

# A Summary of Proposals to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Review

# 2001

children  
income adequacy  
education  
health  
women  
global Targets  
people with disabilities  
employment/unemployment  
housing  
older people  
minority ethnic groups  
urban poverty  
rural poverty



**A SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS  
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NATIONAL ANTI POVERTY STRATEGY  
REVIEW  
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# Introduction

The Combat Poverty Agency is a statutory agency with responsibility for policy advice to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs and to wider government on all aspects of social and economic planning in relation to poverty. The Agency's key functions include this policy advice role, as well as raising public awareness about poverty, conducting and commissioning research into poverty and supporting innovative anti-poverty projects.

This document summarises proposals from the Combat Poverty Agency to the current review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS).<sup>1</sup> It commences with a short summary of data on poverty in Ireland and then identifies the key opportunities and challenges for tackling poverty in Ireland.

Proposals by the Agency on targets and actions for inclusion in a revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy are then presented on:

- Global Targets for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy
- Education
- Employment/Unemployment
- Income Adequacy
- Health
- Housing
- Rural Poverty
- Urban Poverty
- Children, Women, Older People, Minority Ethnic Groups and People with Disabilities.

## Poverty data and trends

Latest data on poverty from 1998 shows 8.2 per cent of households had incomes below 60 per cent of average and experienced basic

deprivation<sup>2</sup>, with 6.2 per cent and 3.5 per cent at the 50 and 40 per cent relative income lines. This figure has fallen considerably from 15.1 per cent in 1994, though the gap with average living standards has widened. In overall terms, both 'real' and consistent poverty have decreased reflecting rising living standards, but relative income poverty remains high as average incomes have grown even more rapidly.

Since 1994 Ireland has experienced remarkably high and sustained rates of economic growth. Consequently, unemployment has fallen to 4.3 per cent - well below the European average - and long-term unemployment to 1.6 per cent. However, unemployment continues to impact on less educated groups, women and lone parents, ethnic minorities and those with a disability. There is also a concentration of unemployment in particular households, especially those with dependent children. Women and men also differ in their sharing of paid work with women being more likely than men to work in jobs with lower pay and poor conditions. Unemployment is concentrated locally: a third of the long-term unemployed live in public housing, as compared to a fifth of the short-term unemployed and a tenth of those in work.<sup>3</sup>

Poverty is an ever-evolving problem in society. It can also affect particular groups in a more intense way than others. In recent years, a number of new aspects to poverty have emerged

- Racism is now identified as a feature of poverty in Ireland, which manifests itself in access to employment and public services.

<sup>1</sup> Full versions of the Agency's submissions are available from our website [www.cpa.ie](http://www.cpa.ie) or directly from the Agency Tel. 01 670 6746 or e-mail [info@cpa.ie](mailto:info@cpa.ie)

<sup>2</sup> Enforced lack of eight items including food, clothing, heating and experience of debt.

<sup>3</sup> NESF (1997) *Ending Long-Term Unemployment*. Dublin: The National Economic and Social Forum



- Indebtedness can be an added burden for those on a low-income. A related problem is exclusion from financial services, which allow people to more effectively manage their resources and to access credit facilities.
- Access to information technology has been identified a major policy issue by the government-established Information Society Commission.

## Opportunities and challenges

There is a very favourable policy context for tackling poverty in Ireland. Among the main features of this policy context are:

- existence of National Anti-Poverty Strategy as a strategic policy framework on poverty with support of social partners;
- significant government resources available for redistribution and service provision arising from recent economic growth and reduced age and economic dependency;
- active engagement of community and voluntary sector in fight against poverty, with particular recognition and support for organisations representing those in poverty;
- availability of high-quality research and information on poverty trends through the government and EU-funded Living in Ireland/European Household Panel Survey;
- extensive number of targeted and innovative programmes for specific needs/groups, with an emphasis on integration and participation;
- formal administrative structures and procedures for co-ordinating policy on poverty, including poverty-proofing, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Unit, departmental committee, cabinet committee and the Combat Poverty Agency.

Eight key challenges for policy can be identified:

1. Reducing inequalities in income through provision of an adequate minimum income for all, fairer access to

employment opportunities and progressive reform of the taxation system.

2. Enhancing the quality of life for low-income groups through improved access to and quality of key public services, in particular healthcare, social housing, early childhood education and public transport.
3. Targeting access to employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed and others excluded from the labour market, in particular in poorer areas, while also developing the skills of those in precarious employment through life-long learning and access to IT.
4. Improving the position of children and the elderly in low-income households through increased financial support and better access to services.
5. Addressing in an integrated manner the problems of disadvantaged urban and rural areas, including better horizontal co-ordination of economic, social and cultural programmes through a reformed system of local government and improved linkages between national and local initiatives through the national spatial strategy.
6. Enhancing the equality dimension in public policies and services, with particular reference to women, people with disabilities and ethnic groups.
7. Deepening the participation of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion in the planning and implementation of relevant policies and programmes.
8. Strengthening the national policy framework for tackling poverty through greater access to public services, enhanced structures for policy co-ordination, better data collection and monitoring of policy and strengthened procedures for poverty-proofing.

## Adopting a rights approach to anti-poverty policy

The government's current review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) is an extremely important opportunity to meet international obligations on economic, social and cultural rights. Poverty seriously compromises human dignity. Economic and social rights such as the right to health, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to housing, the right to work and the right to a sustainable environment are essential to uphold human dignity and are directly relevant to the eradication of poverty. The use of rights language and concepts in the NAPS would serve to emphasise that individual dignity is a primary value of public economic and social policy.

Ireland is one of 145 states that have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Every five years states are required to submit a report on their implementation of the Covenant. In 1999 the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which reviews the Irish report, observed that Ireland's National Anti-Poverty Strategy 'does not adopt a human rights framework consistent with the provisions of the Covenant'. The Committee was also concerned that Irish legislation did not fully reflect obligations of the Covenant. States are obliged to progressively realise the rights listed in the Covenant. This means that when Ireland goes before the UN Committee again it is expected that there will be advances made in our implementation of economic, social and cultural rights. A new National Anti-Poverty Strategy is a very significant opportunity to remedy this under-performance and to strengthen and build on the foundation that already exists in, for example, the Irish Constitution, social welfare and housing law, in health and education policy and more recent equality legislation. A clear and unequivocal commitment to rights in the NAPS would serve to emphasise that individual dignity is a primary value of public economic and social policy.

## Strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

National data from the Living in Ireland Surveys have generated a number of important monitoring reports that have measured the extent to which global targets in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy have been met since they were set in 1997. As we know these targets were based on 1994 survey data and in effect they were surpassed even by the time they were established though this was not known at the time. The review of NAPS must ensure that:

- the global targets are reviewed on an ongoing basis, and in particular as more up to date data emerges from the Living in Ireland Surveys;
- the global targets comprise a number of measures, including consistent poverty, relative income poverty, income inequality and child poverty;
- that each target is accompanied by a relevant set of indicators that are defined in terms of outcomes rather than inputs, and that remain relatively stable over time;
- that the Combat Poverty Agency's role as the evaluation body for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy is maintained and resourced accordingly.

## Establish appropriate consultative and participatory structures

Various international instruments such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stress the right of people to be consulted on issues that affect them. The government's own White Paper, Supporting Voluntary Activity, similarly supports this process. The NAPS review process needs to explicitly commit to supporting the involvement of excluded people in public policy on poverty that affects them. It needs to set out a programme of action that involves people living in poverty and organisations that represent them in setting up new mechanisms that are effective and adequately resourced. Recent work funded by the EU and undertaken by the

Agency, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and national anti-poverty networks along with EU partners sets out a clear direction and guidelines on effective involvement that should be reflected in the new NAPS<sup>4</sup>.

### **Improve effectiveness of poverty-proofing**

Effective poverty proofing has enormous potential to change the outcomes of policy in favour of people living in poverty.<sup>5</sup> Regretfully, there is little evidence that this has been the case to date, though the publication of recent poverty proofing exercises in the National Development Plan and as part of Budget 2001 is a very welcome development. While the recommendations from an independent review of poverty proofing by the National Economic and Social Council are awaited the Agency sees five priorities to strengthen poverty proofing in a new NAPS:

- Resource an action plan that develops civil service capacity for the extensive implementation of poverty proofing within and across government departments.
- Identify data gaps required to undertake poverty proofing and develop an action plan to meet such gaps.
- Poverty proofing exercises should be routinely published as part of all new policy initiatives and major expenditure programmes.
- Develop an action plan for an integrated proofing system taking account of poverty proofing, equality proofing, gender proofing, rural proofing and other proofing

<sup>4</sup> Combat Poverty Agency, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, Irish National Anti-Poverty Networks, NIVT, Odyssey, Integrar, Stakes. (2000). Guidelines for Effective Involvement. Dublin: Author.

<sup>5</sup> Poverty-proofing is a process by which government departments assess policies and programmes at design and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty and inequalities which are likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction.

requirements and consider establishing integrated proofing on a statutory basis.

