Review of the
National Anti-Poverty Strategy

Framework Document

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Appendices

1 Introduction

1.1 Defining Poverty

Within the context of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, the following definition of poverty has been agreed:

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living, which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources, people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities, which are considered the norm for other people in society.

1.2 Background

Ireland's economic progress in the 1990s was outstanding. Between 1994 and 2000, Gross National Product grew by an average of 8.3 per cent in real terms and unemployment fell from 14.7 per cent to 3.9 per cent. These developments brought significant improvements to living standards to the benefit of all groups in society, including those in poverty. During the period 1994-1998, the proportion of the population in consistent poverty fell from 15.1 per cent to 8.2 per cent. In practical terms, this meant that the number of people unable to afford an acceptable standard of living in areas such as food and clothing has reduced very significantly.

Despite these advances, tackling poverty and social exclusion remains one of the major challenges facing Irish society. Government is committed to building on what has been achieved to date, so as to move to a new phase in the development of a more inclusive society. This commitment is reflected not only in the establishment in 1997 of a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), but also in the emphasis in the National Development Plan (NDP) and the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) on measures aimed at promoting social inclusion.

The PPF includes a commitment on the part of Government to progressively introduce social inclusion measures with a total cost in the year 2003 of £1.5/€1.9 billion. The Programme also provided for a review of NAPS to be undertaken as follows:

"In consultation with the relevant actors, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy will be updated, the underlying methodology reviewed, the existing targets reviewed and revised where appropriate, and possible new targets will be considered in consultation with the social partners, under the themes of child poverty, women's poverty, health, older people and housing/accommodation."

The PPF also states that the *"NAPS analysis will be updated to include emerging causes of poverty (e.g. racism).*"

The European Union has asked each Member State to prepare a national action plan (NAPincl) to combat poverty and social exclusion. The Government submitted its plan in June 2001. The NAPincl 2001 focussed on a number of themes that are relevant to NAPS. These comprise measures to:

- Facilitate participation in employment and access to resources, rights, goods and services for all;

- Prevent the risks of exclusion;

- Help the most vulnerable; and

- To mobilise all relevant bodies.

These themes have been taken up by the NAPS Working Groups as appropriate, and a range of measures have been discussed, as will be outlined below. It should be noted that the NAPS and NAPincl processes will merge and that future plans submitted to the European Union will be consistent with the revised NAPS.

This report outlines the manner in which these provisions to review the NAPS process were addressed, together with the outcome of that review. The structure and content of NAPS is set out in Section 2, and progress to date in implementing the Strategy is outlined. This is followed in Section 3 by consideration of challenges and future priorities. Section 4 addresses the first NAPincl objective of facilitating participation in employment and access to resources, rights, goods and services for all. Section 5 considers the second NAPincl objective of preventing the risks of exclusion. Section 6 considers the NAPincl objective of helping the most vulnerable. Women, children, Travellers, older people, people with disabilities and ethnic minorities are considered, as well as disadvantaged urban and rural dwellers. Section 7 focuses on the administrative and institutional arrangements for mobilising all relevant bodies to implement NAPS.

1.3 The Review Process

Following the initial deliberations of the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee and the Cabinet Sub-Committee, a meeting was held with the social partners in July 2000 to agree the review process. It was agreed that the issues to be examined as part of the review should be considered initially by a number of working groups. Subsequently, working groups were established under six themes as follows

- Educational disadvantage;

- Health;

- Housing and accommodation;

- Employment and unemployment;

- Rural poverty; and

- Urban disadvantage.

Part of the work of these groups was to identify a range of possible future targets for their thematic areas, and to suggest policy approaches in order to achieve these targets.

Under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, a working group, known as the Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Group, was established to examine the issues associated with the benchmarking and uprating or indexation of adult and child social welfare payments. An Income Adequacy Working Group was also convened to consider issues relating to income adequacy issues generally. At the same time, as a contribution to the NAPS process, the National Economic and Social Council has also conducted a review of the poverty proofing process.

Each of the six thematic groups was comprised of officials from relevant Departments and agencies and representatives of the social partners. The working groups invited submissions from interested parties via a public notice. When the work of the groups was well advanced, each lead Department hosted a thematic consultation seminar in May/June 2001 to discuss their preliminary findings. These seminars were open to the public and were attended largely by those who had made submissions. After

these seminars, each working group prepared a report summarising its proposals in relation to possible targets. A seminar on " Setting Targets in NAPS" was convened by the Combat Poverty agency and the Community and Voluntary Pillar and focussed on the cross-cutting issues in NAPS.

Based on these reports, a draft revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy Framework Document was prepared. This was considered by a Steering Group comprising Departmental officials and the social partners and was refined in the light of the views of the Steering Group. Finally, a National Consultative Seminar was held to provide further feedback to the Steering Group, prior to submission to Government of the final National Anti-Poverty Framework Document.

2. Review of Progress within NAPS

2.1 Main Features of NAPS

Following the United Nations World Summit in Copenhagen in 1995, the Government committed itself to the development of an Irish Anti-Poverty Strategy. In April 1997, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, "*Sharing in Progress*", was published, and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs was given a lead role in its implementation.

The NAPS set a ten-year target for poverty reduction in Ireland and examined poverty issues within five key themes. These were:

- Income Adequacy;

- Unemployment;

- Educational Disadvantage;

- Rural Poverty; and

- Disadvantaged Urban Areas.

One of the most important features of the NAPS was that it established specific targets for poverty reduction. Six targets were set, including a global target for poverty reduction and a target for each of the five themes identified above. Ireland was the first EU country to formally adopt an official global poverty target.

In developing NAPS, a number of principles were adopted that underpin the overall strategy. These principles are:

- Ensuring equal access and encouraging participation for all;

- Guaranteeing the rights of minorities, especially through anti-discrimination measures;

- The reduction of inequalities and, in particular, addressing the gender dimensions of poverty;

- The development of the partnership approach, building on national and local partnership processes;

- Actively involving the social partners;

- Encouraging self-reliance through respecting individual dignity and promoting empowerment; and

- Engaging in appropriate consultative processes, especially with users of services.

These principles remain relevant to the further development of the NAPS.

The need for strong institutional measures to support NAPS was recognised at the outset. At the political level, a Cabinet Committee to deal with issues of poverty and social exclusion was established. This Committee is chaired by the Taoiseach, and includes all Ministers whose brief includes policy areas relevant to tackling poverty. The Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs was given responsibility for day

to day political oversight of the strategy. Individual Ministers have responsibility for areas under their remit.

At the administrative level, the NAPS Inter-Departmental Policy Committee, jointly chaired by the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, and which was instrumental in the development of the NAPS, was to remain in place.

An SMI team (NAPS Unit), based in the Department of Social, Community and Family affairs was to be established, which would be complemented at central level by the then existing support structure within the Department of the Taoiseach.

It was also envisaged that, drawing on the Department of Environment and Local Government report " Better Local Government – A Programme for Change", social inclusion and equality of opportunity would be fostered through a renewed system of local government.

In relation to monitoring and evaluation, the National Economic and Social Forum, which already had responsibility for monitoring the social inclusion element of Partnership 2000, was asked to report on progress in implementing the NAPS. The Combat Poverty Agency was to oversee an evaluation of the NAPS process, which would include the views of the voluntary and community sector. The Agency was also to advise Government Departments and local and regional structures on the development of anti-poverty strategies.

The NAPS statement stressed the importance of consultation with, and involvement of, the social partners, users of services, and those with a first-hand experience of poverty. In particular, it was envisaged that the social partners would have an ongoing role in relation to monitoring of the Strategy, in the context of arrangements for monitoring Partnership 2000. To this end, government funding for the National Anti-Poverty Networks was to be continued.

2.2   Progress

2.2.1   NAPS Targets

The Global Target for Poverty Reduction

The overall target for poverty reduction was aimed at a "reduction in the percentage of the population…. identified as 'consistently poor' from 9 to 15 per cent to less than 5 to 10 per cent over the period 1997-2007". A person is said to be in consistent poverty when he or she has both a low relative income and experiences enforced basic deprivation measured through a list of eight indicators.

In meeting this commitment, all social welfare payments were to be increased to the minimum of the lower range recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare, in line with the commitment set out in Partnership 2000 to achieve these rates by 1999.

By 1999, it became apparent that the original global target of 5 to 10 per cent in consistent poverty was virtually achieved. As a result, a new target of reducing the proportion of the population in consistent poverty below 5 per cent by 2004 was set. A recent Economic and Social Research Institute analysis has concluded that this "revised target appears eminently achievable given the rate of progress between 1994 and 1998." [1]

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[1] The Changing Face of Poverty in Ireland – Background Paper for the NAPS Review. R. Layte et al. ESRI June 2001.

This indicates that real progress has been made in achieving the global poverty reduction target.

Income Adequacy

<u>Social Welfare Rates</u>
Increases in social welfare rates have been a contributory factor in this process. A specific target of both the NAPS and Partnership 2000 (the previous national agreement) was that the minimum rates of payment recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare (CSW) would be achieved before the end of 1999. The increases announced in the 1999 Budget mean that this key target was met, with rates of payment in 1999 ranging from 101 per cent to 124 per cent of the minimum rate recommended by the CSW.

Building on the achievement of this target, the PPF commits the Government to maintain and, where possible, enhance the real value of social welfare increases, and in particular, to substantial progress towards a target of £100/€127 per week for the lowest rates of social welfare. Substantial increases in Child Benefit over the period of the programme are also envisaged, with a priority focus towards £100/ €127 per month for the third and subsequent children.

Budget 2001 (announced in December 2000) made real progress towards these objectives and provided for significant expenditure in respect of a range of social welfare measures with a full year cost of £850/€1,079 million compared to £403.38/€512.19 million in the previous year. In conjunction with taxation reforms, some of which will benefit those on lower earnings, Budget 2001 should have a significant impact on those experiencing poverty.

In general, personal social welfare payments were increased from the beginning of April 2001. With the exception of Old Age Pensions, personal welfare payments were increased by £8/€10.20 or approximately 7.9 per cent to 10.3 per cent in relation to insurance-based payments and 9.9 per cent to 10.5% per week in relation to assistance payments. Rates for old age and related pensions were increased by £10/€12.70 per week, or between 10.4 per cent and 11.7 per cent, while rates for Widow/er's (Contributory) increased by £12.90/€16.40, or between 13.7 per cent and 14.5 per cent.

