among the existing lifecycle groups named in *NAPinclusion*). In addition, efforts should also be made to identify those who are at risk but who do not fall into larger, more obvious categories. In addition, people within one group should be not seen as homogenous. It was suggested that regular monitoring and reporting of underspending on budget provisions for specific vulnerable group's merits further consideration as this may reflect access issues. Finally, efforts should be made to address the needs of those who often fall outside the scope of larger survey-based studies, such as Travellers, some migrants and homeless people.

A word of caution was raised about the prospect of having too many sub-targets, resulting in competing ambitions among sub-groups. The need for representatives of vulnerable groups to work together as a community to achieve a total improvement in living standards was stressed as being the overriding goal.

2.5 Committing to the Public Sector Duty

There was a strong sense that there needs to be a greater commitment from top levels of government to implementing the Public Sector Duty (Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014), across all levels of public service provision. 'Positive duty', which was introduced in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, should have an important role to play in addressing discrimination and exclusion from the labour market.

2.6 Improving Poverty Research

There are serious gaps in the available data on poverty in Ireland, particularly regarding harder-to-reach groups. In the workshop on revising the targets for poverty reduction, discussion focused on the limitations of relying on the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data to set sub-targets. As it is widely accepted that a number of disadvantaged groups are excluded from this household survey (such as Travellers and asylum seekers living in direct provision accommodation) the question was raised as to whether sub-targets for these groups should remain based on this data source. A number of suggestions were made in this regard, including better use of existing data sources, greater use of qualitative methods, and use of more innovative methods to reach 'hard-to-reach' groups. The group felt there was merit in elevating some of the existing contextual indicators to the level of sub-targets. There was also strong support for the identification of new supporting indicators that could address current gaps in knowledge about people who cannot access services, in particular as this is an important tenet of the active inclusion approach.

In another workshop, it was noted that there is a need for longitudinal studies to improve our understanding of the experience of persistent poverty; the portion of the population who remain under the 60% poverty threshold.

2.7 Importance of Early Intervention

Participants stressed the value of investing in prevention and early intervention in the early years. Such an approach would involve long-term investment. It was noted that, across the spectrum, economists agree that investment in children gives high dividends. An income adequate for participation in society therefore must go beyond the basics

requirements for survival; it must also enable the individual to build up the knowledge and skills required to secure their own income.

2.8 Improving Access to Social Welfare Services

Participants in this workshop agreed that the commissioning and privatisation of social protection services, such as JobPath, should end. Failing this, it was noted that all agencies providing public services (including private agencies) should be bound by the Public Sector Duty (Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014).

Some participants spoke of a problem regarding JobPath referrals – specifically, a disconnect between central policy and what is happening locally (in relation to Pathways to Work). One participant described the referral process as a ‘spider’s web’. Such experiences can damage service users’ trust in the Department. They spoke of the value of intra- and inter- departmental coordination within departments, with agencies and across departments. This approach would be conducive to a better experience for service users. The need for increased consultation with service users was also noted, so as to ensure the level and nature of support aimed at returning people to the labour market is appropriate and relevant.

Participants felt damage had been caused to public perception of the Department by the recent campaign on social welfare fraud, which was felt to have created a very negative discourse and to have negatively impacted people’s trust in the Department. It was agreed that being treated with dignity should be the cornerstone of any engagement with public services.

2.9 Recognising the Value of the Community Sector

Local opinion should play a greater role in deciding how programmes are implemented at local level, and that such programmes be adaptable at local level. The value of the community sector, particularly the role it plays in supporting communities to have a voice, must be acknowledged. On a related point, centralisation of public services can lead to loss of local knowledge and expertise.

2.10 Engaging People Living in Poverty in the Policymaking Process

More expertise needs to be brought into the decision-making process: specifically, people living in poverty and social exclusion should be involved on an ongoing basis. This point was raised in both workshops on an inclusive labour market and an adequate minimum income.

Regarding an inclusive labour market, it was noted that the level of consultation between the Department of Social Protection and people using social welfare services needs to be increased. This could help ensure an improved match between skills deficits and training programmes for the unemployed. It could also make the level and delivery of in-work support relevant to each individual's needs.

In the workshop on an adequate minimum income, participants argued for the need for a 'civil space' where relevant stakeholders (the government, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector, etc.) can come together and explore the complex issue of adequacy of income and social welfare rates.

SECTION 3

Welcome and opening remarks

SECTION 3

3.1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Anne Vaughan, Deputy Secretary, Department of Social Protection, welcomed everyone on behalf of the Department of Social Protection, noting that the theme of the forum was ‘the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion – reflecting on the past and informing the future’. Ireland has had a long history of national anti-poverty strategies – 2017 marks the 20th anniversary of the development of the first strategic framework to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

The 1997 National Anti-Poverty Strategy highlighted the importance of consultation with and the involvement of the voluntary and community sector, users of services and those with first-hand experience of poverty as being central to its development and for the successful implementation of policies.

The Social Inclusion Forum was subsequently established by Government as part of the monitoring and evaluation structures underpinning the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017. The purpose of the forum is to give participants a voice in the development and implementation of the policies that directly affect them. The Forum also provides a welcome opportunity for those responsible for policy to have the chance to engage with those affected and share information.

The Forum was organised by the Social Inclusion Division of the Department in partnership with the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and Community Work Ireland. Anne thanked the partners for their support and expertise in framing and organising the day’s event, in particular the preliminary regional seminars held around the country

Anne noted that the report on the 2016 Forum was published, considered by Government and circulated to relevant stakeholders. The theme of the Forum in 2016 was ‘growing an inclusive recovery’, which reflected a shift in focus to the solution to poverty – inclusive growth – rather than the fact of poverty itself. It recognised that economic recovery or growth will not of itself deliver a more equal or inclusive society.

In total, 140 people attended the Forum in 2016 and the **main points** they raised were:

- disappointment that the interim poverty reduction target of 4% by 2016 would not be met;
- need to improve the activation model in terms of tailoring the package of activation measures to the individual;
- the introduction of regulations could perhaps stem the drift to precarious employment;
- the shift of significant responsibility for community development and local development towards local authorities needed to be better matched with adequate resourcing and capacity at local authority level to ensure delivery of their oversight role and provision of meaningful support for the community sector to function effectively at local level;
- effective regional development and rural development strategies needed to be developed as a matter of priority if meaningful effect was to be given to employment and anti-poverty measures in rural Ireland;
- people in poverty did not have the resilience to survive in an environment of crime and gangland culture and often had to watch their children succumb to drugs or worse; and
- labour market measures should also contribute to general integration strategies, and be inclusive of those leaving direct provision that are particularly vulnerable.

Anne assured participants that their feedback was important and was considered by Government in the ongoing development of policy. She noted that the design, implementation and evaluation of policy is challenging. It takes time to bed down and impact on people's lives. It is also subject to available resources. There have been several policy developments in the areas that participants have highlighted over recent years including:

- improvements in the social protection system including increased social welfare payments and funding for the School Meals Scheme;
- reforms to make work pay, including measures outlined in the *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities* and following on from this, the recent *Make Work Pay* report;
- commitments to tackle low pay including increases in the national minimum wage and the publication of the *National Skills Strategy*;
- the extension of the ECCE pre-school year into a second year, introduction of the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme, commitments in the *Action Plan for School-age Childcare* and the Early Years Quality Agenda with several measures adopted to raise the quality of early years care and education;
- the publication of the *Action Plan for Education 2017* with actions across a range of areas (such as well-being, disadvantage, skills, infrastructure). New literacy and numeracy targets in schools. The publication of the DEIS Plan 2017 and the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education*. Additional funding for apprenticeship & traineeship schemes;
- housing supports, including increased funding for the Housing Assistance Payment, increases in rent supplement limits and the commitments in *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*; and
- other commitments to tackle energy poverty, flooding, the rollout of the National Broadband Plan and improvements in health care.

While progress has been made in developing these policies, Anne recognised that further work to enhance and implement these is needed – feedback from participants’ experiences informs this policy development. She reiterated her interest in hearing feedback on people’s experiences of how the Department delivers its services. Later, when discussing this further, Anne stressed the importance of a person’s entitlement to benefit and to a statutory Appeal. If a person is entitled to a benefit then he/she should receive this. The service is demand led. Anne referred to the recently published Social Inclusion Monitor which provides an update on the social situation in Ireland, including the progress towards the national social target for poverty reduction. The findings refer to 2015, which is the latest data available from the CSO and Eurostat.

The **key findings** are as follows.

- 2015 saw continued improvements in poverty and living conditions. Consistent poverty among children fell from 12.7% to 11.5%. Combined poverty, the basis for the Irish contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target, fell by almost four percentage points to 33.7%. Consistent poverty was largely unchanged at 8.7%.
- Looking at the supporting indicators, basic deprivation fell by 3.5 percentage points to 25.5% and the at-risk-of-poverty rate fell to 16.9%, though this change was not statistically significant.
- The social welfare system continued to play an important role in alleviating poverty and income inequality. Social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate from 35% to 17%; a poverty reduction effect of 52%.
- Looking at life-cycle groups, the consistent poverty rate for older people was 2.7%. Among people of working-age, the unemployed and lone parents faced the highest consistent poverty risk at about three times the average.

Moving from a national focus to the EU, Anne noted that the Annual Convention on Inclusive Growth 2017, which she attended, was held in Brussels on 24 April. The Convention has a similar purpose to the Social Inclusion Forum – it brings together policymakers and civil society to discuss what the EU can do to ensure that all citizens reap the benefits of truly inclusive growth. The event focusses on improving efforts at EU level to develop long-term solutions to improve the social dimension by fighting against poverty, increasing employment and strengthening social cohesion and inclusion for all.

Each year Ireland sends a delegation to the event. The theme of this year's event was 'youth and social inclusion'. The focus was on issues such as child and youth poverty, inter-generational solidarity, social inclusion challenges of young people including young people with disabilities and in urban areas, work-life balance of young parents; and the implementation of the recently adopted European Commission's Youth Initiative.

The day was split between plenary speeches, workshops, interactive sessions to exchange ideas and best practices on how to build a Social Europe with and for young people.

Turning back to the day's event, Anne outlined the programme. Firstly there would be a presentation by the EAPN and Community Work Ireland on feedback from the regional workshops. This would be followed by a few words from the Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar, T.D. who outlined his views and vision for the social welfare systems and the importance of having sustainable and robust systems. The rest of the morning would be taken up by the workshops which would allow participants to discuss the direction that future policy responses and the national social targets should take in the new Strategy. The workshops

were organised around the theme of active inclusion, that is: inclusive labour markets; access to quality services; and adequate minimum income; with an additional workshop focusing on the national social target for poverty reduction.

The afternoon session would focus on a presentation by the conference rapporteur on a summary of the workshop outcomes. This would be followed by a panel and roundtable session that would reflect the current National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.



3.2. Feedback from Regional Workshops

In recent years Social Inclusion Division has been assisted by the European Anti-Poverty Network Ireland and Community Work Ireland in running this event. They facilitate regional workshops that are a key feature of the annual Social Inclusion Forum. These workshops give participants that are affected by the issues being discussed an opportunity to contribute to the key topics which are on the agenda for the SIF and have their voices heard.

Ann Irwin, Community Work Ireland

Ann began by stating how welcome it was that the Minister was present to hear the views of those who had been involved in the regional workshops.

She reminded the participants of the ambition in Ireland in terms of tackling poverty when the first national action plan on poverty was developed, 20 years ago. The challenge then was to put poverty at the top of the national agenda and to involve all government departments. She asked people to hold that ambition with them throughout the day.

Ann noted that, every year, EAPN and Community Work Ireland carried out regional workshops in advance of the Social Inclusion Forum. This year, workshops were held in Galway and Rialto, Dublin. A focus group on homelessness was also conducted. There were plans to conduct a further three workshops following the Social Inclusion Forum.