- Set an explicit timescale and adequately resourced action plan for the expansion of poverty proofing to local authorities, health boards and state agencies.

### **Enhance integrated local delivery of services**

In recent years there has been a welcome concentration on improving local delivery of services by public bodies. The range of initiatives include local government reform, particularly the development of County Development Boards and the creation of Social Inclusion Units in local authorities. A three-year plan to establish a number of cross-sectoral regeneration initiatives in 25 urban areas (RAPID); in rural areas (CLAR) and in provincial towns has also recently been introduced.

NAPS is centrally concerned with improving the living standards of people on low incomes. The new NAPS can provide critical direction to the vision at the centre for improved local delivery of services. In doing this it can make NAPS 'local' and relevant to public bodies charged with social inclusion responsibilities. Local statutory providers have a clear role in responding to poverty and disadvantage. Most of their functions such as housing provision, health services, employment and welfare services have a direct or indirect impact on the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of people in disadvantaged communities. They have day-to-day contact with local communities that are simply not possible for national organisations. NAPS can be meaningful for people living in poverty by facilitating better access and better delivery of vital services thereby improving the quality of life and experiences of people who are excluded.

### **Need for Comprehensive Data and Research Strategy**

In recent years, poverty measurement has relied on information from the *Living in Ireland Survey* (LIIS). This is a national household income survey and has been undertaken on a panel basis each year since 1994. The most recent data analysis available is for 1998. The development of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy was based, in the main, on data and analysis from this survey. The LIIS has also been the key monitoring tool for progress in the NAPS global target on consistent poverty as well as monitoring relative income poverty and poverty risk and incidence.

A number of data gaps have been identified which, if addressed, could improve information on poverty trends, analysis of poverty issues and understanding of causal processes and policy impact and options. These areas include:

- Those not in households
- Relatively small population groups
- Disability
- Wealth
- Intra-households resource allocation
- Women
- Caring.

Building on the research programme that has emanated from the Living in Ireland Surveys and other research and policy analysis activities, there is a need to further enhance the development of a complementary research programme to add value to the data collection processes. Qualitative research has an

important contribution to make to this programme. In addition there is a need to further develop appropriate indicators for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies.

The Agency supports the need for a comprehensive data and research strategy to inform the ongoing development and review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. A data and research strategy is also essential for effective monitoring and evaluating the NAPS and to understand the impact of various policy measures.

### **Conclusion**

An ambitious vision of a more equal society, strong political will and social solidarity can inspire the new National Anti-Poverty Strategy to be a policy commitment and action plan that transforms the Irish experience of poverty. Ireland has been acknowledged within the EU and internationally as having given serious institutional attention to poverty issues.

We should aim to continue this leadership role by developing the next phase of our anti-poverty planning in a radical and ambitious way. Our new anti-poverty plans must set out clear agendas, implementation plans and accountability mechanisms as well as positive models of participation to tackle poverty in Ireland and to meet the challenge of ensuring that all enjoy human dignity.

**June 2001**

# Setting Global Targets in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy

The Agency recommends the following global targets and priority actions.

## **1. Abolish consistent poverty by 2004**

Consistent poverty at the 50% line fell from 9% in 1994 to 6.2% in 1998. In the six years between 1998 and 2004 the Agency is recommending that policies be put in place to speed up this rate of decrease. This will require a revision of the current global target. Consideration should also be given to reviewing the deprivation indicators currently used for measuring basic deprivation for consistent poverty.

## **2. Halve the level of relative income poverty line (using the 50% line) by 2007**

The Combat Poverty Agency and the National Economic and Social Forum have argued that using a consistent poverty measure only provides a partial picture of the extent of poverty and how it is changing over time. This issue has become particularly acute in recent years, because consistent poverty measured by income and deprivation (as in the global target) has decreased, but the number of households under relative income poverty lines has increased. While the situation for many people in poverty has improved, their relative position has not improved and the gap between rich and poor has continued to increase. The Agency therefore recommends the need for a revision of the global target to more fully reflect poverty trends. Specifically this should involve the identification of a relative income poverty target.

## **3. Reduce Ireland's level of income inequality by 2007**

The Agency also recommends that the introduction of an income inequality reduction target. Despite having one of the most successful economies, Ireland has one of the highest rates of income inequality in the

EU<sup>6</sup>. The target should therefore aim to improve this position. This target could be measured by the gini coefficient – one of the main ways in which income distribution is described. The most recent data using the gini coefficient show that Ireland has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the EU<sup>7</sup>. The Agency recommends an ambitious target to reverse the current trend of widening disparities and start to move Ireland toward the best in the EU.

## **4. Introduce a child poverty reduction target aimed at eliminating all forms of child poverty by 2012.**

Ireland's level of child poverty is amongst the highest in both the EU and OECD countries. The child poverty target should encompass three components:

- By 2002 establish a national standard for an adequate income for children that ensures that every child has a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, and social development.
- By 2007 the numbers of children living in households in income poverty (below the 50% relative income poverty line) should be reduced by 50%.
- By 2004 no child should live in a household experiencing consistent poverty – this means that no child should live in a household below 50% average income and experiencing basic deprivation.

<sup>6</sup> The Distribution of Income in Ireland, Nolan, B., et al, CPA, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Gini coefficients provide an overall indicator of disparities in income distribution, with a measure of 0% representing zero inequality and 100% as maximum inequality. According to the latest Eurostat data, Ireland had one of the highest levels of income inequality in the EU at a gini coefficient of 33% - compared to a European average of 31%, but levels as low as 23% and 28% in Denmark and Germany.



### Priority Actions

Actions to support this package of poverty reduction and income inequality targets should focus -on macro social and economic policies to redistribute resources such as:

- An adequate minimum income standard for children and adults<sup>8</sup>
- A focus on progressive tax reform rather than tax cuts
- The expansion of the tax base (through consideration of alternative taxes, e.g. property or green taxes) to ensure adequate resources for quality public services.
- The maintenance of the social insurance fund.

<sup>8</sup> See Combat Poverty Agency submission to the Benchmarking and Indexation (Welfare) group, April 2001.

## Setting Targets to Tackle Educational Disadvantage

The Agency identifies the following three areas as high priority to set targets to tackle educational disadvantage:

- Early childhood education
- Participation in primary and post-primary education
- Access to participation in higher, further and adult education.

### Early Childhood Education

Children born into poverty are disadvantaged in a number of ways, which have a long-term effect on the quality of their lives and the lives of their children. A range of studies - educational, sociological and psychological - have all shown that high-quality early educational services have a positive impact on the future of educational and social success of all children including those born at risk of educational failure and of social exclusion.<sup>i</sup> At a very fundamental level, early education is a way of reducing poverty and reducing the risk of children falling into poverty or exclusion as they grow up.

### Target

1. **All children should have access to quality early education before entering primary school.**

### Priority Actions

- Introduce universal early education provision (taking account of state, community and private sector provision) on a phased basis, prioritising disadvantaged children including those from the travelling community, children with disabilities, children from lone parent families, homeless children and the children of refugees and asylum seekers.
- Subsidise the costs of early education provision for low-income families.

- Service planning and provision should take account of the developmental level of children, their cultural background and their individual needs. Early education services for young children should be integrated into a community policy that is inclusive of parents and family.
- Ensure that current and future provision is child-centred, of a high quality, well-resourced and with appropriately trained staff and good adult:child ratios.

### Participation in Primary and Post-Primary Education

There are three elements to this issue: the costs of primary and post-primary education for families, early school leaving and literacy. Full participation for children in primary and post-primary education can be hindered due to the direct and indirect financial costs associated with education particularly for low-income groups and groups from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. A significant number of children are not transferring from primary to post-primary, opting out of post-primary school with no, or minimum, qualification levels without subsequently engaging in other alternative non-formal education or training schemes. The 1998 National Assessment of English Reading (2000) revealed that 1 in 10 children still leave primary school with significant literacy problems despite the reduction in class sizes and the increase in remedial teachers available.

### Targets

2. **No child should leave primary school with literacy or numeracy difficulties.**
3. **Reduce the number of children leaving school system with few or no qualifications.**
4. **Reduce the teacher/pupil ratio with respect to children within designated disadvantaged schools.**



## Priority Actions

- Eliminate the costs of participating in education for families of school-going children:
  - Establish the full costs of clothing and footwear for school going children and uprate the clothing and footwear scheme to meet these costs.
  - Provide additional financial support through the clothing and footwear scheme to cover additional costs associated with transition from primary to secondary school and from the Junior to Senior cycle.
  - Integrate access to above supports with other educational subventions such as school meals scheme and schoolbooks scheme.
  - Enhance and broaden scope of school meals scheme.
- Provide adequate investment for appropriate in-school equipment for children with disabilities and special needs and review the procedures to ease the claiming of such costs by school.
- Continue the development of the National Educational Psychological Service
- Ensure that current interventions at primary and post-primary level are effective in their targeting of children most in need or most at risk of leaving school early and address their academic, social emotional, behavioural issues. To this end, it is important to develop and fund locally based integrated networks to develop strategic approaches to tackle educational disadvantage and early school leaving.
- Ensure that actions to reduce early school leaving take account of less formal education and training opportunities and interventions outside the mainstream

setting. Identify and develop progression routes for young people and ensure that each child has access to mentoring services to help them identify and plan their education or training paths.