<u>Child Income Support</u>
Budget 2001 provided for very substantial increases in Child Benefit. The lower rate, paid in respect of the first and second child, was increased by £25/€31.74 per month or 59 per cent, while the higher rate, paid in respect of the third and subsequent children, was increased by £30/€38.09 per month or 54 per cent. These increases bring the lower rate of Child Benefit to £67.50/€85.71 and the higher rate to £86/€109.20 per month.

<u>Pensions</u>
With regard to pensions, the PPF and the Action Programme for the Millennium provided that all old age pensions would be increased to £100/€127 per week by 2002. The Government made a commitment that over the period to 2002, all old age pensions would be increased in line with average industrial earnings. The current rate of the Old Age Non-Contributory Pension is £95.50/€121.25 per week, while the Old Age Contributory Pension is £106/€134.59 per week.

Under the PPF, government is committed to improvements in the coverage rate of occupational pensions. A key feature of the Pensions (Amendment) Bill is the provision of a legislative framework for the introduction of a new savings vehicle, the Personal Retirement Savings Account (PRSA). The PRSA will be a low cost, easy access, and long term personal investment account, designed to allow people to save for retirement in a flexible manner. It will complement the Social Welfare Pension.

<u>Taxation and PRSI</u>
Budget 1999 introduced standard rating of all personal allowances, representing the first step in the move to a system of tax credits. The move to a tax credit system was completed in Budget 2001. Tax credits are more equitable as the value of a tax credit is the same for all taxpayers regardless of their level of income. A Working Group has been established under the PPF to examine the issue of Refundable Tax Credits.

The PPF also stated that it was an agreed policy objective of the Government and the social partners that, over time, all those earning the minimum wage would be removed from the tax net.

Over the course of the last four Budgets, personal tax allowances / tax credits have been increased from £2,900/€3,682.24 single and £5,800/€7,364.48 married to £5,500/€6,983.56 single and £11,000/13,967.12 married at the standard rate. Over the same period the PAYE allowance / Employee tax credit has been increased from £800/€1,015.79 to £2,000/€2,539.48 at the standard rate. As a result, a single PAYE worker pays no tax on the first £144/€182.84 of weekly income compared with £71/€90.15 in 1997. Married one earner couples pay no income tax on the first £308/€391.08 of weekly income compared with £127/€161.26 in 1997 and married two earners pay no income tax on the first £288/€365.68 of weekly income compared with £142/€180.30 in 1997. Over the last four years, over 300,000 taxpayers have been removed from the tax net.

The Employee PRSI-free allowance was increased from £80/€101.60 per week in 1996 to £100/€127 currently while the PRSI exemption limit has been increased substantially to £226/€286.96 per week.

Unemployment

The overall target for unemployment was " to reduce the rate of unemployment, as measured on an internationally standardised basis (ILO) by the Labour Force Survey, from 11.9 per cent in April, 1996 to 6 per cent by 2007; and to reduce the rate of long term unemployment from 7 per cent to 3.5 per cent ". Progress in meeting these unemployment targets proved exceptional, and revised targets were subsequently set to reduce unemployment below 5 per cent and long term unemployment to 2 per cent by 2000. These revised targets were fully achieved by mid-2000. By the first quarter of 2001, unemployment had fallen to 3.7 per cent, and long term unemployment to 1.2 per cent. This achievement is all the more impressive, given the substantial growth in the labour force over the period. In simple terms, the number of unemployed people fell from 177,600 in April 1996 to 65,600 in the first quarter of 2001, while the labour force increased from 1,494,000 to 1,776,000 over the same period.

A number of policy actions were proposed to reduce unemployment. Apart from macro-economic policies aimed at increasing employment, specific measures centred on:

• The enhanced provision of training supports for the unemployed;

• A reduction in the barriers facing the unemployed, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups; and

• Ensuring that the unemployed have sufficient incentive to take up jobs through, inter alia, improving the financial return from working for low paid workers.

Measures to prevent a drift into long-term unemployment, especially by younger people, must be seen in the broader context of the National Employment Action Plan

(EAP), which is part of a wider European Community approach to employment and social inclusion. The four pillars of the EAP relate to Employability, Entrepreneurship, Adaptability and Equality between men and women.

The EAP is focused on a preventative strategy aimed at ensuring that people do not simply drift into long-term unemployment in the absence of an early, structured intervention by the Public Employment Service. It incorporates a wider approach, including proposals for life-long learning and training that should address the need for continued education and re-skilling to prevent skills obsolescence, and the related higher risk of unemployment.

The target groups are those people under 25 who are six months unemployed and adults before they reach 12 months of unemployment. The measures taken to assist both groups are training, retraining, work practice, a job, individual vocational guidance and other employability measures. Outcomes to date have been very positive: total referrals at end of March, 2001 were 49,416, of which 34,113 (including those who did not attend for interview) signed off, representing a 69 per cent sign-off rate.

In 1999, 11,000 new places were provided on active labour market programmes together with the establishment of dedicated Social Economy Programme to support locally based initiatives.

The enactment of the Employment Equality Act which came into force in 1999 and the establishment of the Equality Authority will make a significant contribution to facilitating equal access for all to employment opportunities.

The National Minimum Wage was introduced in April 2000. This is benefiting low paid workers, particularly women and young people. Fundamental reform of the tax system has also taken place, with the implementation of tax individualisation and tax credit systems. The standard tax band has been widened considerably to the benefit of low earners. Over the last four years, over 300,000 people have been removed from the tax net.

These initiatives have contributed significantly to improving the incentive to work and ensuring that the remuneration of low paid workers is improved.

Education

The overall objective was to ensure that children, men and women living in poverty are able to gain access, participate in and benefit from education of sufficient quality to allow them to move out of poverty, and to prevent others from becoming poor.

The overall target was to eliminate early school leaving before the Junior Certificate, and reduce early school leaving so as to increase the percentage completing the senior cycle to at least 90 per cent by the year 2000 and 98 per cent by the year 2007. It was also the aim that, having regard to their intrinsic abilities, that there would be no students with serious literacy and numeracy problems in early primary education within the next five years.

Since the target was set, the number of early school leavers before the Junior Certificate has remained largely unchanged at around 3.5 per cent. The overall retention rate to upper second level has increased only marginally to 81 per cent, although this represents a significant increase over 1980 retention rate of 60 per cent.

One of the reasons why the target was not achieved is that it does not take account of school leavers who entered legitimate education and training programmes such as apprenticeships, Youthreach, and other further education programmes. In retrospect,

it is evident that the target set failed to adequately reflect the legitimacy of interventions outside the mainstream school setting.

With regard to literacy and numeracy, the most recent survey of reading achievement of pupils in fifth class indicates that there has been no significant change in reading standards over the past twenty years.

The NAPS included a number of strategies identified as necessary in order to achieve the overall objective and target.

Significant achievements in relation to these strategies include the following:

<u>Pre-school Education</u>

The major development in the 1997-2000 period in pre-school education was the publication of the White Paper on early childhood education "Ready to Learn" published in December 1999 which sets out proposed policy actions.

<u>Preventing Educational Disadvantage and Early School Leaving</u>

Major preventive strategies and programmes have been introduced in the 1997-2000 period to promote and facilitate the retention of young people in the education system, to completion of upper level senior cycle. These include the Home/School Community Liaison and the development and expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service.

<u>Literacy and Numeracy in Schools</u>

The key developments in the 1997-2001 period have included the expansion of the Remedial (Learning Support) service and Home School Community Liaison Service, the development of new Learning Support Guidelines, the establishment of the National Educational Psychological Service, the Educational Welfare Board and the National Reading Initiative 2000.

<u>Travellers and Education</u>

Significant advances have been made in relation to improving the level of resources for Traveller education in the 1997-2000 period. A range of initiatives has been taken including the provision of capitation grants for schools educating Traveller children and increased resource teacher inputs.

<u>Special Educational Needs</u>

In November 1998, the Government announced a major initiative for integrated education for children with special needs. This initiative provided the first ever automatic supports for many children with disabilities. The measures extend right across the entire spectrum of special needs and have delivered extra teaching and childcare services to special needs children, whether in groups or in individual isolated settings.

<u>Lifelong Learning</u>

The most significant policy developments during this period were the publication of a Green Paper on Adult Education in 1998, and the launch of the White Paper on Adult Education: Learning for Life in August 2000 following an extensive consultation process. The White Paper sets out a range of recommendations to promote and

expand access to adult education in the context of a continuum of educational opportunities on a lifelong basis.

Urban Poverty

The overall objective in relation to urban disadvantage was to bring about sustained social and economic development in disadvantaged areas through empowering people living in these areas to become effective citizens, improving the quality of their lives, helping them acquire the skills and education necessary to gain employment and providing them with employment opportunities.

The sub-themes in this area were:

- Developing the partnership approach to local development;

- Housing and Accommodation;

- Urban Renewal;

- Community Development;

- Drugs; and

- Integration of state services.

Partnership

Thirty-eight Area Based Partnerships and 33 community groups are supported by significant funding under the Local Development Measure of the Social Inclusion Programme of the Regional Operational Programmes. These Partnerships and community groups have adopted a partnership approach to tackling local issues based on integrated local action plans.

The RAPID Programme, which was launched early in 2001, is a major initiative aimed to target the 25 most disadvantaged urban areas for investment under the NDP. Separate strands of the initiative, known as RAPID II and CLÁR, will target provincial towns and rural areas respectively.

The Community Development Programme, which provides support to locally based groups involved in identifying and addressing poverty and social exclusion in their own communities, continues to be expanded.

Housing and Accommodation

The scale of local authority house building has been increased. The multi-annual housing programme now provides for 25,000 local authority houses over the period 2000- 2003. The terms and conditions of the Affordable Housing and Shared Ownership Schemes have been improved.

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act was enacted in July 1998. This imposes a statutory obligation on local authorities in relation to the provision of accommodation for Travellers.

The Government has decided in principle to establish new rental assistance arrangements. It is proposed to develop a local authority based scheme to address the housing needs of a large proportion of households currently assisted through rent supplementation under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.

The Government's Integrated Strategy on Homelessness was launched in May 2000. Three-year action plans are being prepared setting out how accommodation, health, settlement and welfare services will be provided to homeless persons.