The workshop participants welcomed being involved at these initial stages, and were broadly positive about the idea of a new action plan on poverty and social inclusion. However, concern was raised over the idea that the ambition of previous action plans, as reflected in targets, might be scaled back. Other concerns were raised.

- There was concern over use of the term 'citizen'; while it was acknowledged that this is an important term, it is also important that the new social inclusion plan be a plan for everyone. It needs to be rights-based, acknowledging people's right to a socially-included life without poverty. The new Public Sector Duty needs to protect this.
- The importance of consultation at grassroots level and the importance of autonomous community development were highlighted.
- It was important to use the term poverty and not to shy away from it, or use the term 'social inclusion' as a means of masking poverty.
- The proportion of people living in consistent poverty (8.7%) remains high. There was concern over a perceived reduction in ambition regarding poverty targets.
- Some groups are particularly vulnerable to poverty, such as Travellers, migrants and members of the Roma community. Often excluded from large-scale survey data on poverty, the experience of poverty among these groups was described as 'invisible poverty'.
- The importance of community development was highlighted.

The table overleaf summarises key themes to arise from the regional workshops.

Table 1: Summary of themes from regional workshops

| Theme | Key issues | Illustrative quotes |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Poverty | Decent income and good quality jobs | <p>'How do we break the cycle of poverty and crime for young people? A young person gets €100 on the dole but can make multiples of that selling drugs – how are we supposed to tackle that?'</p> <p>'What people need are 'proper' jobs – not more schemes.'</p> |
| Health | Access to quality, affordable physical and mental health services | 'Every group and community is affected by mental health and suicide. Access to mental health supports are crucial' |
| Homes | Social housing, Traveller accommodation, homelessness | <p>'Our people, our children are still living in dire circumstances. Our only choice is to try to find private rented accommodation and with the levels of discrimination, that is impossible.'</p> <p>'You feel like you're on a roundabout, you can't get out of the system. There's nowhere to rent, you're not even in the running for private rented housing even with HAP because they don't want someone with "issues".'</p> |
| Community safety | Invest in community Gardaí | 'Community Gardaí should get to know the people in the community and they should be visible.' |
| Rural areas | Access to services, transport, isolation, crime | <p>'Even if there was a job – and that's a long-shot, how is someone in a rural area supposed to get to that job. Even if there was public transport available, how is someone on minimum wage supposed to afford it?'</p> <p>'Someone needs to speak for island communities. We are always forgotten. There is no access to services for any stage on the lifecycle. The island communities are disappearing.'</p> |

Some workshop participants attended the forum and made a contribution during Ann's presentation.

Áine spoke about the additional, invisible costs that arise for a family with a child who has disability, noting her family had suffered due to these costs on a daily basis.

Michael spoke about labour market participation, noting that employment was the means by which a person could get out of poverty, yet had concerns regarding aspects of the labour market, including the notion of precarious work. He also stressed the importance of social welfare and pension payments, in ensuring subgroups of the population such as older people avoid poverty.

Iback spoke of how asylum seekers were not allowed to work while waiting for the decision on their case. This caused significant poverty and hardship, including to children. The right to work, for those who are in this system for a long period of time, would enable them to use their skills and contribute to the economy.

Elizabeth spoke of the need to ensure access to affordable health services for everyone, particularly in areas where such services were currently not available. She raised the issue of mental health among Travellers, which she identified as being related to housing problems and barriers to employment.

William spoke of the stigma attached to being classed as homeless. The longer the period of time an individual is homeless, the more isolated they become. He noted how difficult it was to break out of being homeless.

Mary addressed the subject of Traveller accommodation. She noted that funding given to local authorities for Traveller accommodation had not been spent. This was despite the fact that there is not enough accommodation provided to Travellers. She

suggested that responsibility for this funding should no longer be given to local authorities. She also noted that some Travellers cannot access social welfare because they did not have an address.

Corina addressed the subject of community safety, highlighting the need for greater investment in community Gardaí. She said that rural areas were often forgotten, despite the fact that access to services is often more difficult in a rural context. She also spoke of life on island communities; problems cited included limited sailings to and from an island (Inishturk), which limited tourism opportunities; and a lack of accommodation, which limited opportunities to increase the island population. Island communities needed funding to enable them to become sustainable, rather than dependent.

Robin Hannan, EAPN

Robin noted that, at the regional workshops, participants also talked about how to make aspirations happen. Looking over the past 20 years, they talked about the policies that made a difference. Twenty years ago, a challenge was laid out for a strong change in the way we do business.

'The challenge involved in tackling poverty is a major one. It means bringing about significant change in Irish society. It requires putting poverty among the issues at the top of the national agenda. It involves the mobilisation of all sections of Irish society in building a fair society. It requires listening to and involving those who are directly affected by poverty. It means making difficult choices about priorities and policies. It challenges existing departments and agencies to develop new and more open and inclusive ways of doing things. Above all, given the deep-seated structural causes of poverty, it will require considerable

effort over a period of time. If this is to be sustained, a strategic approach is required. Thus, the development and implementation of a strategy which involves all government departments and agencies in addressing all aspects of poverty and social exclusion is of vital importance.'

Introduction to the original (1997) NAPS, signed by John Bruton

People wanted a very strong signal of commitment. In developing a new anti-poverty strategy, there were a number of challenges:

- recognising rights;
- mobilising the whole of government;
- investing serious resources in services, quality of work and income;
- ensuring all policies promote inclusion; and
- ensuring plans are adapted to deliver.

Recognising the importance of rights was essential. The Plan must be about rights and it must be a plan to resource and vindicate those rights over a planned period. These were:

- the right to an adequate income to live life with dignity;
- the right to quality employment;
- the right to participate in decisions that affect our lives;
- the right to housing, childcare, education, health and other services which allow a decent life; and
- the right to accommodation and housing.

A systematic plan was needed to create a society that leaves no one behind. People getting up early in the morning because they're homeless, lone parents, people living on halting sites without access to proper facilities – all those people needed to be at the centre of this new plan.

Workshop participants shared a concern that the culture is turning against rights, such as the rights to social welfare. A whisper culture makes people afraid to claim their rights. The recent publicity campaign against cheats was felt by a lot of people to have created fear and tension in society. People needed to know this in developing an anti-poverty strategy.

The national action plan on poverty was not just about charity. It was an all-government approach, led from the top. As was previously mentioned, the language used by the government was important. The previous government did not talk about resources. Robin noted that there is a need to invest in resources, to make things happen. There is a need to make sure every area has an impact.

Robin stressed that a plan was needed, not a reporting system, one that was about investing in social inclusion. There was a need to broaden the tax base to create a fairer tax base. Ireland should be brought up to the EU average tax take.

Ireland is also well known for developing pilot schemes and other more exploratory or preparatory work. Robin noted that a lot of work has been done in this country on exploring an adequate income – what was needed to live. But he pointed out that Ireland does not have a good reputation of investing resources to make an adequate income a reality. He suggested that this was also why Ireland does not have a good health system and that, in European terms, people on high incomes in Ireland were not paying enough tax. He stated that this was something that needed to change.

‘Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.’

Nelson Mandela

‘... it means making difficult choices about priorities and policies ...’
(NAPS 1997)

Robin stressed that poverty proofing and impact assessment was not just a tick box exercise – it was about changing attitudes. It needed to comprise a tool for policy planning and evaluation, and not just be seen as a reporting system. Poverty mattered, as much as agriculture for example. An all-government approach was needed; this should not just involve one government department or unit. If these issues were rooted in our thinking, people would not have suffered as much during the recession. There was a need to make sure poverty proofing was about planning, that it affected all of government. No policy should be considered ‘too important’ or ‘too sensitive’ to proof; for example, direct provision policy should be poverty proofed. Finally, targets needed action plans.

‘...it requires listening to those who are directly involved in poverty and their organisations...’ (NAPS 1997)

People using services should be consulted in the development of service planning and policy. One workshop participant noted, ‘Services are better if the people who are using them can participate in decisions about how they are designed and delivered’.

Michael Mackey of Galway Simon: People using services should participate in decisions about how those services are delivered. For example, three clients of Galway Simon are members of its board. The Social Inclusion Forum was a good example of how consultation could be carried out. The community sector had been devastated over last decade. People needed to be able to take control of their own lives. The feedback from regional workshops on this issue was that consultation needed to be slower and delivery faster. People needed to see results or disillusion comes in. There was a need for:

- genuine consultation at all stages of planning and delivery;
- to rebuild supports for communities to represent themselves and take control of their own lives; and
- more time for consultation, faster feedback and delivery.
-

A strategy to address poverty and social exclusion ... 'means bringing about significant change in Irish society... putting poverty among the issues at the top of the national agenda' (NAPS 1997).

Ann Irwin: Concluding

Ann noted that we face challenges as the new national action plan on poverty is prepared. Who were in poverty in 2008 and who were still in poverty now? Who needed new interventions to help them? That was the challenge facing us today.

3.3 Address by Minister for Social Protection, Leo Varadkar TD

“Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here today and to have the opportunity to address this 13th gathering of the Social Inclusion Forum.

I know that this event provides a useful and welcome forum to exchange views and ideas on the social progress in Ireland. The Forum gives people who are directly affected by poverty and social exclusion, and you who work with them, a voice in the development of policy, and in the ways that policies are implemented.

I believe the effectiveness of the Forum is very much related to your active and constructive participation. I value this.

I am proud of my Department’s ongoing commitment to engage and consult with you through a range of fora like our meetings with the Community and Voluntary Pillar, the Disability Consultative Forum, and the Pre-Budget Forum. At the outset, therefore, I want to thank you sincerely for attending today and for sharing your views and experiences. I am also grateful to the people who attended the regional workshops organised by the EAPN Ireland and Community Work Ireland.

I listened with interest to the feedback from Robin and Ann and all the other speakers. It highlights the challenges we continue to face in tackling poverty and the need for broad short and long-term policy responses.

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

Today’s event focuses on the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017 – our cross-government strategy for tackling poverty and

social exclusion. The Plan identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to reduce consistent poverty. It covered a decade, from 2007 to 2017, of unprecedented economic and social change, and the measures in the Plan served to cushion the impact of the very deep recession that we experienced during this time.

This year, my Department is reviewing the Plan and associated national social targets, to inform the development of the new Strategy. The discussions today will give you an opportunity to express your views on this.

Social Inclusion Monitor

The monitoring and implementation structures under the National Action Plan are essential for reporting on and shaping policy. The Social Inclusion Forum is the main structure we rely on to hear your voice on how policies are being implemented and learn from your experience. This is particularly important as we aim to ensure that the recovery continues and that everyone benefits from it.

I welcome the improvement in living conditions, income inequality and poverty outlined in the Social Inclusion Monitor for 2015, published earlier this week. Incomes increased by 6.2% in 2015 mainly due to rising employment.

Ireland was also more equal in terms of the income distribution than at any time this decade. Basic deprivation fell for the second year running, 13,000 children were lifted out of consistent poverty and the social protection system continued to play a strong role in reducing poverty and income inequality.

I am pleased that the Monitor is available to you to inform your discussions on the new Plan and aligned national social targets.

It makes sense to reflect now on the progress to date on the targets, high level goals and supporting policy actions, to ensure the future policy direction and ambition is as comprehensive and realistic as possible.

Future Social Inclusion Strategies

The new Strategy will reflect the social and economic challenges now facing us. These are greatly changed since the National Action Plan was drawn up in 2007.

In developing future strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion we need to consider what are the best short and long-term policy responses. Events such as today's are hugely important; they provide an opportunity for us all to discuss these challenges and policy choices.