- Ensure that sufficiently strong incentives are in place to reduce the risk of children leaving school early in order to enter the workplace. At the same time, it is important to ensure that workplace initiatives for young people who are in need of basic education and literacy training are provided.
- It is important to further develop and enhance the links between home, school and community.
- Ensure that there is an adequate and appropriate provision of public and private transport to and from schools, including rural area provision.
- Ensure an adequate level of financial resourcing and targeted provision of the remedial teaching service to eliminate the literacy problem among school children.
- Every school-going child should be tracked and monitored, including those with school attendance problems.
- Resources are needed to support the development of new and emerging models of parental involvement, which support parents as equal partners in tackling educational disadvantage. Also, it is important to recognise the role that older people play in children's lives and to involve older people in home-school-community initiatives to address educational disadvantage.
- There has been a welcome recognition of the need for whole school planning and review. Training and support will be needed to maximise the potential of this approach. In addition, consideration should be given to including non-school

educational partners (local, youth and community organisations, parents, statutory services etc.) in this process.

- Develop and implement a programme of IT access and training for all children that reflects the different interests and needs of people living in poverty or disadvantaged areas.
- All student teachers should be made aware of the global, national, local and personal dimensions of poverty and exclusion, of their educational relevance and of actions to combat them. They should also be enabled to develop an understanding of equality, human rights and social justice. This should be done through the development of appropriate modules both within initial teacher training and as part of ongoing in-service provision.

## Access to and Participation in Further, Higher and Adult Education

Access to and participation in further and higher education are hindered by financial costs and by the current inadequate level of service provision. These factors contribute to the low proportions of students in further and higher education from disadvantaged backgrounds and the high dropout rates among students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### Targets

#### 5. Increase the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds participating in

further, higher and adult education.

#### 6. Eliminate literacy and numeracy difficulties within the adult population.

## Priority Actions

- Maintenance grants for all students availing of further or higher education opportunities should be enhanced in line with the costs involved in education.
- Ensure adequate levels of funding and supports to enable current interventions to cater for higher numbers of students from low income or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Ensure a further increase in new and appropriate adult education interventions [£30 million allocated in New Deal].
- Increase the number of places in universities reserved for students from low-income backgrounds. Increase the number of special access programmes and enhance and develop community-school-college initiatives.
- All further, higher and adult education provision should include childcare supports.
- Facilitate education progression routes for adults in work and for adults already in the education system [implementation of Qualifications Act 1999] and ensure appropriate accreditation systems are in place for adult learners.

- Ensure that adults, including the elderly, who have need of literacy and numeracy training have access to services [taking account of state, community and private provision] and that literacy, numeracy and other appropriate supports are provided whether in the workplace or in education.
- Prioritise adult/continuing education opportunities for people who have had least access to education in the past including older people, Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, people with disabilities.

## Setting Targets for Employment/Unemployment

### Introduction

Latest figures from the Quarterly National Household Survey for March 2000 to May 2000, which show that the unemployment rate has fallen to 4.3% and the long-term unemployment rate to 1.6%, indicate that unemployment in Ireland has fallen well below the European average. Unemployment remains the largest single cause of poverty in Ireland, impacting in particular on less educated young people, older men, women, lone parents, ethnic minorities and those with a disability. In addition, there is evidence of a concentration of unemployment in particular households, especially where the household head is long-term unemployed and when there are dependent children. In fact, according to a study by the OECD, Ireland has a higher percentage of households with children in which no adult does paid work than any of the other member states.<sup>9</sup> The 1998 data from the *Living in Ireland Survey* (LIIS) further highlights the unequal burden of unemployment.

According to these data, the risk of being below the 50 per cent relative income poverty line remains very high for households where the reference person is unemployed. In addition, the risk for households where the reference person was ill, disabled or engaged in home duties rose from 1997 to 1998 to even higher levels than for the unemployed. A higher risk of poverty was also noted in households headed

by a retired person. Thus, those living in households where the reference person is unemployed, ill, disabled, engaged in home duties or retired face a substantially higher risk of poverty than others do.

There is also some evidence of an unequal sharing of employment. Women and men differ in their sharing of paid work with women being more likely than men to work in jobs with lower pay and poor conditions. In addition, while unemployment is nationally spread, it is also concentrated locally - over a third of the long-term unemployed live in local authority housing estates compared to just over a fifth of the short-term unemployed and a tenth of those in employment.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of further reducing people's experiences of poverty, more focussed attention must be given to addressing the problem of low pay. There is also a need to develop more specific policies to meet the needs of a number of vulnerable groups if they are to access employment, namely older people, Travellers, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, lone parents, refugees and asylum seekers and people experiencing rural disadvantage.

### Targets

#### 1. Eliminate long-term unemployment by 2003

<sup>9</sup> OECD (1998) *Employment Outlook*. Paris: OECD p. 18

<sup>10</sup> NESF (1997) *Ending Long-Term Unemployment*. Dublin: The National Economic and Social Forum

2. **Significantly reduce the percentage of poor households headed by an unemployed person**
3. **Significantly reduce the percentage of workless households**
4. **Significantly reduce the gap in unemployment rates between the most disadvantaged areas and the average rate of unemployment in Ireland**
5. **Significantly increase employment rates for the older long-term unemployed, young people, women and other groups, especially those from ethnic minorities and those with a disability, experiencing labour market exclusion**
6. **Significantly reduce the percentage of unemployed people with only Junior Certificate or lower level qualification**

#### **Priority Actions**

##### **Increasing the Demand for Employment**

- Increase the demand for low skilled workers
- Promote measures to increase job creation at local level in the social economy
- Expand investment in local initiatives to tackle unemployment, underemployment and the regeneration of disadvantaged rural and urban areas.
- Encourage self-employment

##### **Improving Access to Employment**

- Develop provisions for women wishing to return to work after an absence

- Put in place measures to retain more older people in the labour force until retirement age
- Assist older people to return to work through measures such as training, tax allowances, retention of benefits and enforcement of the equality legislation
- Guarantee asylum seekers the right to work six months after they have claimed asylum in Ireland.

#### **Welfare to Work**

- Further ease the transition from work for those who can take up employment by eliminating employment and poverty traps, particularly through further improvements on child benefits, FIS, tax changes and the retention of secondary benefits favouring the low paid
- Freeze tax rate cuts, complete the move to tax credits and establish the benefits of refundable tax credits for low income households
- Ensure that tax changes reduce income inequalities and favour people on low incomes
- Remove the tax burden on the low paid by removing those on the minimum wage from income tax liability
- Assist with childcare costs for those in low paid employment.

#### **Conditions of Employment**

- Target investment in education and training to people in low paid employment, people with lower level educational qualifications or people who are unemployed, particularly for families headed by an unemployed lone parent

- Develop adequate paid parental leave programmes
- Expand child care services, particularly for parents with lower earnings, using the best performing examples for EU member states as a benchmark
- Adequately resource the implementation of the Education Welfare Act so that all children are protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development
- Introduce a flexible retirement age (e.g. between 60 and 70) and allow older people to gain additional contributions for weeks worked if currently lacking the number required for a full pension
- Improve public transport services to disadvantaged communities to facilitate access to the labour market.

# Setting Health Targets

## Introduction

Health inequalities reflect wider inequalities and material deprivation in society. The link between poverty and health status has been well established since the publication of the seminal UK Black report in the eighties. While there is academic debate about the exact causal pathways between poverty and health outcomes, it is clear that

- poor people get sick more often and die younger than those who are better off<sup>11</sup>
- poverty contributes to poor health both directly e.g., damp or poor accommodation, more dangerous surroundings, and indirectly e.g., poorer diet and stress
- being poor makes it difficult to access or afford adequate or appropriate health care where or when needed<sup>12</sup>
- poverty can reduce the opportunity or the motivation to adopt healthy life styles.

The links between income inequality and health are also clear. Research suggests that the most unhealthy societies are not necessarily those that are poorest, but those where the gap

between rich and poor is greatest<sup>13</sup>. It is also widely accepted that the higher up the social class or income ladder you go, the better the health status you are likely to have.

While this is the general situation, some minority groups like Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, the homeless and prisoners, experience particular problems. The health status of Travellers for example is startlingly different from the settled population. Infant mortality is three times higher for Traveller children and life expectancy among Travellers is significantly lower than that of settled people. There is also growing evidence about the poorer health status of refugees and asylum seekers - recent data on peri-natal problems among women refugees and asylum seekers, for instance, is a cause of concern.

Because health inequalities reflect wider inequalities and material deprivation in society, reducing health inequalities requires action to reduce poverty, deprivation and income inequality. The following targets and priority actions are therefore proposed reflecting the Agency's view of the necessity of action to tackle critical determinants of health outside the control of the health services.