Urban Renewal

A new Urban Renewal Programme was established in 1999. Forty-nine integrated area plans have been approved under the scheme, and a number of tax incentives are being introduced.

Drugs

Since 1997, fourteen Local Drugs Task Forces have been set up in areas experiencing the highest level of drug misuse, particularly heroin misuse. Action Plans for these areas are in place and Government is providing resources to support them. A new National Drugs Strategy (2001-2008) was launched in 2001. The new Strategy sets a number of objectives and key performance indicators around the four pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment and research with specific targets that Departments and agencies will have to meet. These are supported by a series of 100 individual actions to be implemented by Departments and Agencies either individually or in partnership with each other.

Integration of State Services

A number of key initiatives have been introduced to develop a more co-ordinated response to the needs of communities with the greatest level of disadvantage. The Integrated Services Process was concerned with improving the co-ordination and targeting of State service provision. This has resulted in tangible benefits for the communities concerned and a significant improvement in services provided by State agencies. County and City Development Boards were established with responsibility for bringing about a more integrated approach to the delivery of public and local services at local level, with a particular emphasis on combating social exclusion.

The Family Services Pilot Projects, which are underway in three urban areas, following the recommendations of the Commission on the Family Report, are aimed at providing enhanced information services for families through the development of the one-stop-shop and case management approach.

The Springboard project of intensive family supports targeted at young people at risk are already in place in a number of areas.

Rural Poverty

The overall objective with regard to rural poverty is to tackle poverty and social exclusion in a comprehensive and sustained manner by ensuring the provision of an adequate income, through employment and or income support, and access to adequate services and infrastructure, co-ordination of responses and empowerment of local people and communities.

The key policy actions under Rural Poverty are in relation to the following:

- A renewal of the local government system;

- Access to services;

- Promotion of rural development; and

- Community development.

The principal developments in relation to this objective have been as follows:

The White Paper on Rural Development, which was launched in 1999, represents a comprehensive approach to the development of rural areas. It seeks to facilitate the capacity of rural communities to participate in and contribute to their own development and to address the issues of rural poverty and social exclusion. The establishment of a National Rural Development Forum is one of the key institutional mechanisms to emerge from the White Paper.

Under the Community Development Support Programmes (CDSPs), operated by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, support is provided on a three-year renewable contract basis to locally-based groups involved in identifying and addressing poverty and social exclusion in their own communities. The CDSPs include the following three programmes:

- Community Development Programme: under the Community Development Programme some 130 projects/areas countrywide are in receipt of funding or have been approved for inclusion in the programme. Expansion of the programme continued in 2000 in line with commitments set out in Partnership 2000.

- Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme: some 70 projects or areas country-wide were in receipt of funding or have been approved for inclusion under this Programme at the end of 2000, with expansion of the programme continuing in line with the recommendations of the Commission on the Family. This Programme will be supported by the new Family Support Agency.

- Programme of Core-funding to locally based Community and Family Support Groups: some 40 projects/areas countrywide were in receipt of funding or have been approved for inclusion in this Programme at the end of 2000.

These three programmes are now administered under the Community Development and Family Support Measure of the NDP. Funding of £110 /€139.7 million has been made available to these programmes over the lifetime of the plan with funding of £14.725 /€18.7 million allocated in 2000 and £17.02 / €21.6 million in 2001 to support these programmes.

Procedures for Rural Proofing of all national policies were also put in place in 1999. The effect of this should be to ensure an evaluation of the extent to which proposals and policies in other areas impact on the rural population.

As mentioned before, as part of the RAPID initiative, there will be a separate focus on rural areas under the CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Ard-Riachtanais). Sixteen rural areas have been identified for targeted actions under CLÁR, as announced on 5th October.

The Disadvantaged Areas Scheme has been reformed and payments are now based on area rather than on the number of animals. The main objectives of the scheme are to ensure continued agricultural land use in disadvantaged areas and thereby contribute to the maintenance of viable rural communities.

The LEADER Programme, while not specifically directed at combating poverty and social exclusion, has the capacity to indirectly contribute to the development of disadvantaged rural areas. The new LEADER+ and National Rural Development Programmes will devote considerable resources to this area.

A Pilot Programme for the provision of integrated public services in rural areas has been completed. This pilot was to test community based models for the delivery of essential public services in rural areas with low and dispersed populations. An evaluation of the programme will be completed in 2001.

Rural transport is being given increased attention. A system of grants for pilot rural transport projects is in place and rural transport needs are being assessed. A Rural Transport initiative is funding a number of pilot transport initiatives in rural areas. In addition, the County Development Boards are currently carrying out an audit of rural passenger transport services and assessing such needs in each county.

2.2.2 Institutional Mechanisms

The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion was established in July 1997 and meets on a monthly basis. A number of Government Departments are represented on the Committee, reflecting the multi-faceted nature of social inclusion. The work of the Committee is supported by the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, which was set up in late 1998. This group, comprising high level civil servants from relevant Departments, meets on a monthly basis to prepare the agenda and recommendations for the Cabinet Committee.

Following the launch of the NAPS in April 1997, the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee that developed the Strategy remained in place to oversee its implementation. It comprises senior civil servants as well as representatives of FÁS, Area Development Management Ltd (ADM) and the Combat Poverty Agency. At its first meeting after the launch of NAPS, the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee agreed that a system of proofing of policies with regard to their impact on poverty be established. Following agreement with the social partners in July 1998, the Government adopted a pilot poverty proofing system as part of official Cabinet procedures. As a result, memoranda for Government and key policy initiatives, upon which significant policy decisions have to be made, must now indicate clearly the impact of the proposals on groups in poverty, or at risk of falling into poverty.

A dedicated NAPS unit has been established in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs with responsibility for co-ordinating and developing cross-Departmental action in support of social inclusion initiatives. The Unit also acts as Secretariat to the IDPC and liaises with all Government departments, other national and international agencies, and the social partners, in promoting and progressing the Strategy.

Liaison Officers have been appointed in each relevant Department to fill a communication and co-ordination role in their respective departments in relation to NAPS. They act as a first point of contact in relation to NAPS issues within Departments. There are regular contacts between the NAPS unit and the Liaison Officers. The social partners have a key role to play in the development of NAPS.

Both the National Economic and Social Forum and the Combat Poverty Agency have produced assessments of the NAPS, which concentrated on an assessment of the institutional structures. [2]

While acknowledging the substantial progress made, these assessments of NAPS have identified a number of areas where the institutional structures require some strengthening.

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[2] These are: The National Anti-Poverty Strategy, Forum Opinion No. 8, NESF, August 2000; and An Assessment of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy, CPA, February 2000.

In general terms, there was concern that:

- The NAPS process had not been fully embedded in policy making;

- The NAPS process had not fully bedded down in Government departments;

- The institutional structures, notably the NAPS unit and the departmental Liaison Officers, required better resourcing; and

- The involvement of the social partners needed to be enhanced through the development of appropriate consultative and participatory structures.

2.3   Conclusions

It is clear that the NAPS has provided a policy focus within which very substantial progress has been made in reducing consistent poverty levels, in raising the incomes of those reliant on social welfare and in increasing employment. The scale of improvements achieved has exceeded expectations.

Significant policy actions have also been taken under the other NAPS themes, relating to education and rural and urban poverty, which have benefited those affected by poverty and social exclusion. It is less clear, however, that these interventions have amounted to a coherent response to the problems in these areas. The identification of a greater number of outcome indicators, with which to measure progress, might have provided a focus for such a response. This is particularly true of objectives for rural and urban areas, where the policy responses are invariably the responsibility of a number of departments.

With regard to institutional structures, it is clear that these need strengthening to ensure that the NAPS is more fully reflected in Government policies.

3. Challenges and Future Priorities

3.1 Introduction

The challenges and priorities for further action are considered under a number of headings. These are:

- The overall policy context in which NAPS operates;

- Trends in the economy;

- Poverty and equality;

- Vulnerable groups in society;

- Access to employment and services; and

- Delivering social services and social integration.

3.2 The Policy Environment

3.2.1 The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness

Social partnership agreements have been central to the economic success that Ireland has enjoyed. The core objective of the current agreement - the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness - is to build a fair, inclusive society based on:

- a dynamic competitive economy;

- full employment and the effective elimination of long-term unemployment;

- equal opportunity;

- lifelong learning;

- adaptation to the Information Society;

- the promotion of research and development;

- balanced and sustainable development between and within regions and between urban and rural areas;

- an entrepreneurial culture; and

- Ireland playing its full part in the EU and the international community.

There are five operational frameworks within the PPF - living standards and workplace environment; prosperity and economic inclusion; social inclusion and equality; successful adaptation and continuing change; renewing partnership. There are extensive provisions concerning social inclusion and equality.

The updating of the NAPS is a specific commitment under the PPF including the review and revision of targets where necessary.

3.2.2 The National Development Plan

One of the four objectives of the National Development Plan 2000-2006 is the promotion of social inclusion. A total of some £15bn (€19bn) is provided within the Plan for this purpose. The social inclusion objectives of the Plan are pursued through four operational programmes - the Economic and Social Infrastructure Programme, the Employment and Human Resources Programme and two Regional Programmes.

The Economic and Social Infrastructure Programme provides for significant capital spending in relation to affordable housing and the health services. The Employment and Human Resources Programme concentrates on education and training supports, including active support measures for the long-term unemployed and the socially excluded. The Regional Operational Programmes include very substantial provisions in relation to childcare, equality issues, community development, family support, crime prevention and youth services.

3.2.3 NAPsincl

The European Union has asked each member state to prepare a national action plan (NAPincl) to combat poverty and social exclusion. The Government submitted its plan in June 2001. The NAPincl has focussed on a number of themes that are relevant to NAPS. These comprise measures to:

- Facilitate participation in employment of those capable of working and especially vulnerable groups in society;

- Facilitate access to resources, rights, goods and services for all;

- Prevent the risks of exclusion; and

- Help the most vulnerable.

These themes have been taken up by the NAPS Working Groups as appropriate, and a range of measures have been discussed, as will be outlined below. It should be noted that the NAPS and NAPincl processes will merge and that future plans submitted to the European Union will be consistent with the revised NAPS.