An open and frank discussion can help us develop a shared understanding of the issues facing all groups in society. This can only improve policy making and service delivery.

As we know poverty is multidimensional, requiring a whole-of-government response. Income support is only one aspect and the other active inclusion components – inclusive labour markets, appropriate active labour market policies and access to quality services – are equally important.

The challenge currently facing us is getting the right balance across these three areas.

Adequate Minimum Income

As you know social transfers play a pivotal role in alleviating poverty and inequality, cushioning people from the worst effects of unexpected reductions in income due to unemployment, illness or disability.

Using Eurostat data, social transfers reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate from 36% to 16%, resulting in a poverty reduction effect of 55%.

This compares to an EU average of 33.5%.

Ireland was the best performing EU member state in reducing poverty and income inequality, with Ireland's income inequality reduction effect twice the EU average.

The recovery has enabled the Government to introduce a range of welfare improvements from 2016 onwards. My approach was to ensure that the level of income support for all was improved while at the same time enhancing the social protection system through a wide range of targeted improvements.

Measures introduced include increases in core weekly rates for pensioners and working-age adults, income disregards for lone parents, and rent limits for housing support payments.

From September next, a new €500 annual Cost of Education Allowance for Back to Education Allowance participants with children will help parents, including lone parents, to return to education.

In recent budgets, I have also set out to make work pay through reforms to the PRSI system, including a new deal for the self-employed and a number of targeted measures to assist lone parents, farmers and school children.

Inclusive Labour Markets – Pathways to Work 2020

Growing employment and providing access to the labour market is important for tackling poverty, particularly in welfare-dependent households.

As you know our focus in recent times has been on reforming the activation approach, including the introduction of Intreo to provide integrated employment services and income supports and more recently, JobPath.

The Pathways to Work Strategy focuses on ensuring jobseekers can access good quality work, training and education opportunities. It continues to prioritise the activation of people who are long-term and young unemployed, with supports provided through the network of Intreo offices.

In the medium term, the objective is to expand services and supports to people who, although not classified as unemployed, have the potential and the desire to play a more active role in the labour force.

I am confident that the package of activation measures that we have in place will continue to produce results and help people back to work. The views you expressed at today's workshops will inform our thinking on this issue.

Access to Quality Services

Recent budgets have been forward looking, allocating limited resources in a prudent way, to help ensure that everyone benefits from the recovery.

The focus of these budgets has also been on the provision of services rather than simply on income supports.

For instance, Budget 2017 included the introduction of measures such as the Single Affordable Childcare Scheme, the extension of medical cards and the school meals scheme.

Conclusion

In closing I would again like to thank you sincerely for attending the Forum and for sharing your views and experiences.

I would particularly like to acknowledge the European Anti-Poverty Network and Community Work Ireland for their support and expertise in organising this and related regional workshops.

The report of today's Forum – which will be presented formally to Government, and circulated to all government departments, to various stakeholders and to the public generally – is a major outcome of the process.

It is designed to ensure that the insights, conclusions and recommendations of the Forum are fed into the policymaking process and are available to all stakeholders. I look forward to reading this report in due course and reflecting on it when developing the new Action Plan for Social Inclusion.”

SECTION 4

Forum Workshops

SECTION 4

Forum workshops

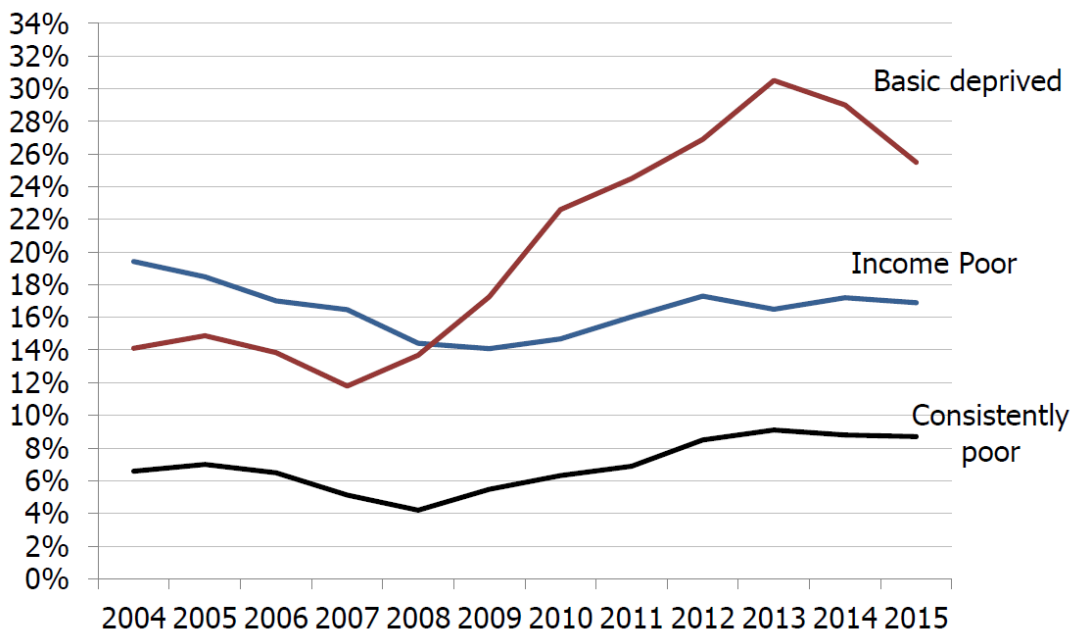
4.1 Workshop 1: Revision of the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction

Facilitator: Frances Byrne, Early Childhood Ireland

Dorothy Watson, ESRI

The focus of this presentation was on the current national social target for poverty reduction and how poverty in Ireland has changed over time. The income measurement for poverty (less than 60% of middle income) has remained stable over recent years. During the recession, incomes fell so the rate of poverty did not increase. The second poverty measure is based on living standards: ability to afford items such as food, clothes, heating, a basic social life, gifts and furniture. A basic level of deprivation is measured if a household/individual cannot afford two or more items. This measure increased during recession, before falling again. This shows the need for two poverty measures. Where an individual/household is found poor in both measurements, this indicates consistent poverty. The rate of consistent poverty did not increase as much as deprivation levels during the recession but following the recession, it did not fall as much as deprivation did.

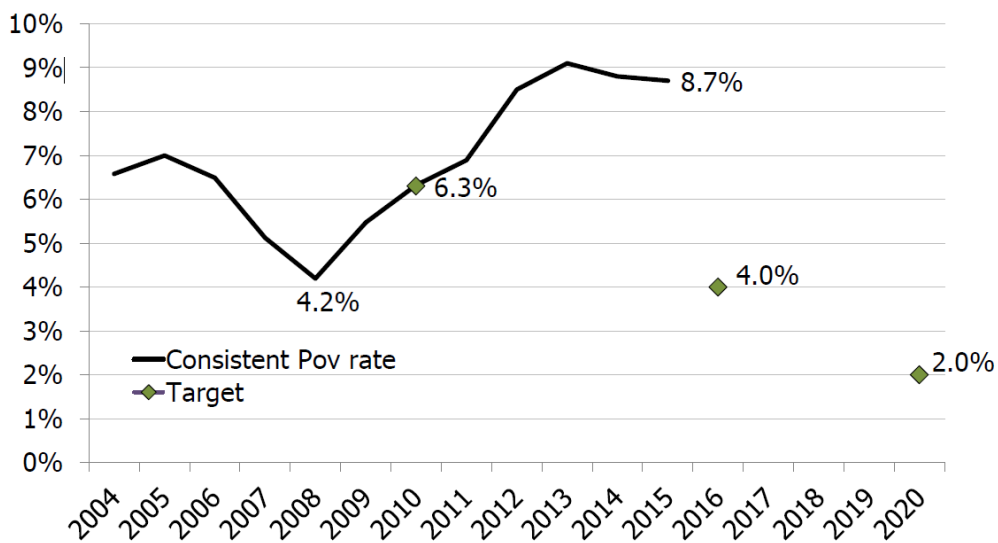
Figure 1: Poverty and deprivation trends



Current Poverty Reduction Targets

The national social target for poverty reduction is based on consistent poverty. The headline target was to reduce consistent poverty levels from 6.3% in 2010 to 4% by 2016 and 2% or less by 2020.

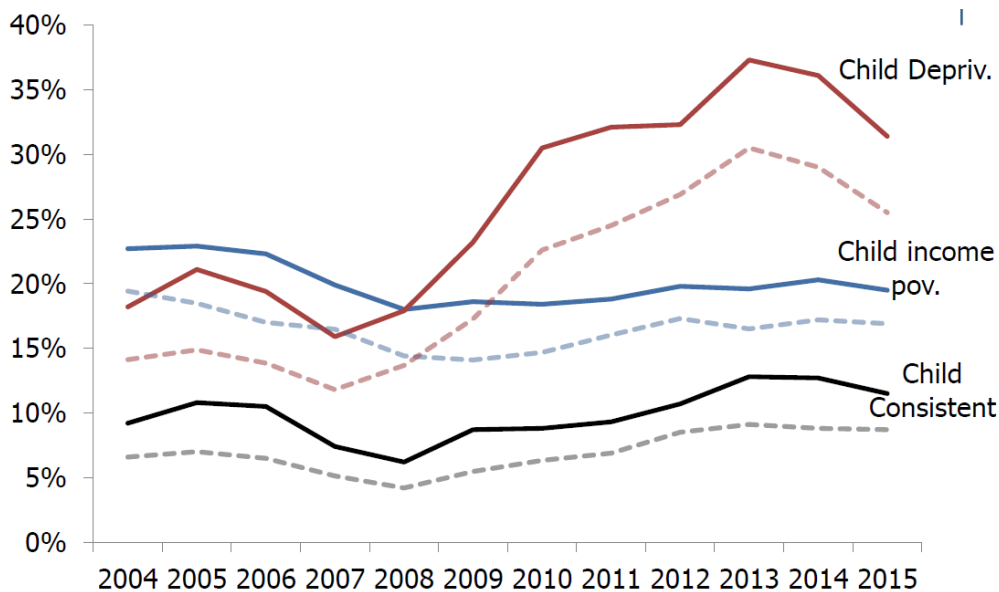
Figure 2: Headline target – reducing consistent poverty



Consistent poverty fell to its lowest level in 2008, after which it began to increase. The current level – of 8.7% – has increased instead of reducing towards the target level.

Another target focused on children, aiming to reduce by 70,000 the number of children in consistent poverty by 2020. The last target was to reduce ‘combined poverty’ (at-risk-of poverty or basic deprivation) by at least 200,000 between 2010 and 2020, which would represent Ireland’s contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target. Rates of poverty measurements have been higher for children than for adults in recent years. The rate of child consistent poverty was falling up to the recession, when it started to rise again. It has only just begun to start coming down.