<sup>11</sup> For example see: Nolan, B., Socio-Economic Health Inequalities in Ireland, Paper for Southern Health Board Seminar on Health Inequalities, May 2000; *Inequalities in Health, The Black Report* edited by Peter Townsend and Nick Davidson and *The Health Divide* by Margaret Whitehead (published together in a single volume) Pelican books 1988; Mary Shaw et al, *The Widening Gap; Health Inequalities and Policy in Britain*, The Policy Press 1999..

<sup>12</sup> Health Inequalities and Poverty, Society of St Vincent de Paul, April 2001

<sup>13</sup> Wilkinson R., *Unhealthy Societies; The Affliction of Inequality*, Routledge, 1996.



## Targets

1. To abolish consistent poverty by 2004
2. To halve the level of relative income poverty line (using the 50% line) by 2007.
3. To reduce Ireland's level of income inequality by 2007.
4. To introduce a child poverty reduction target aimed at eliminating all forms of child poverty by 2012<sup>14</sup>.

## Priority Actions to Support Targets 1-4

Actions to support this package of poverty reduction and income inequality targets should focus -on macro social and economic policies to redistribute resources such as;

- An adequate minimum income standard for children and adults<sup>15</sup>
- A focus on progressive tax reform rather than tax cuts
- The expansion of the tax base (through consideration of alternative taxes, e.g. property or green taxes) to ensure adequate resources for quality public services.
- The maintenance of the social insurance fund.

## Targets

5. The NAPS health group should aim to achieve a right to adequate, accessible and appropriate health care services for all when and where needed regardless of ability to pay. This overriding objective should be underpinned by two sub-targets:

- Universal access to a comprehensive and adequately resourced primary health care service by 2007.

- Access to acute care, medical and paramedical treatments when required.

There are serious problems with access to primary health care. Problems of access include:

- cost of GP services for low income families and individuals currently above eligibility thresholds
- poor geographical distribution of GP services both in disadvantaged urban and rural areas
- lack of access to community based primary health services, out-patient or treatment facilities
- limited user involvement in the design and delivery of primary health care services
- limited nature of GMS services in terms of treatments available from GPs and their limited role in health promotion and preventative health care
- underdevelopment and under-investment in the development of a primary health care infrastructure.

Serious investment in a new approach to primary health care is one of the critical issues facing the health services. There are now strong arguments for working toward the development of a universal system – to provide for greater equity and continuity of service; to address the difficulties thrown up by the two tier system currently in place; the availability of unprecedented public resources; the need to make long term investments in the nation's health (and reduce the high costs of acute care in the long run) and the potential to eliminate poverty and unemployment

traps associated with eligibility thresholds. This could be achieved over time, and funded through a combination of public and private sources – although further discussion on how the system should be funded is required.

## Priority actions for targets 5 and 6

- As an immediate measure there should be improved eligibility to the GMS by providing medical cards to all children; and to all adults and their dependants on or below the minimum wage.
- The reform and restructuring of the GMS as a component of a *comprehensive community based primary health care service* – this reform should involve consultation with those who are disadvantaged in the design and delivery of a new system and should address the range of problems identified earlier, in particular the development of a comprehensive infrastructure of community based primary care teams and services.
- The establishment and resourcing of primary health care initiatives targeted at vulnerable groups experiencing particular problems – these could draw on the lessons from the pioneering work done by the Traveller health network to date, the NICHE project in Cork and others. These initiatives should focus on the health needs of the homeless, asylum seekers and refugees, Travellers and the needs of children and families in disadvantaged communities. They should be drawn up in consultation and delivered in partnership with these groups or those who represent them.

- The eradication of key barriers to access to treatment, both in hospital and out-patient acute care, in order to reduce waiting lists.

- Address operational issues in acute services that create problems for those on low incomes in particular. These include 'user-unfriendly' appointment systems for public patients, lack of crèche facilities (particularly in maternity hospitals) and lack of co-ordination between services and public transport availability (particularly in relation to older people).

## Target

**7. Significantly increase resources for community development / partnership initiatives to include an explicit focus on health in their work and to provide the opportunity for effective integration and collaboration with others involved in the design and delivery of primary health care and health promotion in the community.**

There is a need for a considerable investment in community based action for better health. Those who are disadvantaged need to be involved in the design and delivery of community based services – both in primary care and in health promotion and preventative programmes.

## Priority actions for target 7

- Establish a new programme of interdepartmental funding to develop collaboration and integrated effort between community health providers and the range of community based initiatives tackling poverty and social inclusion (e.g. Community Development Projects and Family Resource Centres funded by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, local

<sup>14</sup> See previous section Setting Global Targets on page 3

<sup>15</sup> See Combat Poverty Agency submission to the Benchmarking and Indexation (Welfare) group, April 2001.

development Partnership Companies, Springboard initiatives, RAPID initiatives and local drugs task forces).

- Establish an independent unit or office to promote the development of integrated community development approaches for better health – perhaps along the lines of the Community Development Health Network in Northern Ireland.
- Establish a cross-departmental mechanism at national level to support this integration on the ground.

One example of a mechanism for adopting this cross-sectoral approach is the introduction of a reformed and comprehensive school meals system. This should draw on learning from the many innovative models currently being pioneered by voluntary initiatives and the work of the interdepartmental review of the school meals scheme<sup>16</sup>. The new scheme should ideally involve collaboration between the Departments of Social, Community and Family Affairs, the Department of Health and the Department of Education. This will allow an integrated approach to the problems of educational disadvantage, poor nutrition and food or nutritional education.

#### Targets

- 8. Reduce premature mortality among low-income groups, with specific targets for minority groups.**
- 9. Improve infant mortality among low-income groups, with specific targets for minority groups.**
- 10. Reduce the rate of death and injury from childhood accidents among low-income groups<sup>17</sup>.**

<sup>16</sup> See Combat Poverty Agency Submission to the School Meals Review, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Social disadvantage is associated with living in more dangerous surroundings as shown by

#### Priority actions for 8,9,10.

- Identify data collection gaps
- Identify strategies for closing these gaps to ensure adequate monitoring of progress toward these targets (paying attention to questions of civil liberties in relation to the collection of information from consumers)
- Identify the mortality and childhood accident rates of Travellers and other vulnerable groups to enable the identification of sub-targets for populations with particular problems
- Invest in the generation of new data sources and data collection systems within the health service infrastructure.

Other actions to support these targets will be wide ranging including both health policies and broader macro social and economic policies. Progress toward improved health status will also be supported by greater investment in community based health services, particularly primary health care, and more equitable access to adequate and appropriate health care.

#### Additional priority actions

As well as adopting targets and actions in the above areas, the Combat Poverty Agency recommends that:

- the NAPS health targets and actions are supported by cross departmental and cross sectoral working - given the broad determinants of health, and the reality that the health services on their own cannot address health inequalities;

inequalities in accidental death. For example, mortality rates for injury in Dublin have been found to coincide with areas of high unemployment.

- adequate resources and mechanisms are put in place to implement, monitor and evaluate progress toward the targets;
- an ongoing consultative forum (representative of the various stakeholders, in particular those who are disadvantaged) is established as a formal component of the implementation process - drawing on lessons from the work of the NAPS/Health working group, the consultation process undertaken to date and the support role of the Institute for Public Health (IPH).

# Setting Targets for an Adequate Income

## Introduction

At the time of going to print, a NAPS Working Group on Income Adequacy has not been established as a separate process within the overall NAPS Review. However, the government has established a social partnership working group under the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* with the following terms of reference:

- i) *examine the issues involved in developing a benchmark for adequacy of adult and child social welfare payments, including the implications of adopting a specific approach to the ongoing up-rating or indexation of payments, having regard to their long-term economic, budgetary, PRSI contribution, distributive and incentive implications, in light of trends in economic, demographic and labour market patterns; and*
- ii) *examine the issue of relative income poverty.*

The detail below draws on the Agency submission “How much is enough? Setting an inclusive minimum income standard” made to the Group in April 2001. Global targets referred to earlier are also repeated here, as they are centrally relevant.

Income adequacy, and in particular welfare adequacy is a key determinant

of the living standards of low-income households, including those who are unemployed. In effect, welfare payments set the floor for household income and is therefore central to determining the living standards of most, though not all, poor people. Welfare payments also have a role in the redistribution of income, though their equalising effect has diminished in recent years. The adequacy benchmark set by Commission on Social Welfare was finally exceeded in 1999. A new adequacy figure is needed to take account of significant changes in the economic and policy context, which should be central to the revision of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

## Adequate welfare payments

The adequacy of welfare rates can be assessed in a number of ways including measuring the percentage of the population experiencing relative income and consistent poverty. The most recent data on relative income poverty relates to 1998 (Layte et al, 2000). It shows that significant percentages of the population have incomes below 40 per cent, 50 per cent and 60 per cent of average incomes, the weekly equivalent of between £88 and £95 (10, 20 and 30 per cent respectively). This leaves Ireland with a high rate of relative income poverty compared with other EU countries. While there are some reductions in the numbers falling below the 60 per cent relative income line, there are increases at the 40 per cent line. There is also a higher risk of poverty for children than is the norm. Others at high risk of poverty are the elderly and those not in work or engaged in home duties. Relative income poverty remains a

serious structural problem that needs to be tackled, not least in order to prevent it escalating into a process of exclusion where relative income poverty persists over prolonged periods. The discussion earlier on Setting Global Targets is also relevant here as it relates to relative income poverty and income inequality.