3.3 The Economy

The period 1997-2000 was one of unprecedented economic growth. During that period, GNP grew by an average of 8.8 per cent per annum. This economic performance was the result of the coming together of a number of factors. Some of these, like the development of an educated work force were long term in nature, while others, such as the unprecedented success in attracting foreign direct investment, have a more recent history. However, one of the key facilitating factors was the capacity of the labour force to expand. The high numbers of unemployed people coupled with the low participation of women in the early 1990s created a pool of labour that fuelled economic growth.

These sources of additional production capacity are diminishing in strength. Because of these factors and also because of infrastructure constraints, the forecast is for the rate of growth in the economy to slow down significantly during the period to 2007. However, economic growth should remain above average in historical terms over the period of the NAPS to 2007.

The central thesis of recent reports such as "Rich and Poor" and "Bust to Boom" is that equity should be a primary rather than a residual concern. It is accepted that inequalities can cause and perpetuate poverty and increased attention is being given

to the promotion of equality as a strategy for eliminating poverty. The challenge, as articulated in the PPF, is to ensure that economic growth benefits all people in society and leads to a more inclusive society.

The short-term economic outlook has become relatively pessimistic because of the impacts of the terrorist attacks in September 2001. It is now anticipated that economic growth will be well below the economy's long term growth capacity and that the Exchequer financing position will deteriorate significantly. These factors will undoubtedly impact on Government expenditure levels, including expenditures proposed under the revised NAPS.

3.4   Poverty Trends

Significant progress has been made in relation to poverty reduction in recent years. The 1998 Living in Ireland Survey (LIIS) shows that:

- There was a substantial decline in the number of people falling below 1987 real income standards between 1994 and 1998. At the 60 per cent relative income threshold, the numbers fell from 18 per cent in 1994 to under 6 per cent in 1998.

- Consistent poverty (i.e. the numbers experiencing deprivation and with incomes under 60 per cent of average) fell from 15 per cent in 1994 to 8 per cent in 1998.

- The number of people and households experiencing relative income poverty as opposed to consistent poverty at the higher 60 per cent relative income line has fallen over the period 1994 to 1998. However, the proportion experiencing poverty at the lower 40 per cent and 50 per cent relative income poverty lines had risen. In addition, the gap between the poverty lines and the incomes of those who fall below them is widening.

In practical terms, these figures mean that:

- The real incomes of those in poverty have risen significantly;

- A significantly higher proportion of people is now able to afford an acceptable standard of living in areas such as food and clothing.

- However, those at the lowest end of the scale have seen their incomes lag behind the growth in average incomes.[3]

The Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Working Group (SWBIG) examined the issue of relative income poverty. It completed its work in August 2001. Subsequently, the NAPS Income Adequacy Working Group examined the issue further in the context of setting global poverty targets.

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[3] It should be noted that the data relating to poverty levels refer to 1998 and, given the speed of economic change over the last few years, must be regarded as out of date. More up-to-date data are currently being compiled.

3.5 Access to Services and the Rights Based Approach

There is growing interest both nationally and internationally in a rights based approach to social and economic development. A wide range of social rights is specifically provided for in the Irish Constitution and in international conventions ratified by Ireland. The need for a rights-based approach to NAPS has been strongly promoted by individuals and organisations that were consulted as part of this review. (See Section 7.12)

3.6 Equality

The new legislative and institutional framework that underpins equality of opportunity includes:

- The Employment Equality Act, 1998;

- The National Disability Authority Act, 1999;

- The Equal Status Act, 2000;

- The establishment of the Equality Authority;

- The establishment of the Office of Director of Equality Investigations; and

- The establishment of the National Disability Authority.

These developments highlight the increased emphasis on equality objectives in Irish social policy. The goal is to bring about a more equal society, by promoting, monitoring and implementing the right to equal treatment and the accommodation of diversity, through institutional, administrative and legal reforms and through programmes targeted at particular needs.

They also highlight the growing realisation that while income poverty is a key element of inequality it is not the only element. Other facets of social exclusion and inequality are manifested in an inability to access a range of services such as education, health, housing and the labour market. In respect of services such as health services, equity of access has a number of dimensions. These relate to:

- Equal access to available care for equal need;

- Equal utilisation for equal need; and

- Equal quality of care for all.

Thus, access to, participation in and quality of services made available are important aspects of ensuring equality of treatment.

These equality issues must be addressed in parallel with action aimed at reducing income inequality. Similarly the spatial dimensions of poverty and social exclusion, as experienced in disadvantaged urban and rural areas, also need to be addressed in the revised NAPS, building on experience to date.

3.7 Vulnerable Groups

3.7.1 Introduction

It is important that NAPS retains a focus on vulnerable groups. Such groups often suffer from multiple disadvantage which has a cumulative impact on their experience of poverty. Focusing on such groups enables policy makers to gain a fuller understanding of the way in which poverty and social exclusion impacts on the lives of those in poverty. It also facilitates a more integrated and comprehensive policy response, which can exploit synergies between policies to the benefit of those in poverty. This cross-cutting aspect of policy and service delivery is a crucial element in NAPS, which requires an appropriate policy and institutional response.

3.7.2 The Unemployed

Because of the reduction in unemployment levels, the proportion of poor households headed by an unemployed person has fallen. The risk of consistent poverty has also fallen for such households. However, it remains the case that households headed by an unemployed person continue to exhibit a higher risk of consistent poverty than other groups (a 29.7 per cent risk at the 60 per cent relative income line in 1998). Measures to improve access to employment and training will continue to be of vital importance to this group.

3.7.3 Children

The quality of life of children improved in the twelve month period from 1997 to 1998, when the level of consistent poverty among children dropped to 12 per cent – a fall of almost one third in the period. This accelerates the downward trend in child poverty, with consistent poverty among children being halved from 24.8 per cent in 1987 to 12 per cent in 1998. However, despite these improvements, a higher proportion of children than adults are in consistently poor households. This suggests that continued efforts will be required to combat child poverty.

3.7.4 Women

While the level of consistent poverty among women has declined, the trends in relative income poverty give rise to some concern. In 1994, there was little difference between men and women in terms of their risk of relative income poverty. By 1998, however, the risk for women was significantly higher than that for men. This gap is partly among older people and reflects the extent to which social welfare rates, on which women depend, have lagged behind average income. Female lone parents who are unemployed are particularly at high-risk of consistent poverty.

3.7.5 Older People

While the risk of consistent poverty for most vulnerable groups has fallen, that for older persons who are living alone has risen. A contributory factor has been the fact that social welfare rates, on which many of these older people depend, have lagged behind average incomes.

3.7.6 People with Disabilities

The position of people with disabilities improved considerably between 1994 and 1998, with, for example, the risk of consistent poverty (at the 60 per cent relative income line) for households headed by an ill or disabled person falling from 43 per cent in 1994 to 28 per cent in 1998.[4] However, despite these gains, the risk of

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[4] These statistics encompass persons who are sick as well as people with disabilities

poverty for these households is exceeded only by that for unemployed households. The additional costs facing this group is a key issue, as well as the need to increase access to education and other services.

3.7.7 Travellers

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, accommodation, health, education and employment continue to remain significantly poor compared to the settled population. Infant mortality rates are particularly high among this group, and life expectancy for members of the Traveller community is much shorter than that for the settled community.

3.7.8 Migrants and Members of Ethnic Minority Groups

There are limited data on the economic and social well-being of ethnic minorities in Ireland. Nevertheless, experience in other countries shows that ethnic minorities that experience racism, tend to suffer discrimination, disadvantage, marginalisation and poverty. In particular, racism may limit people's access to resources and services. Migrant workers and refugees, particularly the unskilled, are also vulnerable. If Ireland is to be a successful modern, intercultural society, it must integrate foreign-born residents in ways that respect their social, economic and cultural rights.

3.7.9 Disadvantaged Urban Dwellers

Public policy has increasingly recognised that there are spatial concentrations of unemployment, poverty and exclusion where individuals, families and communities suffer a form of cumulative disadvantage.

Residents in such areas often experience intergenerational poverty and a variety of forms of on-going social exclusion. Within urban areas, two types of such communities exist – inner city communities and large suburban housing estates. These communities are largely found in the Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford cities and environs. However, they can also be found in other towns throughout the country.

3.7.10 Disadvantaged Rural Dwellers

Rural areas are characterised by high dependency levels, high levels of out migration of those with educational qualifications and a continuing dependency on agriculture for employment and income, with many small farmers living on very low incomes.

People living in rural areas can experience exclusion in relation to education, employment and training, transport and mobility, which may be compounded by physical isolation. The added dimension of peripherality in the border region is also a factor. Such problems can only be addressed by targeted and integrated policy responses

3.8 Access to Employment and Services

3.8.1 Employment

Unemployment as of mid-year 2001 has declined to 3.7 per cent and the long-term unemployment rate is now 1.2 per cent, amounting to 21,500 people who are more than 12 months unemployed.

In a labour market context, our economic success brings new challenges in terms of:

- Increasing labour market supply in response to labour and skills shortages;

- Seeking to continuously upgrade the skills and competencies of the workforce;

- Maximising employment opportunities and reducing disincentives and other barriers to work for disadvantaged and socially excluded people.

Family friendly policies are now a key element in this regard, aimed at ensuring a suitable balance between work and family life. The Government is committed under the NDP to meeting the diverse needs of parents and children, including key target groups, through supporting the development of childcare services that are accessible and of high quality. A National Framework Committee for the Development of Family Friendly Policies at the Level of the Enterprise has also been established.

The threats that accrue to the individual and society from prolonged low pay or low skill work are increasingly being recognised. The groups that traditionally have been at risk of prolonged low pay and low skill employment, especially in an expanding economy, are women, early school leavers, lone parents, long-term unemployed, over-35s, part time farmers/fishermen, older returnees, Travellers, refugees, asylum seekers with the right to work, ex-offenders, people with disabilities and certain ethnic minorities.

Recent policy changes in this area include the introduction of the National Minimum Wage, movement towards the removal of the low paid from the tax net, and a substantial increase in the value of universal child benefit. These policies have substantially improved the financial return from work.

3.8.2   Housing and Homelessness

Population increases and increased immigration is being accompanied by an even more rapid increase in household formation due to the age structure and the increasing single person household formation. This is creating unprecedented demand for housing. Taken together with the rate of house price inflation, this suggests the significant increases in demands for housing support will continue.