Figure 3: Child poverty compared to total poverty

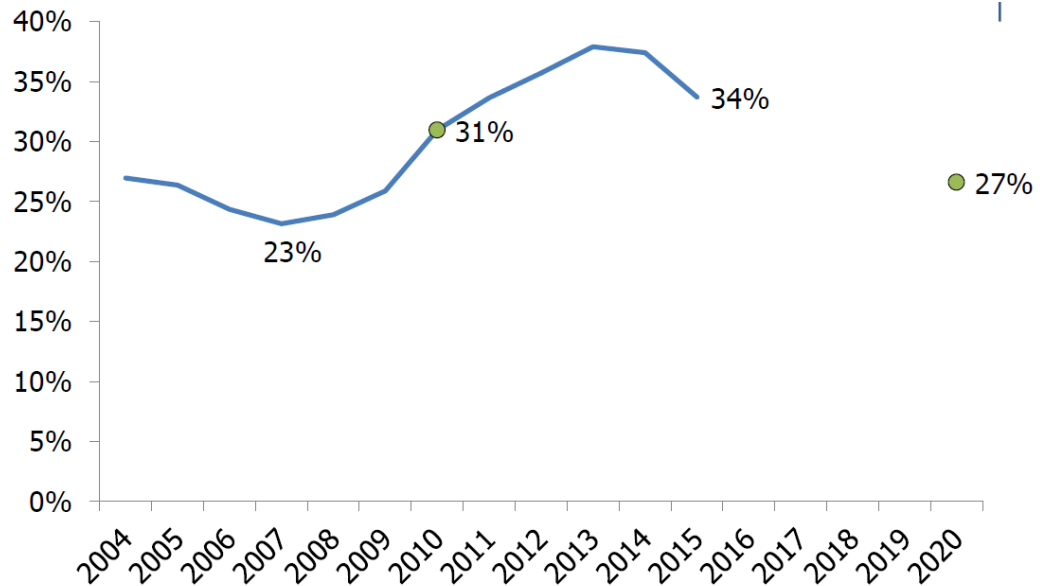


Note: Solid line shows child poverty; dashed line shows total poverty.

In order to achieve the target of lifting over 70,000 children (aged 0–17 years) out of consistent poverty by 2020, we need it to fall to 3.2% by that year – a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level of 9.3%.

The 'combined poverty' rate fell during the economic boom, rose in the recession, and has started to come down slightly in recent years. However, in order to meet the target, it needs to fall from 34% to 27%.

Figure 4: Combined poverty trends and target



Questions for Consideration

Poverty data are derived from household census and survey data: the population living in private households. This means certain small but vulnerable groups of the population are excluded, such as asylum seekers and Travellers, groups that can be particularly disadvantaged. Do we need a separate target for them?

When there is little chance of meeting a target, how do we respond? Do we:

- Change the target to something more realistic?
- Investigate why targets were not met?
- Review our priorities, emphasising improvements for the most vulnerable?
-

Paul Ginnell, EAPN Ireland

Having a poverty target, as well as sub-targets, is important for a number of reasons. A poverty target brings attention and focus to poverty as an unacceptable and violation of human right. A poverty target is also an ambitious driver of policy across all policy areas, requiring an all-government strategy to achieve it. This means:

- allocation of resources;
- monitoring and revision of plans that are not working; and
- proofing and impact assessment at both design and planning stage.

A poverty target also ensures accountability, and should involve the participation of those experiencing poverty.

It is important that a poverty target reflects the complex nature of poverty, that it captures the fact that poverty is related to access to an adequate income, quality services and decent work. Poverty is linked to inequality, discrimination, economic policy (including taxation), redistribution and investment

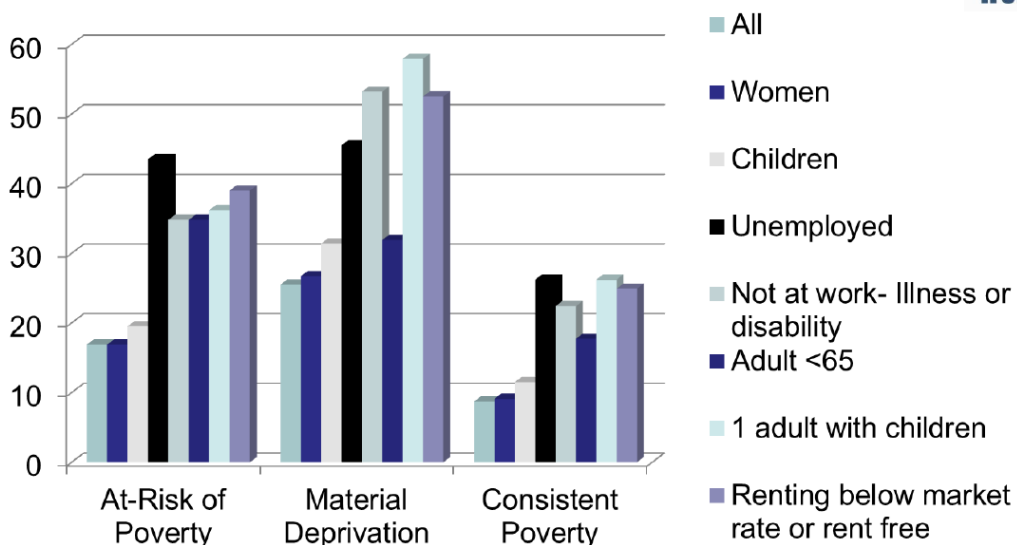




These issues should also be reflected in who is involved in relevant policy design and implementation.

The new target should reflect the fact that the risk of poverty varies across different groups, depending on their social, economic and cultural background, as well as their age and gender. For example, unemployed people, those not at work due to illness or disability and those aged over 65 years are at greater risk of poverty than other groups, and children face a higher rate of material deprivation and consistent poverty when compared to other groups.

Figure 5: Rates of poverty, by groups



In addition, many vulnerable groups are not covered by official statistics, such as Travellers, some migrants, and people who are homeless.

A revision of the target should:

- be an ambitious, high-level target(s) to achieve type of society we want;
- address sub-targets for high-risk groups – be a target that leaves no-one behind; and
- capture different dimensions of poverty by using different indicators of poverty.

At-risk-of poverty captures income inequality. Material deprivation captures people’s ability to afford key essential items and to participate in society. Consistent poverty captures those who are both at risk of poverty and experiencing material deprivation – a deeper level of poverty.

It is important that there is good data on the experience of poverty, both quantitative and qualitative.

It is essential that the new integrated national action plan on poverty should be a driver of policy. Revising the current targets should not equate with reducing current ambition. The current targets were most recently reviewed in 2012, at the height of the economic crisis. Now, despite challenges, the country is enjoying an upturn in the economy. It is not good enough to leave people in poverty. The focus must be on effective policy implementation.

Discussion

Social Targets for the New National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

There was an element of confusion about what was meant by *National Social Target* as a term, and not about the actual construct. It was explained as reaching the 2% consistent poverty target by 2020. The consensus was that it was important to retain the ambitious target for the message this conveyed: that this is an important policy issue; any diminution of the goal might represent a lack of political will. The difficulty may not be with the target, but with lack of sufficient effort being put into achieving it. Some even stated a preference for the original *NAPinclusion* target of eliminating poverty. But others countered with the argument that the target also needs to be realistic and not over-ambitious, as otherwise it could lose traction. The group felt the value of a target is that it keeps policyholders accountable. There was agreement that the revised target needs to strike the right balance between ambition and realism, and between flexibility and surety, so that whatever is agreed is sustainable as well as achievable. The point was made that the extent to which a target is realistic may change over time, but maintaining a fixed target still focuses effort and aligns actions to achieve it. Ultimately, the group conceded that the overall target of 2% should be retained and supporting actions strengthened to achieve this.

Improving the Situation for Vulnerable Groups

The group were loath to single out particular social groups as meriting a specific target. An open question was then raised: how otherwise are we going to find out the reality of peoples' lived experience? Expanding on the question of whether there should be sub-targets for sub-groups, the point was made that if society does not recognise that certain groups are more vulnerable than others, how then can complex social issues be addressed? If sub-groups are not individually named as meriting a specific target then they risk not being prioritised in the policy response. The group proposed setting specific targets with aligned interventions for children, young single men, lone parents, Travellers, migrants, people with disabilities among the existing lifecycle groups named in *NAPinclusion*.

The discussion then focused on the limitations of relying on the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) data to set sub-targets. As it was widely accepted that a number of disadvantaged groups are excluded from this household survey – for example, Travellers and asylum seekers in direct provision – the question was raised as to whether sub-targets for these groups should remain based on this data source. The group advocated for increasing the use of administrative data and more data linkages, to make the data more inclusive. This could in time include integration of data collated from funded programmes. The group expressed concern about a tendency to over-rely on quantitative data to typify the living conditions of the more vulnerable households. To have a better understanding of the lived experience of vulnerable groups, these data need to be augmented by findings from qualitative research. Another concern was the lack of official funding directed at qualitative research in this area. The reintroduction of scholarships and bursaries to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to engage in

qualitative research might be considered. Another proposal was that statisticians and policy officers might consider working through NGOs groups to collate the data needed to address existing gaps in information about the living conditions of certain social groups, such as Travellers and migrants.

Another point made about data collection was the need to develop survey questions reflecting the specific perspectives of distinct sub-groups within a household, to capture the child or gender dimension, for example.

A word of caution was raised about the prospect of having too many sub-targets, resulting in competing ambitions among sub-groups. The need for representatives of vulnerable groups to work together as a community to achieve a total improvement in living standards was stressed as being the overriding goal.

Supporting Indicators for in Monitoring the National Social Targets

The group felt there was merit in elevating some of the existing contextual indicators to the level of sub-targets. Indicators like the food poverty rate, fuel poverty and the inability to meet unexpected expenses were identified as monitoring a necessary poverty dimension, currently invisible at the national level. There was strong support for the identification of new supporting indicators that could address current gaps in knowledge about people who cannot access services, in particular as this is an important tenet of the active inclusion approach. The feasibility of using alternative contextual poverty indicators, such as those developed by projects to monitor service use by the 'invisible poor' could be explored further. These may provide scope for further

development of contextual poverty indicators capable of closing current information gaps among specific cohorts.

The monitoring and reporting of unused budget allocations provided for specific vulnerable groups might be a useful contextual indicator to provide information on access to services. The annual budget allocation provided for Traveller accommodation was cited as an example of a possible indicator for monitoring access to services. Regular monitoring and reporting of underspending on budget provisions for specific vulnerable group's merits further consideration as this may reflect access issues. It would also serve to improve the accountability of budget holders in reporting on actions taken to support social inclusion by providing improved access to services.

4.2 Workshop 2: Inclusive Labour Markets – Pathways to Work 2020

Facilitator: Eilís Ní Chaithnía, National Women’s Council of Ireland

Bríd O’Brien, INOU

Six strands are identified in the policy document, *Pathways to Work 2016–2020*:

- enhanced engagement with unemployed people of working age (with 15 actions identified);
- increase the employment focus of activation programmes and opportunities (with 10 actions identified);
- making work pay – incentivise the take-up of opportunities (with 12 actions identified);
- incentivising employers to offer jobs and opportunities to unemployed people (with 18 actions identified);
- build organisational capability to deliver enhanced services to people who are unemployed (with 16 actions identified); and
- building workforce skills (with 15 actions identified).

Concern was raised as to whether or not these six strands are sufficient. Specifically, it was noted that it was not clear:

- how they will deliver an inclusive labour market; or
- how the Department for Social Protection will engage with people on whom it does not impose conditionality.

Pathways to Work focuses on changing from ‘activation in a time of recession’ to ‘activation for a recovery’. It has two main objectives – to continue and consolidate the progress made to date with an initial focus on working with unemployed jobseekers, in particular people who are long-term unemployed; and to extend the approach of labour market activation to other people who, although not classified as unemployed

jobseekers, have the potential and the desire to play an active role in the labour force.

One section is entitled, 'Expanding scope and coverage – active inclusion'. Here it states that this policy:

'includes specific actions to increase labour market participation and employment progression of people who are not currently active in the labour market and to apply the concept of active inclusion as a guiding principle – particularly in the period from 2018 to 2020. (Pathways to Work, p. 18)

What should 'active inclusion' mean? In 2008, the European Commission adopted a Recommendation on the active inclusion of people most excluded from the labour market. This recommendation sought to promote a comprehensive strategy based on the integration of three key elements: adequate income support; inclusive labour markets; and access to quality services.