The importance of the adequacy principle was clearly recognised by the Commission on Social Welfare (1986) as a central criterion for the evaluation of the welfare system. An adequate payment enabled the welfare state to prevent poverty and was 'the guarantee of minimal participation in society' (p124). Similarly, the European Commission (1997) identified the provision of a minimum level of resources to live in a manner compatible with human dignity as an 'essential tool in an active policy to combat social exclusion'. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy (1997) states that income support policies 'should aim to provide a sufficient income for all those concerned to move out of poverty and to live in a manner compatible with human dignity'.

### Developing a Minimum Income Standard

The international term for an adequate income benchmark is a 'minimum income standard' (MIS). This can be defined as

*A political criterion of the adequacy of income levels for some given minimum real level of living, for a given period of time, of some section or all of the population, embodied in or symbolised by a formal administrative instrument or other construct. (ibid, 23)*

A MIS is thus a policy tool to assess the adequacy of welfare payments, but also tax thresholds, pensions, minimum wages and enforcement orders for debts, fines, etc.

A MIS can thus be conceived of separately from a relative income poverty line or a basic welfare payment. In practice, though, it is likely that there will be linkages between these different concepts. It still remains valid however to distinguish the establishment of a MIS from either prevailing poverty levels or actual welfare payment rates. Underlying the concept of a MIS is a fundamental notion about the right or entitlement of citizens to a minimum adequate standard of living. While Irish social policy has been reluctant to incorporate a rights-based approach, the right to an adequate standard of living is explicitly stated in a number of international agreements to which Ireland is a signatory such as UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the European Social Charter and the EU Charter of Fundamental Social Rights. Critically, the vindication of this right through the social welfare system is elaborated upon in the 1992 EU recommendation on common criteria concerning sufficient resources and social assistance in social protection systems (commonly known as the minimum income recommendation).

Three criteria for developing a MIS emerge from international experience: public acceptability, methodological defensibility and operational feasibility. Taken together with the EU minimum income recommendation, these outline a way forward for an Irish MIS. The independent gathering of the required data is an essential pre-requisite, as is the establishment of a broadly based forum for adjudicating on a MIS on a regular basis. Indexation

of welfare payments should be informed by the regular rebasing and updating of a MIS. In the absence of this, a short-term measure would be to link welfare increase to growth in wages, as was done in Budget 2001. Together with tax indexation by a similar percentage, this provides a neutral benchmark for considering the distributive impact of government budgetary policy.

### Targets

#### 1. Halve the level of relative income poverty line (using the 50% line) by 2007

In recent years, consistent poverty measured by income and deprivation (as in the global target) has decreased, but the number of households under relative income poverty lines has increased. While the situation for many people in poverty has improved, their relative position has not improved and the gap between rich and poor has continued to increase. The Agency therefore recommends the identification of a relative income poverty target.

#### 2. Reduce Ireland's level of income inequality by 2007

The Agency also recommends that the introduction of an income inequality reduction target. Despite having one of the most successful economies, Ireland has one of the highest rates of income inequality in the EU<sup>18</sup>. This target could be measured by the gini coefficient – one of the main ways in which income distribution is described. The most recent data using the gini coefficient show that Ireland has one of the highest levels of income inequality in the EU<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> The Distribution of Income in Ireland, Nolan, B., et al, CPA, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Gini coefficients provide an overall indicator of disparities in income distribution, with a measure of 0% representing zero inequality and 100% as maximum inequality. According to the

### Priority actions

Actions to support this package of poverty reduction and income inequality targets should focus -on macro social and economic policies to redistribute resources as set out earlier under Setting Global Targets in the National Anti Poverty Strategy.

### Target

#### 3. Establish a MIS based on international best practice and international commitments to a right to an adequate standard of living.

This should be considered independent of issues about its affordability and incentive effects and should be defined in relation to prevailing living standards, with a minimum goal being to prevent relative poverty as defined by the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (and measured both by in terms of income and deprivation).

### Priority actions

- A MIS should be inclusive of all sections of society and should incorporate separate adult and child components.
- The setting and monitoring of a MIS should be put on a formal footing, with involvement of the social partners, welfare recipients and advocates and the Oireachtas, and based on an informed and explicit public debate about welfare adequacy.
- Various research-based methodologies should be applied to develop a MIS, including social surveys, budget standards and statistical data on poverty and relative living standards.

latest Eurostat data, Ireland had one of the highest levels of income inequality in the EU at a gini coefficient of 33% - compared to a European average of 31%, but levels as low as 23% and 28% in Denmark and Germany.



- A MIS should have as a floor 50 per cent of average household income (current equivalent of £126 per adult per week) and, for children, the minimum costs of child (£36).

- Equivalence scales for dependant adults and in particular children should be reviewed in the light of research on the higher costs involved and more equitable approaches to income sharing in households.

- A MIS should allow for variable costs for those at work or with a disability.

- A MIS should become the norm across all aspects of policy, which

relate to income (e.g. non-cash benefits, taxation, in-work subsidies, minimum wages and money advice).

- As a short-term measure, welfare payments should be uprated in line with wages, in order to ensure that those on welfare share in the benefits of economic growth (where inflation is greater, this should provide the floor for annual increases).

- Welfare payments should be increased in line with a MIS over a defined timespan, which should be agreed as a social partnership agreement.

## Setting Housing and Accommodation Targets

### Introduction

The Irish housing system has traditionally been dominated by owner occupation with 79 per cent of households owning their own home<sup>20</sup>. The public and private rented sectors account for the remaining 20 per cent in roughly equal proportions. Housing subsidies are provided for 93,000 public housing tenants and a further 42,000 tenants in the private rented sector<sup>21</sup>. The Agency strongly supports the right to adequate and affordable housing and accommodation with particular reference to those on low incomes and those with specific housing needs – homeless people, people with disabilities, single people, Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers and those needing crisis accommodation. This right, included in various international instruments to which Ireland is a signatory such as the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, should be adopted and reflected in the revised NAPS. The right to housing is broader than the right to shelter and includes security of tenure, affordable, accessible and habitable and culturally adequate housing.

The main issues facing social housing policy are:

- increased numbers awaiting the provision of social and affordable housing;

- inadequate provision and poor quality of accommodation for Travellers;
- segregated provision of social housing;
- issues relating to the management and maintenance of public housing estates;
- cost and quality of accommodation in the subsidised private-rented sector and the
- worsening problem of homelessness.

There is a need to both expand the programme of social housing and address the extent of housing segregation in Ireland. Reform in the private rented sectors is also required such that it meets the broad range of needs of low-income groups by offering fair rent, good quality and reasonable security of tenure. The problem of the continued escalation of house prices must also be addressed as a matter of immediate concern. Housing and accommodation should be re-conceptualised in public policy as a social good, not a commodity. As a social good accommodation is available to everybody as a right, and is provided appropriate to need and at a reasonable price. This requires a considerable re-orientation of current policy to reduce the highly favourable policy treatment, particularly tax treatment, of owner occupation tenure in comparison to other tenures.

<sup>20</sup> 6 Cashin (2000) based on Special Tabulations of the 1997 Labour Force Survey

<sup>21</sup> Guerin, Donal. (1999) A Survey of Recipients of SWA Rent Supplement. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency

## Targets

1. Ensure provision of adequate and affordable housing and accommodation for those with low incomes and specific housing needs – homeless people, people with disabilities, single people, Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers and those needing crisis accommodation.
2. Ensure equality of status and treatment of various housing tenures and social groups with specific aim to develop an integrated housing system that takes account of a mix of physical, social, community, cultural, recreational and commercial resources and services and provides for effective management and maintenance of housing stock, including tenant participation.
3. Ensure that net household income, after housing costs have been deducted, does not fall below standard VMI rate.
4. Develop and resource quality standards and effective monitoring procedures for the private rented sector, in particular for built and design, maintenance, security of tenure,

affordable rents and protection against discrimination for vulnerable groups. Ensure that no households, in any housing tenure, are forced to live in sub-standard accommodation.

5. Eliminate fuel poverty through provision of adequate heating systems, adequate insulation and damp-free environment.
6. Eliminate homelessness. Provide back up supports in areas of health, welfare, prevention and outreach services to enable integration within the community. Ensure effective implementation of homeless strategies.
7. Ensure effective implementation of commitment that all Travellers have appropriate accommodation available to them. Provide effective monitoring of Traveller accommodation plans and consider enforcement mechanisms where progress is not being achieved.
8. Work towards elimination of housing waiting lists. Increase social housing output to 3,000 per year or 2% of all housing, whichever is the higher.