To date, services to address homelessness have been underdeveloped in many parts of this country. Eliminating homelessness requires a comprehensive response, which addresses all of the needs of homeless people and provides necessary supports to enable them to move from homelessness into appropriate, stable accommodation

3.8.3   Health

The link between poverty and health is well established. Poverty is known to contribute to poor health directly, for example, through inadequate housing or poor environments and indirectly, for example, through poor diet or stress. Being poor also makes it more difficult to access or afford health care, and to reduce the opportunity for adopting a healthy lifestyle. Mounting evidence is leading to recognition that inequalities in health are a major challenge in Ireland, as in many countries.

Some groups experience particularly poor health. For example, Travellers are known to have very high infant mortality rates and low life expectancy. There is also growing concern about the health of refugees and asylum seekers.

3.8.4   Education

Educational disadvantage is a significant component of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. Research shows that children experiencing poverty are more likely to leave school early and be unemployed as adults. Estimates indicate that 16 per cent of the school population may be regarded as educationally disadvantaged, taking into account literacy levels, early school leaving and the experience of poverty.

The key challenges ahead, as recognised by the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, are to address not only the problems attached to school attendance, but also issues relating to the educational welfare of children in general. It is also crucial, in the development of policies to address basic skills needs, that specific focus be given to people with literacy and numeracy difficulties. A wide range of issues influence education disadvantage including – child/adult literacy, early school leaving and retention, second chance education, barriers to participation, access (e.g. for people with disabilities, women, Travellers, refugees, asylum seekers and non-nationals).

In an information society, one of the key challenges is to ensure that those experiencing exclusion are not left behind. There are a number of initiatives, including initiatives under the eEurope Action Plan, which outline actions specifically targeted at people with special needs as part of the objective: 'Participation for All'.

3.9   Delivering Social Services and Promoting Social Integration

3.9.1   Local and Regional Development

County and City Development Boards (CDBs) were established in early 2000, on foot of the recommendations in the Report of the Interdepartmental Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development systems.   CDBs have been mandated to bring about a more coherent approach to the delivery of public and local development services at local level. The Boards are currently drawing up their county or city strategies for social, economic and cultural development, which are due in early 2002. These will have a strong focus on the achievement of greater social inclusion within their areas. A number of new initiatives are also being tested at this level, e.g. rural transport initiatives, while all CDBs are considering the implications of poverty and equality proofing for their plans.

At regional level, two Regional Monitoring Committees have been established to oversee the delivery of the Regional Operational Programmes and to monitor progress in development generally in their region. These committees will also have a focus on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion within the two regions – BMW and SE Regions.

A number of commentators have called for the extension of the NAPS process to the local level, including poverty proofing, to complement the strategy and related targets being developed at the national level.

3.9.2   Social Partners

The experience and perspectives of the social partners have been invaluable in the development and monitoring of social inclusion strategies and in the review of the NAPS, in the context of the partnership agreement. One of the key challenges in the next phase of the NAPS will be to further strengthen the involvement of the social partners and the wider community and voluntary sector in the Strategy.

3.9.3   Access to Services

Throughout Europe, there is an increasing commitment to the provision of high quality services that are delivered in a customer-focused manner. This involves a more formal expression of entitlements, coupled with agreed standards and guidelines for monitoring outcomes. This applies particularly in relation to the provision of integrated and accessible services to disadvantaged individuals, families and communities. A key element of the revised NAPS therefore will be to ensure that the NAPS objectives and related targets reflect this commitment.

3.9.4   Support for Families

Greater recognition is being given to the importance of families for social integration. A renewed emphasis is being placed on the adoption of measures to support families in their nurturing and educative roles and in reconciling work and the provision of care, as indicated earlier. In addition, a range of supports are provided across a wide area in the public service, including family support projects, increased child care places, appropriate training of child care workers and regulation of child care provision, increased out-of-school hours child care services by community groups and school managements, and further national fiscal and social policy measures to reconcile work and family life, including family-friendly policies in employment.

A significant departure in this regard is the decision to establish a Family Support Agency, which will bring together some of the main programmes aimed at supporting families.

3.9.5   Supporting Voluntary Activity

An active Community and Voluntary Sector contributes to a democratic, pluralist society, provides opportunities for the development of decentralised and participative structures and fosters a climate in which the quality of life can be enhanced for all. The Government White Paper, "Supporting Voluntary Activity" (2000), sets out a cohesive framework of support for the future development of the relationship between the Government and the community and voluntary sector. It forms an important context for the strengthening of consultative mechanisms generally, as envisaged in the PPF. Since the publication of the White Paper, an Implementation Advisory Group has been set up to implement the policies set out in it.

2001 is the International Year of Volunteers (IYV). The objective of IYV 2001 is to enhance recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteer services. Operating under this objective, the National Committee on Volunteering (NCV), provided for under the PPF, was launched in December, 2000, will run until the end of 2002 and will report to the Government at that time. Membership is drawn from relevant Government Departments and relevant stakeholders.

4. Participation in Employment and Access by All to Resources, Rights, Goods and Services

4.1 Introduction

This section sets out the policies that are being considered over the period of the NAPS which fall into the NAPincl Objective 1 viz. to facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services. It begins with consideration of the recommended global poverty target and commitments in relation to social welfare rates. These were matters considered by the Benchmarking and Indexation Group and the Income Adequacy Working Group.

This is followed by sections dealing with employment and unemployment issues and access to health, housing and accommodation and education. In relation to the latter issues, Appendix A sets out the detailed actions and measures that were agreed by the Working Groups.

4.2 Global Poverty Target

4.2.1 Consistent Poverty

Significant progress has been made in relation to poverty reduction in recent years. The 1998 Living in Ireland Survey (LIIS) shows significant reductions in the levels of consistent poverty in Ireland since 1994. Consistent poverty (i.e. the numbers experiencing deprivation and with incomes under 60 per cent of average) fell from 15 per cent in 1994 to 8 per cent in 1998. Thus, the combined income and deprivation measure suggests a marked decline in poverty since 1994 which, in practical terms, means that a significantly higher proportion of people are now able to afford an acceptable standard of living in areas such as food and clothing. However, the national challenge of addressing inequality in opportunities and life chances is recognised.

The quality of life of children improved in the twelve month period from 1997 to 1998, when the level of consistent poverty among children dropped to 12 per cent – a fall of almost one third in the period. This accelerates the downward trend in child poverty figures with consistent poverty among children being halved from 24.8 per cent in 1987 to 12 per cent in 1998.

It is anticipated that when data for 2000 become available, a further significant reduction in consistent poverty as currently measured will be apparent. In the light of this substantial progress, the following global target is now proposed for the period to 2007:

> *Over the period to 2007, the NAPS will aim at reducing the numbers of those who are 'consistently poor' below 2 per cent and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty[5]*

4.2.2 Relative Income Poverty

The number of people and households experiencing relative income poverty as opposed to consistent poverty at the higher 60 per cent relative income line fell over the period 1994 to 1998. However, the proportion experiencing poverty at the lower

[5] Consistent poverty is defined as being below 50% - 60% of average disposable income and experiencing enforced basic deprivation. Basic deprivation refers to a set of eight indicators, which were regarded as necessities and possessed by a majority of those in the ESRI's Living in Ireland Survey. Research into the deprivation indicators is ongoing to establish their continuing relevance. It is possible that a redefinition of consistent poverty to include a wider range of essential items may become necessary.

40 per cent and 50 per cent relative income poverty lines had risen. In addition, the gap between the poverty lines and the incomes of those who fall below them is widening.

It is recognised that a wide range of factors influences the levels of relative income poverty at any given point in time.   Such factors include, for instance, earnings levels, patterns of household formations, the direction of tax and welfare policies, employment and unemployment levels, and the level of recourse to welfare supports generally. It is recognised also, however, that these factors interact in a highly dynamic environment and the relative impacts will inevitably change at different points of the economic cycle.   While budgetary decisions in the areas of tax and welfare policy are obviously key influential factors, there are other factors, which are not amenable to direct intervention by the State.   One stark example is that a reduction in the level of relative income poverty could occur by virtue of an economic downturn, where a significant increase in the unemployment rate would lead to a fall in the level of average disposable incomes. In such a situation, an ostensibly desirable policy objective of achieving a reduction in the level of relative income poverty could be met without there being any positive change in the position of the poorest sectors of society.

Government employment policy continues to focus on developing high-wage and high-skilled work opportunities.   Successful implementation of this policy - as evidenced by the trends in relative income poverty observed during the 1990s - can lead to increases in the numbers falling below relative income poverty lines.

Despite these reservations, it is clear that being on a relatively low income (or living in relative income poverty) - particularly over a period of years - is an important factor in putting people at risk of poverty and exclusion. The proposed target, as agreed by a majority of the Income Adequacy Working Group, in relation to this measure for the period up to 2007 is:

Recognising the complex range of factors which affect the numbers of people on low income and highlighting the role of the social partners in this regard, the NAPS will aim to ensure that the proportion of the population falling below relative income lines, particularly for a sustained period, should be declining over the economic cycle.

It should be noted that the Department of Finance's view as stated in the Report of the Income Adequacy Group was that:

The Department of Finance considered that until such time as a full evaluation of the implications, including for income and taxation policy and the economic effects, of adopting a relative income target is available, it would be inappropriate to propose the adoption of such a measure.

Progress towards this target, including ongoing research and analysis of the factors which contribute to the phenomenon of relative income poverty, will be reviewed in the context of the NAPincl in the period to 2007. The risk of relative income poverty of the vulnerable cross-cutting groups, i.e. women, children, and older people, will be monitored through the use of indicators.

4.3   Income Adequacy

The NAPS objective relating to income adequacy is to ensure that all policies in relation to income support (e.g. employment, tax, social welfare, pensions) provide sufficient income for a person to move out of poverty and live in a manner compatible with human dignity.

The PPF set the following targets for social welfare rates over the three-year duration of that Programme:

- all social welfare rates will be increased in real terms;

- substantial progress will be made towards a target of €127 (IR£100) per week for the lowest rates of social welfare;

- Child Benefit will be substantially increased over the period of the programme, with a priority focus towards €127 (£100) per month for the third and subsequent children.