To that end, employment services must:

- be a person-centred service for everyone of working age;
- be pro-active and supportive;
- ensure the full and pro-active provision of information;
- ensure flexibility in the system to facilitate participation;
- deliver good support services with a particular focus on re-skilling, provision of childcare and accessible transport;
- ensure integrated provision within and across relevant government departments, agencies and organisations on the ground;
- identify clear pathways from activation programmes out into the wider labour market;

- commit to and deliver on an inclusive service and identify how the requirements of Public Sector Duty will be met; and
- be provided with the proper resources to deliver on such a service.

‘Positive duty’ was introduced in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, and it should have an important role to play in addressing discrimination and exclusion from the labour market.

According to Section 42 (1) of the IHREC Act:

A public body shall, in the performance of its functions, have regard to the need to: eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services; and protect the human rights of its members, staff and the persons to whom it provides services.

Kasey Treadwell Shine, Department of Social Protection

This presentation looked at why inclusive labour markets matter and defining an inclusive labour market. It then explored the Pathways to Work (PtW) programme in relation to its role in inclusive labour markets; policy responses; supporting actions; and policy and practice developments.

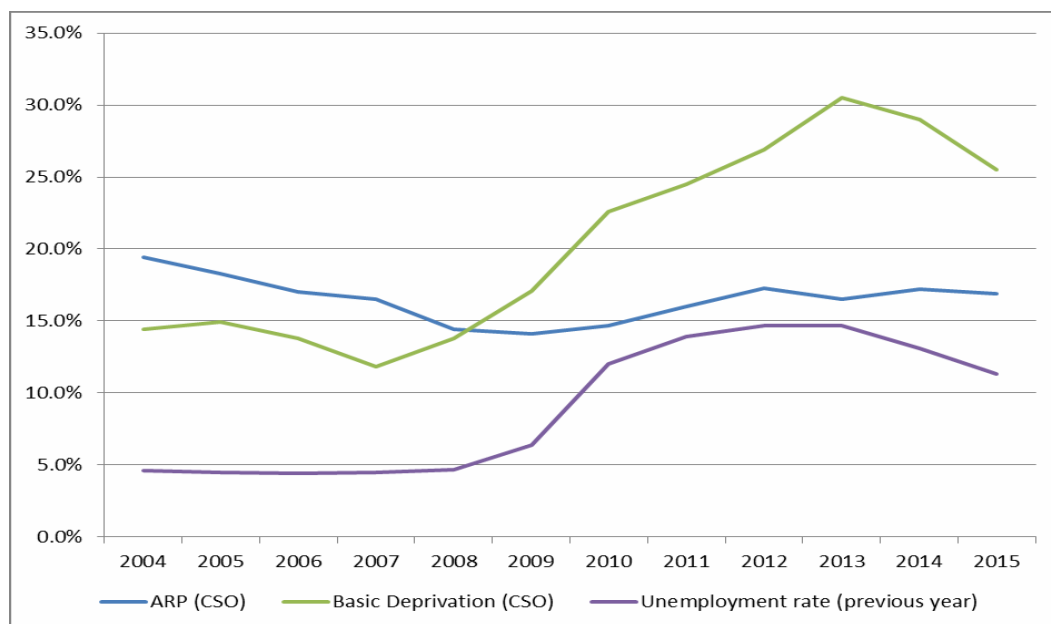
Why Inclusive Labour Markets Matter

Employment is a route out of poverty; high employment (low unemployment) contributes to poverty reduction. Macro-policies create conditions for economic growth and therefore for generating high unemployment, while activation policies and programmes – where they have a positive impact on employment – are important individually-targeted measures to facilitate people back into employment. The principle of ‘active inclusion’, and its three pillars of adequate income

supports, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services, links activation, employment and poverty reduction (and more broadly, social inclusion).

Poverty (and particularly deprivation) trends follow unemployment trends, as illustrated in the figure below, which shows how the rise in unemployment between 2008 and 2013 was accompanied by a rise in relative poverty and a much sharper rise in basic deprivation.

Figure 6: Poverty levels, 2004–2015



What is an Inclusive Labour Market?

The EU social partners’ framework (EU1005011) defines an inclusive labour market as:

A labour market that allows and encourages all people of working age to participate in paid work and provides a framework for their development.]

Achieving this type of labour market can be difficult. In order to ensure that obstacles can be identified and overcome, action is required from:

- workers;

- employers and their representatives; and
- other stakeholders, including public authorities, at all levels.

Role of Pathways to Work in Inclusive Labour Markets

Macro-policies and joined up Government strategies create the conditions for inclusive labour markets. Pathways to Work then plays a role in supporting inclusive labour markets, by focusing on getting unemployed or currently inactive working age adults who want to work, into quality and sustainable employment.

Objectives of Pathways to Work

Successive Pathways to Work strategies have focused, first, on the newly unemployed (2012); then the long-term unemployed (2015) and youth unemployed (through the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, 2014). Pathways to Work 2016-2020 continues to focus on these groups. In addition, and particularly in the latter half of the period, it also considers actions to facilitate currently inactive working age adults, with a capacity and desire to work, into employment.

Supporting Actions of Pathways to Work

Pathways to Work, as a Government strategy, includes additional actions to support target groups in facilitating a return to employment:

- to encourage employers to hire people from PtW target groups;
- to address issues of financial disincentives, employment conditions and low paid work;
- to facilitate access to key services (as reflected in other national strategy objectives);
- to facilitate local coordination and protocols;

- to consolidate reforms, build inter-institutional capacity, and develop the evidence base to ensure activation programmes and processes are effective; and
- to ensure education, training and upskilling measures are labour-market relevant

Policy and Practice Developments

In 2016, of the 86 actions listed in PtW 2016–2020, 42% were completed or completed and ongoing in 2016. These included: the promotion of Intreo services for voluntary engagers and those with a disability; the establishment of regional skills fora; the establishment of protocols between the Department of Social Protection and other employment services providers; and the establishment of new apprenticeships.

Discussion

Consulting with Service Users

The importance of continuing a consultation process with service users was stressed, as well as developing a person-centred approach, in determining matters such as the level of in-work support people need, and how it should be delivered. For example, it was noted that Travellers and people with literacy difficulties can ‘fall through the tracks’; staff should be trained to offer support in completing a form, if needed. Some participants perceived a problem regarding JobPath referrals – that there is a disconnect between central policy and what is happening locally. One participant described being forced to attend a course that he was qualified to teach himself, at a time when he was completing a thesis. His view was that such courses are applied as ‘punishment’ for those not looking for work, rather than being used as a means of increasing skills and helping people to get back to work. It was noted from a resources perspective, it is in the State’s interests to engage with

service users in a meaningful way, to ensure that Pathways to Work provides relevant, person-centred support in re-entering the workplace. The individual should therefore have a voice in identifying the training supports best suited to their situation. (In response to this point, it was noted that case management training for case officers is ongoing in employment services throughout the country.)

Interagency Working

Participants spoke of the value of intra- and inter- departmental coordination within departments, with agencies and across departments. This approach would be conducive to a better experience for service users and would reduce the likelihood of people being referred to inappropriate courses (see above). It would also address the problem of people being sent on a course shortly before they are due to start a new job. One participant noted that one of their clients was told by Department of Social Protection that they should stop wasting time on courses. There needs to be protocols around employer engagement and greater interaction with local employment services to avoid conflicting messages and inappropriate use of courses.

End Privatisation of Social Protection Services

Participants in this workshop agreed that the commissioning and privatisation of the Department of Social Protection services, such as Job Path, should end. It was felt all such services should be provided by public agencies. The next Pathways to Work policy should not promote the tendering out of services such as Job Path to private bodies, and should focus on effective investment of resources.

Implementing the Public Sector Duty

There should be a commitment from top levels of government to implementing the Public Sector Duty (Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014). Instead of responding to problems that arise, this would be a way of proactively countering discrimination – active anticipation rather than reaction to an existing issue. One participant mentioned a local programme, in County Longford, to train public sector bodies about the Public Sector Duty. A difficulty occurs in achieving buy-in from publicly funded bodies. This must come from the top, in order to ensure people at local level engage. The Public Sector Duty must be driven from the very top.

Public Perception of the Department for Social Protection

On this point, participants pointed to perceived damage caused to public perception of the Department of Social Protection by the recent campaign on social welfare fraud. It was noted that events such as this can negatively affect people's trust in the Department. This was linked to the earlier point of the need to improve interaction between Intreo office staff and clients. People need to be empowered before they seek support and public perception of the Department plays an important role in this. Trust can also be lost when service users find themselves up against a difficult referral process, which was likened to putting someone 'in a spider's web'.

4.3 Workshop 3: Access to Quality Services

Facilitator: Martin Collins, Pavee Point

Helen Johnston, NESC

Active inclusion means an adequate minimum income, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services. Of the 14 goals across four themes laid out in the updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, 10 address access to quality services. These 10 goals concern people across the life cycle (children, people of working age and older people), as well as communities.

Table 2: NAPSI goals by category

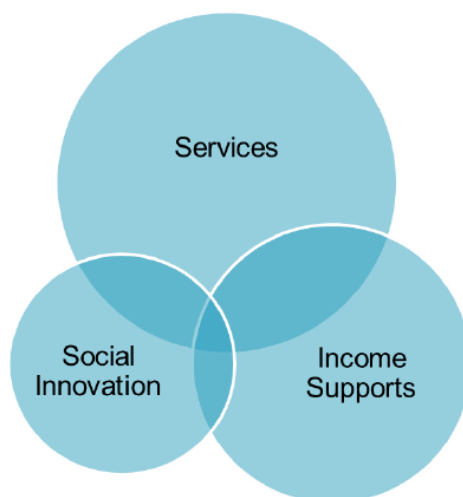
| Group | Goals |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Children | Early childhood care and education Literacy and numeracy Participation in education |
| People of working age | Labour market activation Youth employment Employment of people with disabilities |
| Older people | Community care |
| Communities | Social housing Primary healthcare Migrant integration |

The National Economic and Social Council document, *The Developmental Welfare State*, published in 2005, also emphasised the importance of services and, critically, social innovation.

Table 3: The Developmental Welfare State, 2005

| Feature | Detail |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Services | Education, health, childcare, eldercare, housing, transport, employment services. |
| Income supports | Progressive child income supports, transfers for participation, minimum pension guarantee, capped tax expenditures. |
| Social innovation | Novel approaches, community projects, new needs, |

| outcome-focused, evaluation and mainstreaming.



In 2014, NESC published its study, *Jobless households: An exploration of the issues*. In this study, it was proposed that NESC would examine the role of services in meeting the needs of jobless households. This was followed up by a research project that involved an in-depth qualitative study in a disadvantaged suburb of Dublin into how the various agencies and relevant organisations were responding to the needs of jobless households. The key issues emerging were:

- transitioning from welfare to work;
- jobs;
- supportive services; and
- institutional connections.

Examples of supportive services include literacy, language, career guidance, educational and training courses, apprenticeships, childcare, housing, health, transport, community services and IT.

These findings highlight important factors for consideration in the development of a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion.

- There is a need to re-emphasise the importance of access to quality services, underpinned by rights and standards.

- What would the delivery of ‘tailored services’ look like? For example, would it entail an affordable childcare scheme, or a housing assistance payment?
- Where and how would institutional connections occur?
 - At departmental level (like the Healthy Ireland initiative)?
 - At local authority level (like LCDC, CYPSC)?
 - At community level (like RAPID)?

In the interface between national and local levels, there is a need for balance between autonomy and accountability. There needs to be a means of capturing learning, for example in relation to initiatives that work.

John-Mark McCafferty, Threshold

The focus of this presentation was on rented housing in Ireland. Since 2014, the national housing charity Threshold has provided a free telephone helpline for families and individuals at risk of homelessness. It has also worked to assist a broad range of renters to engage with their landlord to help secure their homes.