## Setting Rural Poverty Targets

Targets to be met in other thematic areas also apply to rural areas, with a specific focus on the provision of services. The difficulty in setting a more specific target to address rural poverty reflects a dearth of specific information for rural areas and analysis of it in a form suitable for target setting. While data is being prepared at county level, often the effect of urban areas within counties conceals large pockets of rural disadvantage.

### Target

1. Analysis of poverty in rural Ireland needs to be developed at the national, regional and local levels

### Priority Actions:

- Data collection and analysis needs to be improved and consideration given to the appropriateness of current rural deprivation indicators
- An improved target for the reduction of rural poverty needs to be set alongside the development of appropriate performance indicators
- Policy responses need to be multi-dimensional across government departments across national, regional and local levels, action learning and non-learning responses
- A coordinated effort is required to realise the aspirations contained in the various policy documents

There are also a number of key factors that affect rural areas as well as urban areas but in rural areas these factors have a different and profound effect. They include:

### Access/Transport

Physical isolation and availability of transport as a means of access to both public and private services and facilities is a major issue for people living in rural communities. The centralisation of service provision means that transport plays an important role in accessing services such as health care and in the social integration of people living far away from major centres of provision. The absence of public transport is therefore one of the major determinants of social exclusion in rural areas and an issue which needs to be urgently addressed through innovative approaches.

### Targets

1. Increase the investment in public rural transport provision taking account of mobility requirements
2. Provide a comprehensive set of rural transport involving the public sector, private sector and the social economy

### Priority Actions:

- While greater use of active travel taking account of people with disability and mobility problems
- Large increase in investment in rural transport services taking account of the availability of different vehicles at local level involving a combination of operators in public and private sectors and the social economy
- Carry out local transport audit in public transport operated in Dublin Region and active travel in facilities local planning and more effective coordination and improvement

### Service Provision

Inadequate service provision and inadequate infrastructural development present major problems to participation and inclusion in rural life. Limited access to, and provision of, services impact on certain groups in rural communities more harshly than others do. These include older people, poor women with children people with disabilities and carers. These groups tend to be the least mobile and experience isolation from the normal life of the community.

### Targets

**4. Maximise the use of existing facilities and provide new services and facilities to address gaps in provision**

### Priority Actions

- Retain rural service provision including post offices, health centres and garda stations
- Improve provision of information in rural areas through innovative methods including information communications technology

### Unemployment/Underemployment

While high unemployment rates have been found to be a predominantly urban phenomenon, this is in the context of the high level of emigration that persists in many rural areas, which results in a reduction of conventional unemployment rates. Migration from rural areas tends to be selective since it is concentrated among the working age population and consequently it leaves behind a disproportionately large economically dependent population. The situation in rural areas is also characterised by the continuing decline in employment in agriculture and a shortage of off-farm job opportunities. There is also underemployment in agriculture and among many other rural residents because of the seasonal

nature of much of the economic activity.

### Targets

- 4. Eliminate rural Long Term Unemployment and underemployment.**
- 5. Reduce the number and percentage of poor rural households headed by an unemployed person.**
- 6. Reduce the number of rural 'workless' and underemployed rural households.**
- 7. Reduce the gap in unemployment rates between the most disadvantaged rural areas and the average rate for Ireland.**
- 8. Increase employment rates for those most vulnerable in the rural context including young people, women, underemployed farm families, isolated rural men, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities.**
- 9. Increase the amount of people involved in cross-border employment mobility, particularly in the most disadvantaged rural border areas.**

### Priority Actions

- Develop the necessary support services such as training and capacity building programmes especially for those experiencing social exclusion
- Design a set of strategies which will build on existing capacity, potential and needs at local and regional level
- Further promote and develop local employment services in disadvantaged rural areas
- Implement a regional training service

- Build on the current advisory, guidance and support services (including mentor support) for small firms and enterprises
- Provide support for community enterprise and co-operative approaches to development
- Provide accessible support for people who wish to work and do business on a cross-border basis

### Low-Income Farming

While in general farm incomes have been improving there is a persistent group of low-income farms, which are living in or are at risk of poverty. They display some of the following characteristics of small drystock businesses; older farmers who farm at low levels of intensity; those farmers with little or no contact with the advisory services; farmers with a low level of general and agricultural education; small farm households with no off-farm job; high levels of underemployment on the farm; and farms with a heavy reliance on direct payments and social welfare transfers.

### Targets

- 10. Provide sufficient, accessible income to enable rural people to move out of poverty**
- 11. Increase skills and literacy levels in rural areas.**

### Priority Actions

- Increase the minimum rate of social welfare payments and have regular annual increases taking account of the prevailing standards of living
- Make available a supportive, holistic advisory service which has community involvement

### Educational Disadvantage

A number of key issues are identified in relation to educational disadvantage in rural areas:

- the need for better identification of educational disadvantage in rural areas;
- the need for a targeted approach to tackling rural educational disadvantage focused on disadvantaged pupils, families, schools and communities rather than areas;
- the need for coherent policy on the provision of early education;
- the need for the reallocation of resources within the education sector to pre-primary, primary and adult education provision;
- the need to address issues pertaining to small rural schools e.g. prevention of closures, enhancing single teacher schools, provision of an adequate remedial service;
- to prevent and address early school leaving; and
- to enhance access to third level for identified disadvantaged groups.

### Targets

- 12. All children in rural areas should have access to quality, affordable early education before entering primary school**
- 13. No rural children should leave primary school with literacy or numeracy difficulties**
- 14. Reduce the number of children leaving the school system with few or no qualifications**
- 15. Reduce the teacher/pupil ratio with respect to children within designated disadvantaged areas**
- 16. Increase the number of students from rural backgrounds participating in Further and Higher and Adult Education**

17. **Eliminate literacy and numeracy difficulties within the adult population (including the target groups)**
18. **Increase in the provision for access to locally based, community-led initiatives with adequate, affordable supports**
19. **Reduce the percentage of rural people with only Junior Certificate or lower level qualifications.**

#### **Priority Actions**

- Provide innovative responses to address gaps in provision including mobile education units, transport facilities to locally-based pre-school provision, pre-school services attached to primary schools based on the cluster concept used to share educational services between primary schools
- Provide a minimum of 2 teachers per rural primary school
- Provide packages of services to disadvantaged children including small classes, remedial education teachers and home-school liaison teachers
- Upgrade rural schools and provide them with resources (including IT) which children may not have access to in the home
- Improve the range of subjects on offer in small rural primary schools

#### **Health**

Health is a key issue in rural areas in terms of both adequacy and access. The availability of community care is essential for rural people, particularly for older people, people with a disability and for young families. Furthermore in rural areas the problems of access to healthcare services is acute for many people.

#### **Targets**

20. **Make available comprehensive healthcare information to all rural households**
21. **Reduce the distances rural people have to travel to access the range of healthcare services**
22. **Maximise the use of existing healthcare facilities and services and where gaps in provision exist, new services and facilities will be provided, taking account of cross-border opportunities**
23. **Put in place a range of pro-active strategies that will target the healthcare needs of these groups.**

#### **Priority Actions**

- Development of user-friendly information strategies through a range of approaches involving partnerships with the mix of statutory, social partner and voluntary/community organisations
- Development of innovative ways of providing and co-ordinating healthcare services in rural areas e.g.
  - Healthcare/community resource centres
  - Co-ordinated transport schemes involving statutory, private and community partners
  - Greater outreach and mobile provision of health and social care provision, including home-help provision
  - Developing mechanisms for the provision of new healthcare provision
- Development of healthcare strategies on a cross-border basis to ensure maximum benefit to rural people especially those living in the region

#### **Accommodation**

Housing policies in rural areas should continue to have a greater emphasis on smaller estates and stand alone housing, and as far as possible people should be housed within their own geographical location. In relation to accommodation, issues around quality of life must also be taken into consideration and this will include provision of services and facilities in the rural area.

#### **Targets**

24. **Increase the affordable housing stock in rural areas for people in poverty**
25. **Increase the mix of housing type in all rural areas**
26. **Increase the number of rural households with adequate provision of the following services: running water, electricity and heating, and sanitation**

#### **Priority Actions**

- Involve tenants in addressing the needs of communities on rural housing estates
- Provide communal facilities such as staffed resource centres and playgrounds
- Refurbish poor quality private houses occupied by low income families
- Provide accommodation and facilities for Travellers in rural areas.

#### **Crime**

A particular feature of crime in rural areas is the increasing fear among older people about crime in general and about the rising level of crime that they themselves experience.

#### **Targets**

27. **Reduce rural crime**

#### **Priority Actions**

- Short term - installation of security equipment and advice on personal safety,
- Longer term - identify and address the causes of crime

#### **The voluntary and community sector**

Community development, the empowerment of groups which experience disadvantage and marginalisation, as well as community capacity building generally are acknowledged as having a central role in local, social and economic development in rural areas. The NAPS acknowledges that it is important that the voluntary/community sector is involved in a partnership approach to tackling rural poverty and that the sector is adequately supported and resourced to contribute to development.