The majority of the Income Adequacy Group has proposed a formal linkage between adult welfare rates and average earnings in order to ensure that the income of welfare recipients keep pace with those of the wider population.

Recognising that the exact rate was a matter for Government, and having balanced the various factors set out in the terms of reference, it is proposed that the target of 27 per cent of Gross Average Industrial Earnings (GAIE) (on a current-year basis) for the lowest adult social welfare payments be established.

The minority view on the Group (comprising representatives from the Dept. of Finance, Dept. of Enterprise, Trade & Employment and the Employer Pillar) was that:

It was inappropriate to establish a formal benchmark and that existing arrangements, which have seen real increases (i.e. in excess of inflation) in welfare rates should continue to apply. Essentially, it would be left to the Government to determine the level of welfare increases form year to year, having regard to the range of high priority demands on the Exchequer and to issues of affordability, sustainability and compatibility with the social, economic and employment needs of the economy on a continuing basis.

Given current uncertainties in relation to the short term economic position, the Group found it difficult to be prescriptive about the precise time frame, although it would not be unreasonable to expect that the target would be met in full by 2007 (i.e. in the Budget announced late in 2006).

This does not rule out the setting of a higher target, in the context of the review process outlined below. The Community and Voluntary and Trade Union Pillars are of the view that the lowest social welfare rates should be increased to 30 per cent of GAIE in the medium term.

Regardless of how the Government chooses to develop social welfare budgetary policy in the coming years, the majority of the Group was strongly of the view that regular and formal review and monitoring of the range of issues covered by their report should be provided for. The Group stated that this could best be accommodated within the monitoring and review structures under the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The Group examined the available evidence on the costs of rearing a child and the issue of equivalence scales. The Group noted in particular the Government's commitment to invest heavily in the Child Benefit scheme over the next two years (following on the very significant increases introduced in 2001) and that this investment implies that the basic weekly level of child income support for social welfare recipients will have reached some £40.30 (€51.20) by 2003.

The Group noted also that the available research on the costs of rearing a child (based on a budget-standards approach and excluding the cost of childcare) suggests that this cost will have risen to some £39.25 (€49.90) per week by 2003.

As regards equivalence scales, the Group noted that such research as is available in an Irish context suggests that social welfare dependent households with children require an income per child of some one-third of the single adult rate to maintain the same standard of living. Accordingly, it is proposed that the appropriate equivalence level of basic child income support (i.e. Child Benefit and Child Dependant Allowances combined) should be set at 33 to 35 per cent of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate.

Having regard to the majority recommendation that the lowest adult rate should reach 27 per cent of GAIE by 2007, this would mean that basic child income support would be in the range of £47 (€59.70) to £50 (€63.50) per week (i.e. some £8/€10 more than the costs of rearing a child above).

4.4 Employment and Unemployment

4.4.1 Challenges and Strategic Approach

Because of the gains in employment and the reduction in unemployment levels, the proportion of poor households headed by an unemployed person has fallen considerably. The risk of consistent poverty has also fallen for such households. Safeguarding the gains in employment will be an important means of ensuring that these reductions in poverty are sustained.

It remains the case that households headed by an unemployed person continue to exhibit a higher risk of consistent poverty than other groups (a 29.7 per cent risk at the 60 per cent relative income line in 1998). Moreover, jobless households are at particularly high risk or poverty. Thus, measures to improve access to employment and training will continue to be of vital importance to this group.

Moreover, given the advances made in employment, there must be increased emphasis on ensuring that those in employment have the opportunity to progress to better paid and higher skilled and more fulfilling employment. While acknowledging that a number of significant measures have been taken, such as the introduction of the National Minimum Wage and tax reductions focussed on the low paid, there is still concern that there are some low paid workers and their families vulnerable to poverty.

4.4.2 Overall Objective

The overall objective is now to provide maximum opportunity for the most vulnerable members of society to gain employment and to progress to a better-paid and more fulfilling job.

4.4.3 Key Targets

The key targets are:

- The elimination of long-term unemployment by 2003;

- The reduction in the unemployment rates of marginalised groups towards the average; and

- The achievement of the targets set out in the National Employment Action Plan.[6]

4.4.4 Overall Policy Approach

The broad approach will be to:

- To have in place a proactive policy of engagement with people of working age on social welfare, to ensure that, where possible, they have the opportunity to avail of employment, education and training options;

- To create new opportunities for unemployed people and for marginalised groups to access employment and training;

- To eliminate any remaining gaps or disincentives to employment/training in the application of secondary benefits system, so that, at a minimum, nobody is materially worse off as a result of taking up employment, training or education opportunities; and

- To ensure that those in low pay have access to higher incomes and the opportunity to progress to better-paid and more highly skilled employment.

4.4.5 Key Policy Actions and Measures

The specific actions may include:

Access to Employment and Training

- Implementation of the National Employment Action Plan so as to maximise employment opportunities;

- The extension of the Employment Action Plan intervention processes to the stock of long-term unemployed (LTU) by end 2003 in order to identify and address barriers to employment, with the effect of achieving the following increases in participation in employment, training and educational programmes:

  - A 15 per cent increase in 2001;

  - A 30 per cent increase by 2003; and

  - A 65 per cent increase by 2006.

  - Achievement of a 30 per cent increase in number of childcare places by 2003, by full implementation of Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 - 2006

Social Welfare Benefits and Disincentives to Work and Training

- An audit of all relevant Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs programmes will be undertaken to identify factors that inhibits recipients or their dependants from engaging in work or activities preparatory to work;

- Review of the eligibility guidelines for retention of the Medical Card as they affect former Job Initiative and Back to Work Allowance participants and long term unemployed and their spouses on taking up employment; and

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[6] It should be noted that the temporary economic downturn envisaged in the ESRI's Medium term Review 2001-2007 makes these targets more difficult to achieve within the original timespan. However, they remain valid objectives over the period of the revised NAPS timeframe.

- Renewed emphasis on implementation of the recommendations of the Goodbody Report on Secondary Benefits, particularly those relating to the Differential Rent system;

Progression to Better Paid and More Highly Skilled Employment

- As committed by Government under the PPF, those on the national minimum wage will be taken out of the tax net over time;

- A range of Life Long Learning options will be introduced that are specifically designed to assist people currently in low paying jobs to acquire the skills that will lift them out of poverty;

- Improved scheduling of available training options, combined with further examination of issues surrounding opportunities for release from employment, to pursue such options;

- Further examination of the issues around take-up of FIS need to be undertaken, and

- Finally, a more holistic approach to those who experience difficulties in the labour market should be provided, so as to provide a continuum of supports for unemployed persons, those recently moved from unemployment to jobs and from Community Employment to jobs.

4.5 Education

4.5.1 Challenges and Strategic Approach

Education can play a key role in the promotion of a more inclusive society. Educational qualifications, or the lack of them, determine to a large extent the life chances of people. The likelihood of obtaining educational qualifications has been found to be closely associated with social background, to the extent that it is the children of the poor who constitute a majority of those who do not fully benefit from the education system.

More than ever, underachievement at school results in social difficulties that can lead to a life of uncertainty, marginalisation, and dependence on the structures of social assistance. Lack of qualifications can combine with unemployment, dependence on social welfare, accommodation difficulties and health problems, and create a situation where various aspects of disadvantage become mutually reinforcing.

A wide range of measures has been introduced aimed at addressing educational disadvantage over the last five years or more.

These include:

- Early intervention measures.

- Curricular reforms.

- Second chance education and training.

- New qualifications system with related progression and accreditation system.

Despite these interventions, problems still exist in relation to literacy and numeracy levels, and early school leaving in particular.

For example, with regard to child education, the most recent figures on early school leaving indicate that 3.5 per cent of school leavers have no qualifications, a further 15.5 per cent leave at Junior Cycle level. Only 17.4 per cent of school leavers whose fathers are unemployed progress to third level compared to 60 per cent of those whose fathers are in higher/lower professional groups.

Literacy and numeracy problems remain acute, even allowing for concerns as to the accuracy of the way in which they are measured.

In relation to adult education, research shows that 61 per cent of all unemployed people have less than upper second level education and that 77 per cent of the long-term unemployed fall into this category. The persistence of age based differentials in educational attainment is also of concern. The task of upgrading the educational attainment levels of those aged between 25-64 also has significant economic implications, particularly with regard to the reduced relative competitiveness of countries that fail to do so.

The National Action Plan for Employment emphasises the need to enhance labour quality, through education, training and, in particular, lifelong learning.

It is clear that notwithstanding the improved levels of investment in tackling educational disadvantage since 1997, critical barriers still remain. Educational outcomes are still strongly influenced by socio-economic status and the costs of education arising from books, clothing and footwear and school meals. The level of early school leaving with minimal or no qualifications remains unacceptably high. Investment in education is thus central to any NAPS.

4.5.2 Overall Objective

The overall objectives for education are twofold. Firstly, to ensure that all young people leave the educational system with an adequate education and related qualifications to support their full participation in the economy, in employment and in society. Secondly, to ensure that all those that have already left school have the opportunity to address any current lack of educational experience and related qualifications that affect their ability to participate fully in the economy, in employment and in society.

4.5.3 Key Targets

There are three key targets:

- The proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties will be halved by 2006;[7]

- A reduction in the proportion of the population aged 16-64 with restricted literacy to below 10 to 20 per cent by 2007 – restricted literacy being defined as falling *below* 200-225 on the IALS scale or equivalent;

- The number of young people who leave the school system early will be reduced, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 85 per cent by 2003 and 90 per cent by 2006[8].

Supplementary targets are as follows:

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[7] This target to be reviewed after next round of English reading surveys
[8] This target will be subject to review by 2003. Completion rate published in December 1999 was 81%.

