

Policy Submission

**Submission on the
European Year for Combating Poverty and
Social Exclusion 2010**

April 2009

Combat Poverty Agency Submission on the EU Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010

Through the EU Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010, EU Member States are reaffirming the commitment of the EU to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty.

The EU Year presents an important opportunity to raise awareness about poverty and social exclusion and to show that these problems are not inevitable. The legacy of the year in terms of changes in policy development and implementation or public perceptions of poverty represents an equally important opportunity.

The four guiding principles and objectives of the year are as follows:

- The fundamental right of people in poverty to live in dignity and play a full part in society is recognized
- Public ownership of policies and actions to combat poverty and social exclusion
- Promoting a more cohesive society to ensure sustainable development and solidarity
- Securing commitment and concrete action on poverty and social exclusion

These should inform the planning and implementation of the year's activities and are reflected on and addressed throughout this paper.

This paper sets out to address a number of questions which are the subject of two consultations carried out on behalf of the National Implementation Body by the European Anti-Poverty Network and the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice with anti-poverty groups and people living in (or direct experience of living in) poverty.

How can the Year support the implementation of the NAPinclusion?

By raising awareness about poverty and social exclusion and the policy framework which has been set down to tackle these issues, the EU Year has potential to reinvigorate commitment to implementing the NAPinclusion.

As part of the year, the integrated division, comprising of the OSI and the Combat Poverty Agency should undertake a review of the NAPinclusion structures and should make recommendations to strengthen the effectiveness of these structures, building on work developed by both organizations, for example Combat Poverty's study *Poverty and Social Inclusion: Linking Local and National Structures*. The review should pay attention to the need to develop effective integrated responses to poverty and social exclusion at the local and national levels and to strengthen policy linkages between the local and national levels. As the new division is the key structure responsible for rolling out the NAPinclusion, the Year presents an excellent opportunity for contributing to the agenda and modus operandi for the new division in relation to this role.

As part of the EU Year, groups should be supported to develop plans to contribute to meeting the NAPinclusion goals. Specific opportunities exist, for example the government could make a declaration renewing the government's commitment to fulfil the goals set down in the NAPinclusion.

What might be useful legacies of the Year?

The year should have a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty. The year should have three legacies: a legacy on society, a legacy on Irish social policy and a legacy at European level.

First, the Year should create an awareness among policy-makers and the general public that certain groups in our society are most likely to suffer in the current global economic crisis. There will be increasing levels of poverty due to job losses and cuts in public spending. Concrete steps should be taken at all levels of policy and practice to build solidarity in society and ensure these groups do not experience greater exclusion.

An important legacy for the Year would be prioritizing mainstreaming of social inclusion as a national and European policy objective. Desirable legacies in the national policy arena include the following: The effectiveness of the NAPinclusion structures should be strengthened following on from the review which will be undertaken by the new division. Poverty impact assessment should be recognized

and used by policy-makers as a useful tool at a national and local level. Training on poverty and social inclusion, including poverty impact assessment, should be embedded in the civil service as part of the induction and ongoing training which is available to staff at all levels, from policy makers to front line service deliverers. There should be a continued commitment to funding marginalized groups to participate in decision-making.

The development of mechanisms to support integrated responses to poverty and social exclusion at local level, for example local poverty observatories, should be considered. These observatories would have a role in collecting and monitoring data at local level, as well as coordinating inter-agency responses and supporting the engagement of policy-makers with communities on issues relating to poverty and social exclusion.

Further legacies for the Year may emerge from a formative evaluation of the Year. The development and agreement of national level indicators would an important legacy of the year. A very useful legacy for the year would be a commitment by each of the partners involved in the year to undertake a commitment, which they would not otherwise have undertaken, in the following year. Follow-up activities should be monitored and supported by a cross departmental group, which should include representation from anti-poverty groups, in accordance with the guiding principles and objectives for the year. The proposed advisory group for the new division would be a suitable group to carry out this role.

At a European level, a desirable legacy for the year would be a new European Union Anti-Poverty Programme. The focus of this programme could be to support a rights based approach to combat poverty and social exclusion, as recognized in the guiding principles and objectives for the year. Both groups working on the ground and the policy-makers engaging with them will require further support to ensure that this approach is embedded as a reality, rather than given notional status.

How should people experiencing poverty be involved in the Year?

People experiencing poverty should be involved in the decision-making around all planning and activities of the year. People experiencing poverty and groups

representing them should be adequately represented on both the Advisory Group for the year and the thematic subgroups of the Advisory Committee. Steps should be taken to ensure that their opinions are given due weight in these fora. Given that the right of everyone to play a full part in society is a guiding principle for the year, a significant proportion of the budget for the year should be spent on ensuring that people experiencing poverty are supported to contribute to the year and its legacy.

What/who should the key messages/audiences for the Year?

Key Audiences:

People experiencing poverty are a key audience for the year. They should be empowered through the correction of stereotypes and a firm governmental commitment to combat poverty and social exclusion.

There should be a balance between public and policy activity throughout the year. While key messages about poverty should be directed at the wider public with the aim of securing a shift in public attitudes about poverty issues which will support policy activity in this area, decision-makers should be targeted with the aim of securing the prioritization and implementation of existing anti-poverty goals within the national policy framework. Given the role of the social partners in developing and supporting the implementation of policy in this area, the social partners should be a key audience for the year.

As envisaged in the guiding principles for the year, organizations and sectors not usually engaged in these issues should be targeted. Particular care should be taken to ensure that new communities are targeted as a key audience, given the increased risk of racism in an economic downturn.

Innovative means of communication, such as community arts and sports should be used to engage people who do not normally engage with these issues.