# Setting Urban Poverty Targets

## Understanding urban disadvantage

The spatial aspect of poverty was clearly identified in the original NAPS as requiring a specific policy response. This is in keeping with the emphasis placed in government policy on targeted spatial responses, e.g. Breaking the Cycle, Local Development, PEACE and URBAN programmes, and urban renewal/regeneration initiatives. An important task at the outset is to clearly define what is meant by the term 'urban disadvantage'. This can have at least three distinct dimensions:

- Urban poverty levels are in line with other geographical areas. Recent research suggests that there is no concentration of poverty in towns and cities. Housing tenure is an important indicator of poverty risk with households in public housing having up to ten times the risk poverty for those in private housing. This division is particularly acute in urban areas, especially Dublin. However the overall level of concentration is limited with 50% of poor households living in public housing. Local authority tenants reflect social class, education and employment factors, and not a distinct 'housing' influence. Lone parents, private rented tenants, homeless, Travellers and refugees and asylum seekers are small population groups at high risk of poverty who live in urban areas.
- Urban (local authority) communities with high concentrations of poverty and experiencing cumulative disadvantage, face additional communal problems such as inadequate services, problems of social

disorder and crime, limited involvement in decision-making and the negative effects of media labelling and public stigma.

- Urban disadvantaged areas experience economic and environmental decline, due to collapse of traditional industry or lack of investment in the physical/housing infrastructure (e.g. docklands, inner city areas and suburbs such as Ballymun. The environment in which people live, including the quality of housing management, is a contributory factor to disadvantage. Urban renewal initiatives have sought to redress this but the weak linkage between economic and infrastructural improvements and the quality of life for local residents has hindered their impact.

Each of these dimensions of urban disadvantage requires a different policy response. An analysis of urban disadvantage that does not take account of these dimensions is flawed. This is the case for the background paper prepared for the NAPS Urban Disadvantage working group which essentially only emphasises urban disadvantage as a population group, with only a single reference to the problems of disadvantaged urban communities or decline in the built environment of urban areas.

In addition, it is important to clarify the definition of urban (and by extension rural) areas. A standard census definition of urban would be towns above 1,500.

**Table 1: Distribution of population by location**

Dublin	26.3%
Other cities	10.0%
Towns > 10,000	10.5%
Towns between 1,500 and 10,000	11.4%
Other (rural)	41.9%

### Key cross-cutting policy issues in tackling urban disadvantage

There are five key policy areas that directly impact on urban disadvantage:

- *Regional development*  
The ad hoc and unbalanced nature of economic and social development is reflected in the uneven distribution of economic activity and population. The proposed national spatial strategy should therefore have as a key theme a commitment to balanced regional and urban development.
- *Urban planning*  
Large parts of urban Ireland suffer from economic and environmental decline. Recent policy initiatives include the urban renewal scheme and special projects (e.g. Temple Bar, Docklands and Ballymun). These should have an explicit commitment to develop the economic and physical infrastructure.
- *Housing policy*  
The segregated provision and poor management of social housing is a major contributor to the problems of disadvantaged urban communities.
- *Co-ordination and delivery of public services*  
The provision of public, private and voluntary services has a crucial

bearing on the quality of life in urban areas. Issues such as access, delivery, integration and cost need to be considered.

- *Development of sustainable neighbourhoods/communities*  
Government policy does not give adequate attention to the development of sustainable neighbourhoods. A key element of this is the lack of local decision-making. Another is the absence of a neighbourhood-planning framework in public policy.

A new urban policy framework is needed therefore to prevent the generation of urban poverty.

### Policy priorities for tackling urban disadvantage

Short-term measures to address urban disadvantage are also needed as follows:

- *Targeted investment in run-down urban areas*  
policy instruments: urban renewal scheme, community reinvestment initiative, social housing, URBAN, city development strategies, social economy programme, advanced factories initiative, city enterprise boards, public sector initiative (new)

- *Enhanced delivery of services (public and private)*  
policy instruments: RAPID, local development programme, equal opportunities childcare programme, educational schemes (e.g. Breaking the Cycle), youth diversion programme, family resource centres, labour market programmes, Springboard, sports partnerships, early childhood education.

- *Strengthened neighbourhood structures*  
policy instruments: community development support programme, tenant participation, community health initiatives, home-school-community liaison scheme, community information points, crime prevention initiatives.

### Indicators and targets for urban disadvantage

#### Indicators

- General poverty rate in urban areas and public housing
- Concentration of poverty in specific localities
- 'Quality of life' in disadvantaged urban areas
- Access to services
- Level of community involvement

#### Targets

Global poverty reduction targets should be applied for urban areas and public housing.

Greater investment in rundown urban areas

Improved delivery of public services

Improved quality of life in poor neighbourhoods.

# Children, Women, Older People, Minority Ethnic Groups and People with Disabilities

## Introduction

The Programme for Partnership and Prosperity commits the National Anti-Poverty Strategy review to consider children, women and older people as cross-cutting issues and to consider emerging causes of poverty e.g. racism. This section of our submission sets out proposals in each of these areas. It also recommends that people with disabilities be included as a new theme under the NAPS review.

Child poverty is a strategic objective for the Agency and our submissions to the NAPS review process give particular attention to this issue. In our current Strategic Plan the Agency has published research on child poverty, supported a programme on educational disadvantage and supported a collaborative public education and policy programme called the *Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty Initiative*. The Initiative has made a separate submission to the NAPS review process.

## Child poverty

The latest data (1998) suggests that one in eight Irish children experienced severe or 'consistent' poverty in 1998, that is lived in households below 60% of average household disposable income and were deprived of basic commodities and opportunities. Twenty three per cent Irish children lived in households below half average income in 1998. Children carry a greater risk – up to 1.25 times greater – of being in poverty than adults. More than half the children 'consistently poor' in 1997 were in households headed by an unemployed person and children of lone parents and children in larger families (3+ children are more likely to experience poverty).

Ireland has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the EU. In a league table of child poverty published in 2000 Ireland has the sixth highest percentage of children living in income poverty amongst 22 OECD countries. Many children and young people

experience multiple forms of disadvantage and discrimination such as children with disabilities, homeless children and young people, Traveller children and young people and children.

## Children's rights

The Combat Poverty Agency endorses the adoption of a children's rights approach in a revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy, recognition of our responsibilities under the United Nation (UN) Convention on the Rights of a Child. This was signed and ratified by the Irish government in 1992. The Convention provides an internationally agreed framework of minimum standards necessary for the well-being of every child. In 1998, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that child poverty in Ireland was undermining the fundamental right of children including their access to education, housing and health services. The Agency also strongly supports the view that NAPS should advance a

vision that all children living in Ireland should have a standard of living sufficient to guarantee their well being

and the full development of their capacities.

### **Targets**

Targets relevant to each thematic group and children are listed as appropriate in the relevant section of this Supplement. The Agency proposes a global target for child poverty as follows:

#### **1. Introduce a child poverty reduction target aimed at eliminating all forms of child poverty by 2012.**

The child poverty target should encompass three components:

- **By 2002 establish a national standard for an adequate income for children that ensures that every child has a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, and social development.**
- **By 2004 no child should live in a household experiencing consistent poverty – this means that no child should live in a household below 50% average income and experiencing basic deprivation.**
- **By 2007 the numbers of children living in households in income poverty (below the 50% relative income poverty line) should be reduced by 50%.**

Each NAPS Working Group should identify priority actions that will contribute to realising these targets.

### **Cross-cutting priorities for including children in NAPS**

Two cross-cutting priorities relevant to the work of each NAPS Working Group are discussed below.

#### **(i) Non-discrimination**

One of the underlying principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is that children should be protected from discrimination irrespective of the child's social or other status. When poverty interferes with children's health, housing, play, education and enjoyment of a decent standard of living it may be regarded as constituting a form of discrimination. Further, discrimination based on social characteristics such as age, ethnicity, disability, gender and sexual orientation can also lead to poverty.

- The NAPS Working Groups and the NAPS Review should enshrine a commitment to ensuring that the use of resources, access to them or the results achieved by them or not unjustifiably discriminatory towards children. This should requirement should particularly apply to children in poverty or children who experience disadvantage and discrimination, especially homeless children, children with disabilities, Traveller children, children of ethnic minorities, particularly children of refugees and asylum seekers.

#### **(ii) Information and participation**

In modern society information is essential for the individual to participate actively in society. This is particularly important if the goal in the National Children's Strategy (p.14 Executive Summary) to give children a voice in matters which affect them is to be realised in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

- The Agency proposes that the NAPS Working Groups and the NAPS Review should communicate, in appropriate formats and to all children, its work on child poverty.

The Agency particularly supports the objects in the Children's Strategy for the establishment of new mechanisms in the public sector to achieve participation by children in matters, which affects them. The Children's Strategy also asserts that additional resources and supports will enable marginalised children to participate equally.

- The Agency proposes that the NAPS Working Group and the NAPS Review should devise and implement appropriate mechanisms for consultation with children and for ongoing participation of children in policy-making relating to child poverty. In particular, marginalised children should be supported to participate equally in these processes.