Children and Young People

- All children in targeted disadvantaged areas will have access to early childhood education, including all special needs children by 2006;

- The proportion of pupils in designated disadvantaged schools with serious literacy difficulties will be halved by 2006;

- Schools with a high concentration of at risk pupils will be supported with Pupil-Teacher Ratios of 20:1 in the junior classes (infants-2nd class) and a maximum of 25:1 in the higher classes (3rd-6th) except schools, which already have a lower ratio under an existing recognised programme;

Adults

- Increase participation in third level education of students from unskilled/agricultural work backgrounds from 16% (1999 figure) to 22 per cent by 2003 and 27 per cent by 2006;

- Increase participation in third level education of students from the unskilled social class from 20% (1999 figure) to 27 per cent in 2003 and 33 per cent in 2006;

- A significant expansion of part-time options so that by the end of 2006 approximately 50,000 early school leavers and adults will be participating annually in further education;

- A halving of the number of 18-24 year olds with only lower secondary level education who are not in further education and training by 2010;

- Provision of 20,000 extra places per annum in the further education sector by 2006, 10 per cent to be reserved exclusively for community education providers. The first phase of the initiative is due to come on stream by the end of 2001 (400 places for the community education sector);

- A network of community education facilitators on an area basis to be put in place by end 2001;

- Support for Community Education through the VECs;

- Within the published 15 per cent quota of full time undergraduate places for mature students each third level institution is required to set aside by 2006, to *double* participation by mature *disadvantaged* students including Travellers and Refugees;

- To increase participation at third level by students with disabilities from 0.9 per cent to 1.35 per cent by 2003 and 1.8 per cent by end of 2006.

4.5.4 Overall Policy Approach

The overall policy approach is to:

- Expand early education/pre-school services, particularly in designated disadvantaged areas.

- Seek to meet the holistic needs of young people at risk and their families and other vulnerable groups.

- Improve pupil teacher ratios for schools with a high concentration of at risk pupils.

- Continue implementation of measurers and programmes to support participation and achievement in school.

- Facilitate and encourage access to second chance education, broaden access to further and higher education and adult and community education.

Strengthen the commitment to lifelong learning and ensure the provision of educational opportunities on a lifelong basis particularly for the over-45s and those with less than upper second level education.

4.5.5 Key Policy Actions and Measures

The major specific actions may include:

Children and Young People

Early Childhood Education and Care

- An expansion of early education pre-school services, focusing particularly on the areas selected under the RAPID, CLÁR (Rural) and provincial town programmes;

- The Early Childhood Education Agency will be made operational by mid 2002;

- Incremental build up of pre-school services for children with special needs;

Literacy and Numeracy

- Increased literacy training provision;

- A national programme of in-service training at second level on the integration of literacy and numeracy teaching into all aspects of the curriculum;

- Establishment of a National Literacy and Numeracy Committee;

- The existing English reading survey of eleven year olds will be replicated in junior classes, following consultation with interested parties;

- Random sample survey of levels of literacy, in designated disadvantaged schools, to be conducted by the Educational Research Centre using approved existing assessment tools, in the interim, pending agreement on more broadly based assessment tools;[9]

- Extension of the support teacher project to RAPID, CLÁR and identified provincial town areas.

Participation and Achievement at School

- Requirement that all schools in disadvantaged areas implement a transfer programme no later than 5th class which links effectively with 2nd level schools.

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[9] See actions under Participation and Achievement at School in Appendix A2.

- Continuing implementation of "Giving Children an Even Break" and of the School Completion initiatives (combining the Early School Leaver and Stay in School Retention initiatives).

- The NCCA will publish a consultative paper on the nature of provision at senior cycle. Arising from this, it is planned to develop models of modularisation. It is intended to have a part-time Leaving Certificate Applied framework available by the end of 2002.

- Establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board.

- Completion of planned expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service.

- Appropriate assessment, provision and resourcing of alternative places/schools, including Youthreach.

- Ensure that all schools are connected to the Internet and are equipped with multi-media resources by the end of 2001 and that all teachers needed are skilled in the use of these tools by 2002.

Third Level Access

- Establishment of a National Access Office.

- A review of current income levels for student supports.

- Implementation of the White Paper on Adult Education, by 2006

- Development of flexible entry, delivery and assessment arrangements.

Adults

Adult Literacy

- A strengthening of the scale, scope and quality of adult literacy provision through the National Adult Literacy strategy;

- Inclusion of a National Adult Basic ICT Skills Programme as part of the Back to Education Initiative.

- Establishment of a National Literacy and Numeracy Committee.

Further Education and Training

- Implementation of the White Paper on Adult Education.

- Ongoing implementation of the Back to Education Initiative.

- The establishment of a National Adult Learning Council, by 2002.

- A review of the PLC sector, including increased support for structured literacy provision for PLC participants, based on assessed need.

4.6   Health

4.6.1   Challenges and Strategic Approach

The link between poverty and ill-health is well established. Poverty is known to contribute to poor health directly, for example, through inadequate housing or poor environments and indirectly through poor diet or stress. Being poor also makes it more difficult to access or afford health care, and reduces the opportunity for adopting a healthy lifestyle. Therefore actions to reduce poverty will also contribute to reducing health inequalities.

There is increasing evidence that inequalities in health are a major challenge in Ireland, as in many countries. For example, circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries and poisonings account for nearly three-quarters of all deaths each year in Ireland. For these causes of death, the death rate for working age males in the lowest socio-economic groups was very much higher than the rate in the highest socio-economic groups.

There are very many determinants of health. Some such as age and sex are fixed. Others range from individual behaviour to living and working conditions, psychosocial and community influences and the broader socio-economic environment. Health services are just one and not necessarily the most important of these factors. The NAPS initiatives are based on a broad social model of health. The model postulates that the social and economic environment of a country is a key influence on the population's health and well-being. Thus, a multi-sectoral approach to health is required, as well as the development of more equitable public policies and services. The Government intends to publish a comprehensive Health Strategy, which will address these issues and develop appropriate performance indicators.

Proposals to address health inequalities as outlined in the NAPS review must take into account two major factors:

- The need to place them in the context of the forthcoming Health Strategy[10]. At this stage the overall shape and the specific measures of the Strategy have not been finalised.

- The importance of complementary life style changes in ensuring that the strategy is successful.

In relation to access to services, the following issues need to be addressed:

- Health care services should be centred on people's needs. This requires consultation and a community development approach involving people and communities in assessing their own health needs and in various stages of design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of health and personal social services. This issue is particularly relevant to primary care services.

- People who opt to be treated as private patients have faster access within the public hospital system and this is widely perceived as inequitable.

- There are considerable differences from area to area in community services, community paramedical services, home helps, meals on wheels and day care centres, and in who is entitled to them and what charges, if any, can be made.

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[10] The Health Strategy "Quality and Fairness – A Health System for You" was launched on 26 November, 2001

- Rates of cardiovascular disease and cancer are considerably higher among lower socio-economic groups compared to higher socio-economic groups. The Report of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy Group found regional variation in access to certain procedures such as angioplasty and coronary artery bypass graft. Lifestyle associated risk factors are also higher in lower socio-economic groups.

- Standardised death rates from injuries and poisonings are very much higher in lower socio-economic groups compared to higher groups. The relationship is particularly true of childhood injury.

- People often contact the health services when they are at their most vulnerable, and it is important that their difficulties are not compounded by discriminatory policies or treatment in that service. It is also important that services are delivered in a manner that not only responds to the particular needs of some groups but also reflects the diversity within society.

One of the keys to successful health policy development within NAPS will be the availability of appropriate data on the health status and access to services for marginalised groups. The Data Strategy for NAPS, which is discussed in Section 7, should have a focus on the disaggregation of routine data by occupational class and for marginalised groups.

4.6.2 Overall Objective

The overall objective is to reduce the inequalities that exist in the health of the population by making health and health inequalities central to public policy, by acting on the social factors influencing health, by improving access to health and personal social services for people who are poor or socially excluded, and by improving the information and research base in relation to health status and service access for these groups.

4.6.3 Key Target

The gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups will be reduced by at least 10 per cent for circulatory diseases, for cancers and for injuries and poisoning by 2007.

The achievement of this target requires integrated action across all the NAPS thematic areas. It is also supported by targets set out in the National Health Promotion Strategy and by the National Strategies to reduce cancers and cardiovascular disease.

4.6.4 Overall Policy Approach

The broad approach proposed comprises the following:

- Increased equity of access to health care services, effective interventions for cardiovascular disease and cancers, and community supports.

- Increased access to health care services through the Medical Card.

- The integration of an equality dimension into health and social services.

- A multi-sectoral approach to health and health impact assessment

- Support for these initiatives through other policies such as those pertaining to income adequacy, child poverty and education.

4.6.5 Key Policy Actions and Measures

Specific actions may include the following:

Increased Equity of Access to Primary Health Care Services

- By 2003, primary health care will be significantly strengthened through multidisciplinary working and local case management (i.e. where an identified member of staff assists in the co-ordination of services for a patient).

- By 2003, better access will be provided for patients to diagnostic and treatment services through their GP by increasing the services carried out universally in general practice.

- By 2005, the incidence of youth homelessness will be reduced significantly, through increasing family and community based supports to prevent homelessness and providing appropriate emergency response so as to prevent young people staying homeless and to facilitate their reintegration into the community.

- By 2005, a community development approach will be integrated into health and personal social services, with a focus on primary health care.

Increased Equity of Access to Public Acute Hospital Services

- By 2003, the difference between public and private patients in waiting times for public acute hospital care will be reduced.

- By 2005, the difference between public and private patients in waiting times for acute hospital inpatient care will be further reduced from the position achieved in 2003.

Increased Access to Effective Interventions for Cardiovascular Disease and Cancers

- Particular attention will be paid to the needs of people who are poor or socially excluded in the implementation of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy.

- Regional access (as measured by age standardised discharge rates by health board of residence) for procedures such as angioplasty and coronary artery bypass graft will be improved in line with the basic levels of service recommended in the Report of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy Group.

Increased Equity of Access to Community Supports

The specific actions proposed are set out below:

- By 2003, national guidelines will be put in place for the provision of respite care services to carers of older people.

- By 2003, improvements will be made in access to planned respite care for carers of disabled people.

- By 2005, there will be nationally standardised rules for eligibility for community support services.

Injury Prevention Strategy for People at Risk in Lower Socio-Economic Groups

- A comprehensive injury prevention strategy to reduce higher injury rates in people at risk (children, young men and older people in lower social economic groups) should be developed by 2003.

Income Eligibility Limits for the Medical Card

- By 2003, the income threshold in the guidelines for the medical card will be increased with a view to removing impediments to access to health services and taking account of the particular needs of children.
- Health boards will have a more proactive approach to ensuring uptake of the medical card by those entitled to one, including addressing the particular needs of specific groups such as Travellers, Refugees and asylum seekers.