Young people should learn about the issues and the ways the policies which aim to tackle them through the formal education system and projects aimed at young people, such as Gaisce and Young Social Innovators. While recognizing that the development of resources for use in the formal sector can be very costly and time

consuming, the sector can be used nevertheless to engage young people by publicizing new media initiatives directly.

Key Messages:

Key messages for the year should include the following:

- Poverty is a reality in modern Ireland
- It makes economic sense to tackle poverty
- Effective services are services which meet the needs of everyone, particularly those at risk of poverty and social exclusion
- People have a right to an adequate standard of living and to actively take part in society
- There is a need for society to ensure that the most vulnerable are protected in the context of an economic downturn. A society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members
- The importance of promoting strong communities as a response to poverty
- The importance of promoting society as a community, with an obligation to care for its more vulnerable members

What might be key activities to be undertaken in the Year?

1. Public Awareness

As regards public communications strategy, there should be a focus on engaging with local communities and communities of interest through existing infrastructure, rather than expensive national advertising campaigns. Previous experience has shown this method of engagement to be more cost effective. It would be useful to use existing activities and events to raise awareness of the Year's objectives. Examples of existing opportunities include local authority social inclusion weeks, the social inclusion forum, the Gaisce award and the Young Social Innovators and

The Year should have a clear and consistent communication strategy. This should include awareness raising about the guiding principles and objectives of the year and information about the way the year is prepared and run.

The year should include a good mix of activities aimed at local and national levels. The programme of activities for the year should be complementary and reinforcing rather than individual. It should seek to ensure maximum coverage and impact by targeting a diverse range of audiences at local and national level.

Innovative and creative methods, particularly community arts, should be used to engage the general public in the year. The use of innovative public education tools such as graffiti and murals and new communication methods, including social networking sites should be explored. Festival organizers should be approached to see if they were willing to host a festival within a festival on a theme related to the year. Preliminary and informal consultations with young people suggest that a younger group of teenagers, aged 12 – 15, may be interested in more traditional approaches such as designing posters.

The potential of libraries as a site for exploration of these issues should be fully explored. The fact that there is a national network of libraries and they have a considerable track record in promoting social inclusion means that libraries constitute a considerable asset for the Year. Interesting projects might involve book festivals, creative writing workshops, workshops aimed at children and young people and workshops involving new technologies. Particular attention should also be paid to engage with youth clubs and youth development programmes to engage young people in the Year.

Given the increase in people participating in team sports, rather than individual sports is a common feature of an economic downturn, particular attention should be paid to engaging with local sports partnerships as a means of raising awareness about poverty and social exclusion. The impact of sports organizations engaging in anti-racism initiatives demonstrates the value of this type of engagement. Organisations such as the GAA, the FAI and the Irish Amateur Boxing Association could be approached to become sponsors or official supporters of the year.

Corporate donors should be approached to become sponsors of the year. Also, as part of the year corporate social responsibility should be encouraged, incentivised and mentored.

The guiding principles for the year should be taken into account when activities are being organised. Therefore, for example, social care costs should be made available so that carers can actively participate in meetings.

2. Policy making

The year provides the impetus for a range of activities from a programme to support policy-makers to engage with people experiencing poverty and groups who represents to a review of existing *NAPinclusion* structures.

Pilot initiatives to support the development of poverty impact assessment as an active tool for policy making should be rolled out at national and local levels. In accordance with the guiding principles of the year and as required in order to make poverty impact assessment real and effective, anti-poverty groups should be supported to engage with the public officials undertaking the poverty impact assessment so that their expertise can feed into policy-making.

A series of events should be aimed at policy-makers at the national level, for example, a regular lunchtime seminar series exploring the priorities and challenges identified in Ireland's national report on social protection and social inclusion strategies. Another series could focus on technical and implementation issues relevant to the rollout of the *NAPinclusion*. Key technical issues include data, poverty indicators and poverty impact assessment and relevant implementation issues include the development of action plans to tackle poverty and social exclusion, engagement with communities and monitoring and evaluating the impact of policy.

There could also be a series of local and regional events on similar issues. These events could include a focus on promoting good practice, which has been developed by a particular government department, local authority or community.

In recognition of the important role of the social partners, they should be invited to attend these events or a series of events should be targeted at them specifically as an audience.

The Year should include an opportunity to strengthen Irish involvement in and learning from EU efforts on poverty and social exclusion. These learning opportunities should be afforded to people working across government departments, the social partners and communities working on the ground. A national conference would constitute an ideal opportunity to explore good practice from across the European Union.

3. Direct Funding

Direct funding should be made available to support other groups and organizations to engage in the year. This approach will ensure the maximum coverage and impact. It also meets the aim of the third objective for the year, to create ownership of the issue across the wider society.

The funding scheme for the year should have two strands: one strand should be aimed at groups working directly with poverty issues and another should be directed should incentivise groups not normally engaged with the issues to incorporate an anti-poverty focus in their work. Possible recipients under the second strand include community fora, churches, schools, sports organizations and youth organizations.

What would be indicators that the Year was a success?

Indicators to measure the success of the year should be set at the beginning of the year. These indicators should be set in consultation with people who are affected by poverty and social exclusion. There should be process indicators, as well as outcome and output indicators. In accordance with best practice, these indicators should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timebound. The indicators should relate to the EU objectives and guiding principles and national objectives for the year, in addition to the proposed legacy for the year. It would be very valuable to engage a formative evaluator to monitor and advise on the implementation of the year. In addition to measuring the success of the year, this evaluation can inform future policy-making by capturing the learnings from the year.