An important element of the service, in certain areas, is to intervene in cases where families in receipt of Rent Supplement are in danger of losing their homes. As part of *Rebuilding Ireland: An action plan on housing and homelessness*, the Tenancy Protection Service is now national, and the public awareness campaign was launched on 23 May by Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, Simon Coveney.

There are five pillars in *Rebuilding Ireland*: ‘address homelessness’, ‘accelerate social housing’, ‘build more homes’, ‘improve the rental

sector’ and ‘utilise existing housing’. Whether or not the pillar on improving the rental sector will be successfully implemented depends on the implementation of the other four pillars, particularly pillar two – ‘accelerate social housing’.

One-third of the rental market is supported by State subsidies; the State is in the business of intervening in the rental market in Ireland. One-fifth of the population is now living in the private rented sector.

Two positive developments regarding the rental market are the recently introduced rent certainty measures and the Tyrrelstown amendment, legislation that aims to protect tenants from eviction when ownership of medium-sized and large-scale developments is sold in bulk.

However, gaps in policy and issues of concern remain.

- The deposit protection scheme has yet to be implemented.
- The action plan does not contain any stipulation regarding minimum levels of thermal efficiency under which rental housing cannot be let.
- There has been a sharp increase in invalid notices for tenancy terminations.
- Tenants are getting caught between their landlord and the receiver in the case of property repossessions/receiverships.
- There is a need for policies to support long-term tenancies.
- There is a need for a public awareness campaign to explain the Rent Pressure Zones and homeless prevention measures such as the Tenancy Protection Service.
- The Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) does not provide any security of tenures and administrative burdens are leading to financial difficulties for families. ‘Topping-up’ by the tenant has implications for the remainder of the household budget. Some

local authorities are taking people, who enter a HAP tenancy, off the social housing list.

The private rented sector is here to stay; it needs to stop being viewed as a 'purgatory'. More needs to be done to improve the situation for tenants, as set out above, while ensuring a viable sector for landlords.

The building and acquisition of social housing is key to solving the housing crisis. However, only a small number of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs)/Housing Associations can deliver on this scale. Social housing needs to be delivered at pace and at scale, including the direct provision of social housing by local authorities or other statutory agencies.

Discussion

Accommodation

Much of the discussion focused on the housing crisis. Participants agreed that social housing needs to be delivered as per the presenters point – at a scale and at pace. Local authorities have an important role to play in building social housing; in this context, more local authority participation at events like the Social Inclusion Forum would be welcomed. There was a suggestion that Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000 has led to some local authorities dropping their social housing build.

One participant felt that the Government should cut the VAT due on building materials and that, in the case of young people wishing to purchase their own homes, banking institutions should take into account the track record of individuals paying rent. Government also needs to deal with issues in the private rented accommodation sector as matter of

urgency. Despite recent measures introduced by the Government, rents are too high, rent hikes are common and tenants are often required to make 'top-up' payments to landlords. (Regarding existing tenant rights, it was suggested that more needs to be done in terms of raising awareness among tenants of their rights.)

The question was posed as to whether there might be a role for the voluntary and co-operative housing sector in the mortgage-to-rent scheme or that kind of model.

The need for a greater focus on specific groups was noted.

- Travellers are still living in dreadful circumstances without access to basic services such as electricity and running water.
- Within the provision of social housing, there needs to be a focus on the specific needs of people with disabilities.
- The deepening of the homeless crisis at the rate currently seen in Ireland has at its root a broken housing system.
- Younger people are not allowed to go on housing waiting lists; in the context of the current housing crisis, situations are arising whereby two or even three generations of one family are living in the same house. This can put a strain on family relationships.

Groups Facing Additional Barriers to Quality Services

For people who are deaf, communication presents a major barrier across all services, such as healthcare and housing. It is not affordable or practical to expect a deaf person to provide their own interpreter for accessing every service they might require.

People living in rural areas have access to a limited transport infrastructure, making it difficult for people to access services. In

particular, island communities face issues as a result of generally fewer services such as education and housing. In this context, it was noted that while national strategies and frameworks are essential, responses must also include developing a capacity to provide tailored services that respond to people's needs and circumstances at a local level. On a related point, the important work of community organisations, in terms of capacity building and pre-development, was highlighted. Cuts to the community sector have impacted negatively on both services and supports to people on the ground. The cohesion and alignment processes at local level have left many communities feeling disempowered.

Treating People with Dignity

Being treated with dignity should be the cornerstone of any engagement with public services, even in the event that it transpires that you are not entitled to a particular service. In the context of this point, particular mention was made of the Welfare Cheats Cheat Us All public awareness scheme run by the Department of Social Protection. There was a general consensus that people and communities who are vulnerable and excluded should not be made feel demonised.

Policy Level

A number of points were made regarding policy development.

Proofing Policy: There is a clear need for proofing of policy documents at all levels, from both human rights and equality perspective and a poverty perspective.

Public Sector Duty: Any new strategy needs to be informed by the Public Sector Duty that imposes a positive duty on public sector bodies to have

regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights. This code of conduct should also apply to private sector bodies employed by the State to deliver services on its behalf.

Reducing Child Poverty: From a Barnardos perspective, to have a meaningful impact on child poverty, priorities are in the areas of education, health, childcare and family support. A cross-government approach is in place through the Better Outcome Brighter Futures Framework (BOBF), though some departments engage more than others.

Implementing Existing Policy: There is a need for an integrated, multi-dimensional, cross-departmental response to implement what is already there in policy terms. In this regard, there is a need for sustainable funding - some really good local initiatives have ceased due to time limited funding e.g. Area based Childhood Initiative.

Privatisation of Services: Concern over social inclusion services being privatised.

4.4 Workshop 4: Adequate Minimum Income

Facilitator: Camille Loftus, socio-economic consultant

[Bernadette MacMahon](#), Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice

Minimum essential standard of living

Project team: Dr Bernadette MacMahon DC (director), Robert Thornton (research associate) and Noreen Moloney (researcher).

'Will no one show the policy and decision makers what it is like to live on social welfare or the minimum wage?'

'Will no one show them what people need in order to have a basic, decent and dignified standard of living?'

A minimum income is based on the cost of a **minimum essential standard of living (MESL)**. VPSJ's work in this area originated in a 1999 study, *One Long Struggle*, which had two reoccurring themes:

- Poverty is experienced as both material and social deprivation; there is a lack of awareness of the importance of social inclusion.
- An ad hoc approach is taken to rates for social welfare payments and the national minimum wage, which depend on statistical and political factors. There is no apparent awareness of the need to evaluate buying power, or for evidence-based policy.

On this basis, the VPSJ identified a need to explore new approaches to understanding and communicating the impact of an inadequate income on the daily life of people, many of whom live in poverty.

[Minimum Essential Standard of Living](#)

A minimum essential standard of living meets an individual's or household's physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum but

socially acceptable level. It is a standard based on needs and not on wants. It is a standard below which no one should be expected to live.

Minimum Expenditure

Minimum expenditure is that required to meet the cost of the goods, services and activities that allow for an MESL. Detailed baskets of goods and services (comprising over 2,000 items) define minimum needs for households to live at a socially acceptable level.

There are 16 budget areas, as presented below.



A consensual budget standards methodology was used to establish the goods, services and activities necessary for a minimum essential standard of living. This involved extensive and detailed work with focus groups and the input of experts (such as on nutrition and household energy). A negotiated consensus was reached on what people believe is essential for an acceptable minimum standard of living.

Minimum Income

A minimum income is that required to meet expenditure. An income below the expenditure threshold means that individuals and households must forego goods, services and activities accepted as a minimum norm for participation in Irish society.

Minimum Income Standard

A minimum income standard is the gross income a household needs in order to afford a minimum standard of living. It takes account of the potential tax liability and social welfare entitlements of the household in question. Identifying a minimum income standard is an iterative process that involves assessing the adequacy of net household income on the basis of incremental increases in gross salary.

There is a growing divergence between measuring poverty using the 60% average disposable income and the cost of MESL. A number of people whose income reaches the 60% level still cannot afford a MESL. The table below presents MESL costs (in 2016) for a two-parent, two-child (3 and 6 years) household. The following table presents social welfare income for the same household type, and shows that the social welfare income for such a family is inadequate, when compared with the MESL costs, with a deficit of €33.41.

Table 4: MESL costs and weekly rate, 2016

| MESL Costs 2016* | Weekly Rate (€) |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Food | 121.20 |
| Clothing | 23.26 |
| Personal Care | 17.90 |
| Health | 1.32 |
| Household Goods | 19.70 |
| Household Services | 9.53 |
| Communications | 13.99 |
| Social Inclusion | 71.11 |
| Education | 8.08 |
| Transport | 60.00 |
| Housing | 44.26 |
| Household Energy | 43.55 |
| Personal Costs | 3.48 |
| Insurance | 2.58 |
| Savings and Contingencies | 32.40 |
| Total | 472.35 |

** MESL core costs adjusted for effect of secondary benefits (e.g. Medical Card) and employment scenario.*

Table 5: Social welfare income scenarios, 2016

| Social Welfare Income Scenario | Weekly Rate 2016 (€) |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Adjusted Household MESL* | 472.35 |
| Primary Social Welfare | |
| Adult 1 (Jobseekers) | 188.00 |
| Adult 2 (Qualified Adult) | 124.80 |
| Qualified Child Increase | 59.60 |
| Total Primary Social Welfare | 372.40 |
| Secondary Social Welfare | |
| Child Benefit | 64.62 |
| BSCFA | 1.92 |
| Medical Card | Full |
| Household Income | 438.94 |
| Income Adequacy | Inadequate |
| (Household Income – MESL Expenditure) | -33.41 |

**MESL core costs adjusted for effect of secondary benefits (e.g. Medical Card) and employment scenario.*

The Minimum Essential Budget Standards Research Centre was established in 2016. Its role is to:

- ensure the consolidation of the research and MESL data within a clearly visible identity;
- enhance the VPSJ's ability to address the core research and policy development issues arising from the expanded recognition and utilisation of the MESL data by groups across Ireland and at EU level; and
- increase the potential to contribute to both national and international debates and efforts to promote acceptable living standards for all citizens.

An Adequate Minimum Income: Some Observations

Dr Micheál Collins, UCD School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice

What is an Adequate Minimum Income?

The question arises, when defining an adequate minimum income, of what the minimum income should cover. Should it address subsistence, relative well-being and societal participation? Different objectives give different answers, so perhaps the first step is to agree an objective.

For a single individual in 2017, unemployment benefit is €193 weekly, or €10,070 annually. In the same year, the poverty line was at €235.73, or €12,300 annually (Social Justice Ireland, Socio-Economic Review 2017).

The minimum income standard in 2016, according to the VPSJ's minimum income for urban area, was €442.71 weekly or €23,100 annually (plus estimated private housing costs).

Where are we Today?

Most members of society fall above all these three benchmarks. Yet, many remain below them. According to data from CSO SILC 2015, approximately 9.1% of population is below the 50% median income (430,000 people), and 16.9% of the population is below the 60% median income (800,000 people). Data for 2014 point to 2.8 million people in Ireland receiving social welfare of some kind – that is 61% of the general population.

Gross or Disposable Income?

This is an important question; it is important in framing our answers on an adequate minimum income. An adequate minimum income is all about the expenditure required to reach a certain standard of living. It is about disposable income, and how much to live off per week. That means it is

income after various income taxes, welfare receipts and public service provisions are taken into account.

Routes Towards an Adequate Minimum Income?

In looking for routes towards an adequate minimum income, should we think about the various interconnected policy levers available? Many things alter living costs, and therefore the income required to afford them.

Examples include:

- rates of pay (low pay);
- welfare rates (entitlements and claims, levels);
- income tax structures (generous to low income);
- social insurance contribution structures (generous to low pay);
- price levels for goods and services (such as food and education); and
- Provision of public services (such as housing, health and transport).