## Women

Data from the Living in Ireland Survey (1994 and 1997) confirms that women are at greater risk of poverty than men. Households headed by someone 'working full time in the home' form the largest income poverty group. This risk of poverty increased from 1994 to 1997 for older people, composed predominantly of women. Lone parents, predominantly women, are also shown to be at high risk of poverty. In general, the increasing poverty risk for female-headed households is accounted for by three factors - social welfare trends, changes to household composition and the economic status of household members. In addition, women are much more likely than men to be working for low levels of pay. In particular women over 35 face a much higher risk of being in low pay.

Adequate income support for lone parent households, the vast majority of which are headed by women, should be a priority for the government. Welfare payments to lone parents should be raised in line with average earnings. Equivalence scales for dependant adults, mainly women should be reviewed in the light of a rights approach to providing an adequate income, research on the higher costs involved and more equitable approaches to income sharing in households. Substantial increases in child benefit as an anti-poverty strategy and a well-monitored national minimum wage would also benefit women dependent on welfare and low paid women. Women's earnings, even

if low, can play a significant role in keeping their households out of poverty.

Paid employment is the most efficient route out of poverty for women, and particularly those heading up households. In this context, it is essential that access to quality employment opportunities be provided for those who wish to take them up. This includes providing access to jobs, training and education, in addition to adequate, affordable and appropriate childcare.

The availability and cost of childcare is a significant barrier to participation by women in the paid labour force. Policy in this area, while facilitating women's paid employment and the financial independence of women should also focus on the alleviation of poverty among children. The provision of quality childcare in disadvantaged communities and universal support for children through substantially increased child benefit is important anti-poverty strategies that require urgent attention.

Because of data gaps, a more complete picture is yet to emerge regarding the causes and nature of women's poverty, the intra-household distribution of income and women's experience of poverty. The development of a programme to enhance data collection relating to women's poverty and specifically to work towards availability of data on women as a feature of all national data should be a priority.

## Targets

1. **Significantly reduce the percentage of poor households headed by women, specifically older women, lone parents and women 'working full time in the home'.**
2. **Significantly reduce the gap in unemployment rates between men and women.**
3. **Significantly increase employment rates for the women and other groups, especially those from ethnic minorities and those with a disability, experiencing labour market exclusion.**
4. **Significantly reduce the number of women on low pay.**
5. **Implement an expansion programme of quality childcare in disadvantaged communities.**
6. **Substantially increase universal support for children through increased child benefit to at least meet the minimum weekly costs of child (estimated at £36 in 2001).**
7. **Ensure the provision of aggregated data for women in all official national statistics.**

Each NAPS Working Group should identify priority actions that will contribute to realising these targets.

## Older people

Evidence from research conducted in 1999 by the ESRI for the National Council on Ageing and Older People (NCAOP) highlight the relatively high risk of poverty and deprivation faced by older people. The incomes of older Irish people tend to be derived from a narrow range of sources e.g. social welfare pensions and occupational pensions. In 1998 four-fifths of older lived on under £200 per week. 80% of rural women live on less than £100 per week. The proportion of elderly

households under half the average income has more than tripled from 12 per cent in 1994 to 42 per cent in 1998. When low income is combined with basic deprivation (called consistent poverty), it emerges that older people's households have lower levels of poverty than non-elderly households. When deprivation levels and living on half-average income are combined, there is an increase in the numbers of older people experiencing poverty.

### Target

1. **Significantly reduce the percentage of poor households headed by older people and specifically older women.**

Each NAPS Working Group should identify priority actions that will contribute to realising this target.

## Minority Ethnic Groups

In general, there is a lack of data on the socio-economic position of ethnic minorities in Ireland. Limited data is available that relates to the Traveller community. There is however an emerging body of evidence that suggests that ethnic minorities in Ireland experience racism and discrimination and that this continues to be a common experience for Travellers. Racism directly limits people's access to and benefit from resource distribution systems and structures and may directly and indirectly contribute to poverty. Ethnic minority groups may experience more difficulty in accessing the labour market and experience higher unemployment levels. This section of our submission briefly raises issues relating Travellers and asylum seekers.

### Travellers

The 1996 Census shows that 10,891 Travellers live in halting sites, encampments, caravans and mobile homes. The number of Travellers living in roadside accommodation has increased from 1,112 families in 1995 to 1,207 families in 1999. Travellers living circumstances and social situation continues to be one of extreme deprivation, poverty and social marginalisation and exclusion. Participation in and outcomes for Travellers' in education, housing and accommodation, health, education and employment continue to remain dramatically poorer compared to the settled population. Infant mortality rates in particular are extremely acute and life expectancy for Traveller men and women much shorter than for settled men and women.

The 1995 Task Force on the Travelling Community sets out a comprehensive agenda for action on meeting the needs of the Travellers. The Task Force report makes recommendations on areas including culture, accommodation, education, health, discrimination and economy. Many of the commitments and targets in this report remain unmet or only partially met. The NAPS review process must integrate and prioritise the achievement of these targets and recommendations in the shortest possible time and with maximum priority, as the report and the commitments therein are now six years old.

### Targets

1. **Increase the participation of Travellers in employment and in full-time education.**
2. **Ensure that Travellers have adequate income and resources to live with dignity.**
3. **Guarantee all Travellers housing and accommodation that is culturally appropriate, adequate, accessible and affordable.**

Each NAPS Working Group should identify culturally sensitive and bias-free priority actions that will contribute to realising these key targets.

### Asylum seekers

Recently arrived asylum seekers are not permitted to work in Ireland, to attend full-time education or to travel. They are required to here at least 12 months and meet other criteria before they can compete for jobs. In relation to access to social welfare, they receive payments differently to others on social welfare through the direct provision of full board accommodation and extremely modest cash allowances per week. Often they are required to live in emergency accommodations such as hostels, B&Bs and guesthouses and are deprived of independence.

These combined circumstances fails to guarantee the basic needs of adults and children who are asylum seekers. They are contrary to the principles of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy that seek to guarantee the rights of minorities, encourage self-reliance through promoting empowerment and ensure equal access to goods and services for all. They self-evidently do not uphold the human dignity of asylum seekers and the directly contribute to the experience of poverty and social exclusion. The review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

### Targets

1. **Increase the participation of asylum seekers in employment and in full-time education.**
2. **Ensure that asylum seekers have adequate income and resources to live with dignity.**

Each NAPS Working Group should identify culturally sensitive and bias-free priority actions that will contribute to realising these targets.

### People with Disabilities

Households headed by a person with a disability have one of the highest risk of poverty, using the consistent poverty measure. The Living in Ireland Survey data for 1998 shows that the risk of poverty for households headed by a disabled or ill person is 28%. Using the relative income poverty measure, at the 50% income poverty line, households headed by a disabled or ill person make up 8% of the poor population.

The Agency strongly supports the view that people with disabilities should be included as a new cross-cutting theme under a revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in its Strategy for Equality (1996) called for specific measures to respond to the needs of people with disabilities to be included in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Commission noted:

*"People with disabilities need income support and assistance with costs relating to their disability for two reasons. Firstly, many of them are not in employment and, therefore, do not have any income from work. Secondly, disability gives rise to extra costs in areas such as equipment, care, travel, telephone, fuel, food, clothing and laundry, hospital and medical expenses, home treatment (e.g. physiotherapy) and home services (e.g. home help)"* (Chapter 6).

The establishment of a Working Group on the Costs of Disability Payment under the Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness is noted here as a welcome development.

### Target

1. **NAPS should establish an overarching target for poverty reduction amongst people with disabilities. The risk of consistent poverty among households headed by a person with a disability should be reduced to below 5% by 2004.**

## Conclusion

This document collates the Agency's submissions to the NAPS review process. It reflects the Agency understanding of poverty as a relative concept. This implies that poverty involves a degree of inequality that excludes some people from what is considered a normal standard of living in society. The proposals in the submission reflect the Agency's belief that poverty is the result of structural faults in society and not the fault of individuals or groups. The recommendations thus focus attention on the distribution of resources and opportunities in society. The Agency also understands poverty as multi-dimensional and this requires that solutions to poverty address people's social, emotional, cultural as well as their material and physical needs.

The Agency's proposals are ambitious, achievable and necessary. We welcome the government approach of linking a new national plan against poverty to the requirement to submit a plan against poverty and social inclusion (NAPinSI) to the European Commission. Both policy statements need to be complementary but they also need to make new commitments.

They need to avoid being a restatement of current commitments and avoid complacency because of what has been achieved to date. A fairer and more just society requires the prevention and elimination of poverty. The prevention and elimination of poverty is fundamental to people enjoying human dignity. This is the challenge for the current public policy focus on developing national anti-poverty plans.

Ireland has been acknowledged within the EU and internationally as having given serious institutional attention to poverty issues. We should aim to continue this leadership role by developing the next phase of our anti-poverty planning in a radical and ambitious way. Our new anti-poverty plans must set out clear agendas, implementation and accountability mechanisms and models of participation to advance the fight against poverty and to meet the challenge of ensuring that we all enjoy human dignity.

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