Discussion

An Income Adequate for Participation in Society

There was a discussion on the challenges of defining a basic income – particularly in terms of how to ensure it encompasses use of services and addresses taxation. One participant described the notion, gaining interest internationally, of a basic income for everyone. Another stressed that a basic income needs to be enough to facilitate people to take part in society. It was pointed out that such an income level would need to be defined clearly – how basic is it? This is intrinsically tied up with the provision of services in society; income is relative to the cost of things. For example, if all public servants took a pay cut they might be better off if that money was used instead to improve public services. If there are to be improvements to public services, they will come with a cost.

On a related point, it was noted that it is important to ensure that welfare payments rise in line with salaries. In the past, we have seen income tax cuts lead to a situation whereby the income of working people increased at a faster rate than that of people on social welfare. There is a risk of that happening again.

Many daily living costs are expensive – childcare, for instance, as well as caring for adults, energy costs, housing and education. Having a disability can lead to higher costs, and can also make it more difficult to get an income. In the face of such expenses, people discussed where people were forced to make cutbacks. It was noted that food is the ‘most disposable area’ of items in a household budget and, as such, a key area for cutting back. This can mean parents neglecting their own health in order to reduce costs. Other items that are commonly cut are savings and parents’ personal expenses. One participant, whose organisation works with people who have become insolvent, noted that for their clients, a social life was the first aspect of their lives to go. Yet it is important that people are enabled to participate in society.

Importance of Early Intervention

An income that is sufficiently adequate to enable people to participate in education and training enables them to build their income themselves in the future. If an individual is not equipped to participate in the labour market, they will not be able to support themselves later on. A minimum income that denies people the opportunity to participate in training and/or education denies them the opportunity to secure their own income in the future.

Participants stressed the value of investing in prevention and early intervention in the early years. There is a need to shift the emphasis

towards prevention and away from compensation. This approach would involve long-term investment. For such an approach, it might be 20 years before returns are seen; unfortunately, policy development in Ireland does not tend to involve such a long-term view. Yet across the spectrum, economists agree that investment in children gives high dividends.

Importance of Labour Market Participation

It was suggested that providing certain groups (single parents and people with a disability) with an adequate income away from the labour force can increase their long-term risk of experiencing poverty. If it is at all possible for people to be in the workforce, then that is where they should be because that is the best protector against poverty. It was noted that while Ireland has one of the most favourable taxation systems for returning to work, there are costs involved for some and this can make returning to work not worth it, from a financial perspective. For example, going back to work to increase income can lead to a loss of secondary benefits, such as a medical card and aids and appliances.

For people with a disability, career progression can pose a particular challenge, in terms of both lifespan and income. Moreover, credit and loans are not always accessible to people with a disability. In Ireland, levels of female participation are also relatively low, even compared with Northern Ireland. This is related to childcare, up to age 14 years. In some cases, a lack of affordable childcare, especially alongside high-cost housing, can make it impossible for women to return to education or training. The level of income required to meet such costs is significant. In terms of helping people find employment, it was noted that support should extend beyond placing someone in employment, but also supporting them in keeping that job and in their career progression.

More Data are Needed

There is a gap in the data – we need more longitudinal research on movements in and out of poverty. Better data will inform our policymaking. In particular, we need more information on the experience of persistent poverty – how many people in Ireland are trapped below the poverty line? Long-term unemployment is a real concern – that is where the major implications lie. There are vulnerable subgroups with larger populations, of whom we know little. Existing longitudinal studies such as TILDA are useful but unfortunately often exclude some vulnerable groups (such as Travellers and migrants). Participants also shared concerns regarding a number of more vulnerable subgroups of the population, including: lone parents; people with disabilities; children in consistent poverty; and children living in direct provision accommodation (including concerns around access to facilities, such as cooking facilities). Concern was also raised over the lower social welfare rates for young people. A good example was cited: a UK-based study on persistent poverty that drew from the UK Millennium Cohort Study. There is a need for aggregated data because people experience poverty at different levels.

Involving People Living in Poverty in the Policymaking Process

There is a need to involve real expertise – namely, the insights of people living in poverty – into the policy and decision-making process as it relates to reducing poverty. This needs to occur on an ongoing basis, rather than, for example, as a once-off, consultation event.

Need for a Public Space to Explore ‘Adequate Income’

The subject of an adequate income is complex. There is no ‘public space’ in which relevant stakeholders can come together, discuss and explore the issue. The last time we formally reviewed social welfare payments in Ireland was through the 1983–1986 Commission on Social Welfare. We

need a space in which we can consider it in detail. It was proposed that a social inclusion forum, similar in structure to the Labour Market Council, and made up of representatives of employers, trade union, NGOs and government departments, should be established. Such a process should also capture the expertise of people living in poverty. We as a society are not having that conversation.

There is a need to create a political will to eliminate poverty in Ireland. This requires creating a specific type of political understanding and will. We need a public conversation on the issue that leads to sustained, meaningful changes to policy. There is also a need to create greater public awareness and understanding around the issue of an adequate income.

4.5 Summary of Workshops

Revising the National Social Targets for Poverty Reduction

Striking the Right Balance

Participants at this workshop identified a need, in the new targets, to strike a balance between being sufficiently ambitious while also remaining realistic. The new targets must be both flexible and sustainable; they must be realistic without feeding complacency.

Targeting Everyone at Risk

Up to now, specific groups have been targeted, such as older people and ethnic minority communities. It was noted that this approach risks ignoring individuals or subgroups outside of these groups who may also be at risk of poverty.

Ensuring Poverty Research Includes all those at Risk of Poverty

Problems were identified regarding the current approach to data collection in poverty research. Specifically, it was felt that gaps exist in the data, regarding certain harder-to-reach groups. A number of suggestions were made in this regard, including better use of existing data sources, greater use of qualitative methods, and use of more innovative methods to reach 'hard-to-reach' groups.

Supporting Indicators

There was support for the idea of contextual indicators such as those related to fuel poverty and food poverty be retained and used as supporting indicators. It was felt that indicators, in profiling progress in reducing poverty, should include expenses that might be unanticipated (such as certain school expenses). The level of racism was identified as another potentially useful indicator for monitoring social inclusion in Ireland.

Value of a Collective Approach

It was noted that there are many groups vulnerable to poverty in Ireland, but that it is important not to view them as separate groups with competing demands for the same resources; rather, a joined-up approach should be taken by stakeholders, with a focus on identifying common solutions that will see improvements across all those vulnerable to poverty.

Inclusive Labour Markets

Consulting with Service Users

The importance of continuing a consultation process with service users was stressed, as well as developing a person-centred approach, in

determining matters such as the level of in-work support people need, and how it should be delivered.

Interagency Working

Participants spoke of the value of intra- and inter- departmental coordination within departments, with agencies and across departments. This approach would be conducive to a better experience for service users.

End Privatisation of Social Protection Services

Participants in this workshop agreed that the commissioning and privatisation of social protection services, such as Job Path, should end.

Implementing the Public Sector Duty

There should be a commitment from top levels of government to the Public Sector Duty (Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014).

Public Perception of the Department for Social Protection

Participants felt damage had been caused to public perception of the Department by the recent campaign on social welfare fraud. It was noted that this can affect people's trust in the Department.

Access to Quality Services

Importance of Implementing Existing Policies

It was noted that Ireland is good at social policy development but poor at implementation. This can lead to local communities growing discouraged by the lack of progress and, ultimately, disheartened.

Engaging at Local Level

It was argued that local opinion should play a greater role in deciding how programmes are implemented at local level, and that such programmes such be adaptable at local level

Need for Poverty Proofing at all Stages

Poverty and rights proofing need to be in place at all stages of policy development – design, implementation, outcomes and evaluation. This obligation should be extended to any for-profit company involved.

Recognising the Value of the Community Sector

The value of the community sector, particularly the role it plays in supporting communities to have a voice, must be acknowledged.

Adequate Minimum Income

Engaging with People Living in Poverty in the Policymaking Process

More expertise needs to be brought into the decision-making process: people living in poverty and social exclusion should be involved on an ongoing basis.

Need for More Data

There is a need for longitudinal studies to improve our understanding of persistent poverty.

Identifying an Adequate Income

An income adequate for participation in society must go beyond the basics requirements for survival. It must also enable the individual to build up the knowledge and skills required to secure their own income – i.e. to attend third level or further education, and to gain work experience.

Value of a Collective Space for Dialogue

Participants argued for the need for a 'civil space' where relevant stakeholders (the government, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector, etc.) can come together and explore the complex issue of adequacy of income.



SECTION 5

Reflections and closing remarks

SECTION 5

5.1 Reflections on NAPinclusion

The inputs to this session provided national and international perspectives on the development of national anti-poverty strategies. The first presenter, Joanne Mulholland, set out the background to and main structures in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017*. She outlined the next steps envisaged for the development of the new strategy and posed questions on the framework for the new Plan. The second presenter, Hugh Frazer, considered how an EU perspective could inform the development of the new Plan. He identified areas Ireland could focus on to reach EU benchmarks and identified best practice approaches from the EU.

Progress to Date

[Joanne Mulholland](#), Department of Social Protection

Joanne noted that Ireland has a long tradition of developing national anti-poverty strategies to provide a strategic framework in which to tackle poverty and social exclusion, which goes back to *Sharing in Progress* in 1997. The purpose of this session is to reflect on this tradition with a view to informing future action plans.

Joanne outlined some of the key features of the current strategy, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017, which was introduced during a period of sustained economic growth with low unemployment and poverty rates. The Plan:

- adopted a life-cycle approach with goals set for each group: children; people of working age; older people and communities;
- identified a wide range of targeted actions and interventions associated with these groups to support the overall objective of achieving the national poverty target;

- covered a 10-year period from 2007 to 2017 – a period of significant change when the economic cycle went through a boom, crisis, and now a recovery;
- outlined a range of monitoring, institutional and governance structures including:
 - social inclusion reports, which outline progress on the implementation of the high level goals and associated actions;
 - stakeholder engagement mechanisms such as the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) and SIF report;
 - social inclusion monitors, which report on progress towards the National Social Targets for Poverty Reduction;
 - poverty/social impact assessments, including analysis of the main welfare and direct tax budgetary policies using the ESRI’s tax/welfare model, SWITCH;
 - Technical Advisory Group, which provides support and advice on data, poverty measurement, research and monitoring; and
 - community participation and institutional structures such as social inclusion supports/structures at local levels and the Senior Officials Group and Cabinet Committee B (Social Policy and Public Services).

Joanne mentioned the Plan was updated for the period 2015–2017 to reflect new challenges, which were very different to when the Plan was drawn up in 2007, and to reflect current policy responses to poverty. The Updated Plan contains 14 reformulated goals, which include a greater focus on early childhood development, youth exclusion, access to the

labour market including measures for people with disabilities, migrant integration, social housing and affordable energy.

Joanne then outlined some of the next steps the Department envisages around the National Action Plan. A key task this year is the preparation of the biennial social inclusion report, monitoring the commitments in the Plan during 2015-2016. The Forum discussions and regional workshops represent the first consultation phase on the new Plan. Event partners, the EAPN and CWI, are organising more regional workshops to get peoples' views on the Plan during the year. The Department is also preparing a consultation paper and survey that will issue to stakeholders later in the year. With the Plan coming to an end this year, there will be a review of it to inform the development of the new strategy. The new Plan will also be informed by international developments through the European Commission and other bodies.

Joanne referred to the strong connections between work to tackle poverty and social exclusion at national and EU/international levels. She mentioned the European Council adopting a poverty reduction target as part of its *Europe 2020 Strategy* in June 2010. On foot of this, Member States were required to set national poverty targets to contribute to the overall Europe 2020 poverty target. Ireland's contribution to the target is set out in the National Reform Programme and was discussed at the workshop earlier today. Another relevant development is the adoption of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. Ireland also contributes to EU initiatives to tackle poverty and to promote social inclusion by participation and inputs into various activities, including the

- Social Protection Committee which reports on the European social situation and fosters policy co-ordination; and

- Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth, which brings a range of stakeholders together to examine what the EU can do to ensure all of its citizens reap the benefits of truly inclusive growth.

Joanne sought the views of participants on the structure for the new Plan and the possibility of it being developed around an active inclusion approach. Active inclusion means enabling everyone, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job. It has three main components, which all the relevant goals and actions would be categorised under: (i) adequate minimum income; (ii) inclusive labour markets; and (iii) access to quality services.

Joanne also asked people to consider the most appropriate timeframe for the new Plan. A four-year timeframe (2018-2020) is being considered. This is consistent with the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Programme for a Partnership Government and the expected availability of poverty figures from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions. This would allow any future strategy to be informed by progress towards the national poverty targets at that time.

Joanne asked participants to consider the governance structures they would like to see. It is anticipated that similar governance structures would apply to the new Plan, with the Social Inclusion Division in the Department co-ordinating the development of a detailed implementation plan monitoring and evaluating progress on the high-level goals, actions and national social targets. This would be done in conjunction with the structures and support of the Senior Officials Group on Social Policy and Public Service. Periodic progress reports on the implementation plan would be submitted to Cabinet Committee B. Stakeholder engagement would continue to be an important aspect of the National Action Plan. It

has a strong footing in the Department, reflected in the strategic objective of putting the client at the centre of services and policies. Joanne emphasised the importance of hearing the views of participants on these governance structures.

An EU perspective on Developing Ireland's next National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

Hugh Frazer, European Social Policy Network and Maynooth University

Hugh noted that an EU perspective can be helpful in a number of ways. It can help to identify areas needing more or continued effort, by highlighting some of the areas where Ireland is underperforming by EU standards. It can also make us more ambitious; by comparing Ireland, as a rich EU country (Ireland's GDP is the second highest per capita in the EU28), with not just EU average figures but with the best performing EU countries. Finally, it can help us to find better solutions.

There are a number of areas where comparable European data suggests that Ireland is performing poorly. The table overleaf provides figures for the EU average, Ireland and the best performing EU states. It shows many areas in which Ireland falls behind the EU average, and sometimes well behind that of the best performing countries. For example, 26% of the Irish population are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, compared to an EU average of 23.7% and a rate ranging from 14% to 18% for the best performing countries. For risk of child poverty, the Irish figure rises to 34.4%, compared to 27.8% and 14%–18% respectively. Other groups in Ireland facing a higher-than-average risk of poverty (in the EU context) include: single people with children; those not in employment; people with some or severe disability; and people aged 60 years and over living in households with 'very low work intensity'. Our employment rate of people with disabilities is also substantially lower than the EU average, at

26.5% compared to 43.5%. The table also highlights that our expenditure on social protection, as a percentage of GDP, is only 20.6%, compared to the EU average of 28.7% and 30%–34% among the best performing countries.



Table 6: Some areas of poor performance (Ireland vs EU rates)

| Indicator | | EU | Ireland | Best performing Member States |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------|---------|-------------------------------|
| | | % | % | % |
| At risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) | All | 23.7 | 26.0 | 14–19 (9 MS) |
| | Children | 27.8 | 34.4 | 14–18 (7 MS) |
| | Single person with children | 47.9 | 61.7 | 35–39 (5 MS) |
| | 18+ not in employment | 34.2 | 43.4 | 21–28 (6 MS) |
| | People with some or severe disability | 30.2 | 40.3 | 21–25 (9MS) |
| People living in jobless households | 18–59 | 10.1 | 11.6 | 5–7 (5 MS) |
| | 0–17 | 10.5 | 13.4 | 4–7 (7MS) |
| Population less than 60 living in households with very low work intensity | | 10.6 | 19.2 | 6–7 (7 MS) |
| Employment rate of people with disabilities | | 43.5 | 26.5 | |
| Expenditure on Social Protection as % of GDP | | 28.7 | 20.6 | 30%–34% (9 MS) |
| Total general government revenue % of GDP | | 44.9 | 27.5 | |

There are also a number of other areas where Ireland is performing poorly by European standards. Homelessness is a serious cause for concern, with rates rising rapidly as shown in FEANTSA data, as is the issue of housing exclusion. Compared to the best performing EU countries we have poor access to quality public services, particularly health services and childcare and child protection services. Our investment to date in community care for the ageing population has been low.

Some Priorities from an EU Perspective

This EU perspective highlights a number of priorities. First, Ireland needs to maintain and intensify policies for the inclusion of children and lone parents. In doing so, it needs to build on the three-pillar approach proposed in the EU's 2013

Recommendation on Investing in Children - breaking the cycle of disadvantage: income, services and participation. This will require the further development of a comprehensive and integrated strategy. Such a strategy should have clear objectives and work programmes for each key policy area and for each group of children at high risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Key areas for action are:

- continue investment in early childhood care and education;
- further increase availability of affordable quality childcare;
- enhance measures to support increased parental employment; and
- continue improvements to child income support.

Secondly, Ireland needs to increase its policies supporting and/or enabling access to good quality employment. Specifically, it needs both a significant public investment programme to create more jobs, and to maintain and deepen its integrated and enabling 'active inclusion' approach (i.e. combining inclusive labour market policies with policies ensuring access to adequate income and to quality services).

As part of this approach Ireland needs to further develop policies to help transitions from welfare to work; to maintain focus on employment of people with disabilities; and to increase its focus on up-skilling as Ireland has one of the highest disparities between the employment rates of low-, medium- and highly skilled workers. It will also be important to improve targeting of jobless and low work intensity households, the long-term unemployed, lone parents, Travellers and people from a migrant/ethnic minority background. It also needs to intensify further efforts to prevent youth unemployment.

Thirdly, Ireland needs to invest more in tackling housing exclusion and homelessness. There is a need for a significant increase in investment in social housing. Support for Traveller families should also be improved.

Fourthly, Ireland needs to improve access to health services. Relevant steps here would be the provision of free GP care for all and universal health insurance.

Fifthly, Ireland needs to strengthen community care services. Specifically, there is a need for greater support for carers and for enabling people to have a good work–life balance. Entitlement to the homecare package should be extended and there is a need for more respite care and long-stay facilities.

However, real progress in all these areas will not be possible without a commitment to significantly increase Ireland's expenditure on social protection, so that our rate is closer to that of the EU's best performing countries. This requires an increase in the overall tax take and a broadening of the tax base. It will also be important to closely link the spending of EU funds in Ireland to the achievement of NAPSI priorities.

Strengthen Institutional Arrangements

Institutional arrangements need to be strengthened if Ireland is to improve its performance in tackling poverty and social exclusion. Having a good plan is not enough: successful Member States have effective national and local mechanisms to ensure effective delivery of their plans and policies. A number of things are important in this regard. First, strong political leadership is needed to ensure a whole-of-government approach. Leadership by the Taoiseach, a clear priority in the Programme for Government and a cabinet committee to oversee implementation can all be helpful. Secondly, there needs to be effective cross-departmental policy coordination, involving senior officials with a high level of leadership. Thirdly, overall targets need to be complemented by more specific ones for high-risk groups – e.g., Travellers, people with disabilities, lone parents – and by programme-related targets, such as those relating to childcare. Fourthly, poverty proofing of policies needs to be rigorous. This means maintaining and intensifying budget proofing, as well as the proofing of all proposals coming to cabinet. Fifthly, regular monitoring and reporting of outcomes must be visible and debated regularly in the Dáil. Sixthly, local coordination and participation needs to be enhanced. This will require a strong link to Local Community Development Committees and Public Partnership Networks and increased investment in community development. Seventhly, the active participation of all stakeholders needs to be ensured, including those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Eighthly, and finally, there is a need for a national public awareness

raising programme that will make the NAPSI better known and discussed and thus raise public awareness and support. Such a programme should challenge some of the myths and, prejudices that exist about poverty and social exclusion and counter a culture of blaming or scapegoating of specific groups and victims of poverty and social exclusion.

Conclusions

The past 20 years of NAPSI have seen good incremental initiatives, but the issues persist; levels of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland remain unacceptably high. This is because we have not sufficiently changed fundamental inequalities in relation to access to resources and services.

A new NAPSI, therefore, must move social inclusion from the periphery to the centre of government economic, employment, environmental and social policy. This must be backed with major increase in social investment. Finally, rights need to be more at heart of all aspects of NAPSI. The European Pillar of Social Rights and SDGs are moving rights to the centre of policymaking. This is a first, necessary step towards rebalancing economic, employment, environmental and social policies and building a more inclusive and fair society



5.2 Flashcard Exercise

This section summarises the key findings from the ‘reflections’ exercise, held towards the end of the forum proceedings, during which participants were asked to identify policies they supported (existing or proposed by participants themselves), and those they felt should be stopped.

Policies that should be maintained and/or prioritised

Prioritising the New Action Plan

- Place the new action plan at the centre of government policy;
- Set high targets, relative to EU levels;
- Ensure the new action plan is significantly resourced;
- Continue taking a multi-faceted response to tackling poverty;
- Maintain the active inclusion model, in its broadest interpretation; and
- Invest in alleviating energy poverty, including by developing a methodology to measure energy poverty levels accurately in Ireland.

Ensuring ‘No One Gets Left Behind’

- Name ‘at-risk’ groups;
- Don’t treat people within one group as homogenous
- Ensure social inclusion funding programmes support groups named in the action plan;
- Name racism as a barrier to inclusion;
- Take a person-centred approach in policy interventions addressing poverty and social exclusion;
- Introduce and develop incentives to make employers more family-friendly.

Monitoring and Accountability

- Establish a social inclusion council modelled on the labour market council to monitor the social inclusion implementation plan;
- Ensure poverty and rights proofing of all policies takes at all stages of the policymaking process;
- Initiate a public awareness campaign approach on how money is spent on addressing poverty.

Improving Service Delivery

- Improve communication between DSP staff and people using service;
- Increase level of consultation between DSP and targeted groups;
- Hold service providers accountable in relation to treating clients with dignity;
- Ensure a greater match between skills deficit and training for the unemployed.
- Continue using community development approaches in delivering services;

Measures and approaches that should be stopped

Participants identified the following measures and approaches that they felt should be stopped:

- including too many goals in action plans on poverty, as this can dilute focus;
- outsourcing services to the for-profit sector;
- using the lifecycle approach, which is insufficiently nuanced and makes targeting difficult;
- centralisation of public services, which leads to loss of local knowledge; and
- the 'welfare cheats' campaign, which it was felt had created a very negative discourse.

5.3 Closing Remarks

Anne Vaughan thanked the Minister and all of the participants for their valuable contributions during the day, noting it had been a constructive day with a lot of input made. Thanks were also extended to all staff of the Social inclusion Division who organised the event and to the staff of the Aviva Stadium for their contributions. Special thanks were expressed also to the people who attended the preliminary regional preparatory workshops in the period leading up to the event, including those who participated in the presentation by Community Work Ireland and EAPN. Anne noted that a full report of the day's discussions and conclusions would be compiled. The finalised report would be laid before the Oireachtas; published on the Department's website; circulated to all interested parties and brought to the attention of the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform.





Gnóthaí Fostaíochta agus Coimirce Sóisialaí, Áras Mhic Dhiarmada, Sráid an Stórais, Baile Átha Cliath 1



An Roinn

Gnóthaí Fostaíochta agus Coimirce Sóisialaí

Department of

Employment Affairs and Social Protection