- By 2005, access to an increased range of services will be provided under the General Medical Services Scheme, in particular to cervical screening and counselling.

Integrating an Equality Dimension into Health and Social Services

The implementation strategy for equality proofing will be developed in conjunction with the Equality Authority, which has a national brief on this issue.

Development of a Multi-sectoral Approach to Health and Health Impact Assessment

It should be government policy that all relevant sectors recognise and accept their responsibility for health by developing multi-sectoral working and the adoption of Health Impact Assessment by 2007

Two ways of addressing the determinants of health and developing healthier public policies are incorporated into this approach:

- Multi-sectoral working for health; and

- Health Impact Assessment.

The following actions are envisaged in relation to multi-sectoral working:

- Awareness raising (by 2003) and additional resources for multi-sectoral working (by 2005).

- Utilisation and mobilisation of existing structures and networks to provide leadership for multi-sectoral working (by 2003).

- Developing mechanisms for engaging citizens and communities, including establishment of a community development and health network to facilitate community participation in multi-sectoral working (by 2003).

- Establishing a Public Health Alliance to bring together all those working for public health from all sectors to promote the reduction of health inequalities (by 2003), and

- Integration of multi-sectoral work for health in training programmes in relevant sectors.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an approach by which a policy, programme or project can be judged for its impact on health. As HIA is a method for addressing inequalities in health, achieving equity is a core component of HIA.

The proposed actions in relation to HIA include:

- Establishment of a steering group to drive HIA development (by 2003); and

- Establishment of a national HIA function to lead the HIA process (by 2005).

4.7 Housing and Accommodation

4.7.1 Challenges and Strategic Approach

Housing and accommodation provision has several distinctive features that have particular implications for poverty. These are a strong reliance on private sector housing and accommodation provision, a high concentration of poor households in rented accommodation and the persistence of poor housing standards in a minority of dwellings.

In addition, there is evidence that the extent and acuteness of housing and accommodation poverty has grown since 1997. As a result, housing and accommodation related poverty has become a key concern of Government, the social partners and the wider community. Population and economic growth has created increased demand for housing and accommodation which, coupled with limited supply, has generated rising accommodation costs in the owner occupied and private rented sectors. This has created affordability problems for low-income households living in or seeking to enter those sectors, has radically increased demand for social and affordable accommodation which is subsidised by the state, and contributed to the development of significant problems of homelessness particularly in urban areas.

Local authority assessments of housing need demonstrate that access to affordable and appropriate housing and accommodation is a problem for low income and disadvantaged groups. Rising prices in the owner occupied and private rented sectors has created affordability problems for low income groups seeking accommodation in these sectors, and the numbers of households assessed by local authorities as in need of social housing increased by 11,739 or 43 per cent between 1996 and 1999.

Homelessness is the most extreme manifestation of housing and accommodation poverty. Local authority assessments of homelessness indicate that the number of homeless people in this country increased from 2,501 people in 1996 to 5,234 people in 1999.

The available evidence indicates that most sub-standard housing and accommodation in Ireland is occupied by low income and disadvantaged groups and that fuel poverty, resulting from thermally inefficient dwellings which are often heated by less efficient fuels, is a significant problem for such groups.

Furthermore, the progress under NAPS in refurbishing local authority estates has highlighted the need for more effective maintenance and repair programmes, if improvements to the built environment of these estates are to be sustained. Additional housing management, social service and community development interventions are also required, to comprehensively address the needs of residents.

A significant number of disadvantaged households live in private rented accommodation. The Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector (2000) estimated that some 43,000 of the approximately 131,000 tenants living in private

rented accommodation are currently in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Rent Allowance. Of this group, 33 per cent are unemployed; 20 per cent are lone parents, 12 per cent are participants in active labour market schemes, 11 per cent are on disability schemes, 10 per cent are asylum seekers and 14 per cent are in receipt of the benefit for other reasons. If the conditions of low income private renting tenants are to be improved, reform of the management of such accommodation is also necessary, in tandem with the policy measures to eliminate sub standard dwellings in this sector which are proposed above.

4.7.2   Overall Objective

The overall objective is to enable households experiencing poverty and disadvantage to have available to them housing or accommodation, which is affordable, accessible, of good quality, suitable to their needs, culturally acceptable, located in a sustainable community and, as far as possible, in a secure tenure of their choice.

4.7.3   Key Targets

The key objective with regard to access to housing is to address the problems of low income and disadvantaged households, by ensuring that they have access to affordable, accessible, good quality dwellings, located in a good environment, and, as far as possible, in a secure tenure of their choice. The key targets proposed are therefore to ensure that:

- by end 2007, 70 per cent of low income and disadvantaged households, assessed by local authorities as being in need of accommodation, will have available to them suitable and adequate accommodation within two years of their acceptance on the housing list

- by end 2010, 90 per cent of low income and disadvantaged households, assessed by local authorities as being in need of accommodation, will have available to them suitable and adequate accommodation within 18 months of their acceptance on the housing list.[11]

A statutory assessment of local authority housing needs will be undertaken by each local authority in March 2002. The appropriateness of the recommended targets will be reviewed, in the context of the NAPS monitoring process, in the light of the information acquired through this assessment on the length of time a housing applicant spends on the waiting list.

- By end 2004, sufficient and appropriate emergency accommodation will be available to rough sleepers, in conjunction with appropriate outreach services to enable them to access it.

Sub-Standard Dwellings

- By the end of 2007, no low income and disadvantaged households will be forced to live in dwellings which lack an indoor toilet and bath or shower.

- In the same time period, the number of such households which live in dwellings, which are not dry, damp free and adequately heated , will be reduced by 50 per cent;

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[11] Because of lack of baseline data to underpin these targets, they will have to be reviewed, as data become available.

Fuel Poverty

- By end 2007 adequate heating systems will be available in all local authority rented dwellings provided for older people.

- By 2010 adequate heating systems will be provided in all local authority rented dwellings.

Homelessness

- The need for homeless people to remain in emergency accommodation for longer than six months, or to remain in inappropriate institutional accommodation will be eliminated, as soon as possible, but in any event, not later than end 2007;

- Suitable transitional accommodation and long term supported and permanent housing and accommodation will be available as required for those households who are assessed by local authorities as being in inappropriate institutional accommodation, or in emergency accommodation under the terms of the 1988 Housing Act as soon as possible, but in any event, not later than end 2007;

- Suitable accommodation and care will be available, where necessary, in relation to youth homelessness as soon as possible, but in any event, not later than end 2007.

These targets, and the key target relating to homelessness, are to apply to each local authority and health board area. At end 2003, progress in meeting these targets will be reviewed and, if necessary revised mechanisms will be introduced to achieve these targets.

In recommending the above targets, it is recognised that in most local authority and health board areas the extent of homelessness is less than that in major urban areas. The target dates of end 2007 are, therefore, seen as the latest delivery dates and it is considered that the majority of local authorities and health boards should be able to meet these targets by end 2004.

The Management of Social and Private Rented Housing and Accommodation

- By the end of 2003, all social housing providers will have in place housing and accommodation and estate management strategies;

- By mid 2003, a legislative basis to implement the reforms proposed in the Report of the Commission on the Private Rented Residential Sector (2000) will be put in place.

- Effective local authority rental assistance arrangements linked to an adequate supply of good standard rental accommodation will be developed.

4.7.4   Overall Policy Approach

The overall policy approach proposed is to

- Address the length of time spent on the housing waiting list by low income and disadvantaged households;

- work towards the elimination of substandard dwellings in all housing tenures;

- address the issue of fuel poverty by ensuring that dwellings are adequately insulated and have appropriate and adequate heating systems;

- ensure that homeless persons should have access to good quality accommodation that is suitable to their needs, and that they are provided with the appropriate health and welfare supports to assist them back into independent living within the community. Where this is not feasible appropriate sheltered long term accommodation will be provided;

- ensure that social housing providers deliver a high standard of housing/accommodation and estate management;

- reform the private rented sector; and

- meet the needs the needs of the sections of society that are at particular risk of housing and accommodation poverty.

4.7.5   Key Policy Actions and Measures

Specific actions may include the following:

Access to Housing

- Local authorities will, in 2001, adopt housing strategies that will indicate the manner in which they propose to meet their social housing needs over the period covered by these strategies.

- Local authorities will achieve 25,000 housing starts during the period 2000-2003. The annual output of the Voluntary and Co-operative housing sectors will increase from 1000 in 2000 to 4000 in 2006, yielding 15,000 dwellings in the period 2000 to 2006 as provided for in the National Development Plan.

- 2000 housing units will be provided annually through the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes

- At the end of 2002 the Department of the Environment and Local Government will review all social housing programmes in the light of the results of the local authority assessments of housing needs to ensure that their scale and pace are sufficient to meet the objective.

- A housing information and advice structure will be provided by end 2003.

Sub-standard Dwellings

- By end 2003, adequate procedures for the effective enforcement of legal minimum standards for rented housing will have been put in place.

- By end 2002, the legislative requirements relating to minimum standards for rented housing will be reviewed, and revised standards will be introduced in 2003.

- The availability of funding for the existing housing grants available for low-income households will be reviewed when the 2001 National House Condition Survey becomes available. The terms of the Disabled Persons and Essential Repair Grants and the Special Housing Aid for the Elderly programme will also

be kept under review, to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the categories of person for whom they were intended.

Fuel Poverty

- As part of the process of addressing fuel poverty, the adequacy of the fuel allowance scheme will be kept under review.

Homelessness

- In 2001 integrated strategies to address homelessness will be adopted by all local authorities.

- By end 2002, health boards, in conjunction with local authorities and the voluntary agencies, will have put in place appropriate support services for homeless people to coincide with the finalisation of local action plans.

- By end 2002, systems will be established by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, in consultation with local authorities and voluntary agencies, to ensure that local authority assessments of homelessness are as accurate as possible.

- The Homelessness Fora, representative of local, statutory and voluntary organisations working with the homeless, which are being established at county level, will ensure that the full range of appropriate services are provided for homeless people and that service provision is effectively co-ordinated.

- By end 2002, funding schemes for homeless services will be reviewed and, if appropriate, reformed.

The Management of Social and Private Rented Housing and Accommodation

- By the end of 2003, all social housing providers will have in place housing and accommodation and estate management strategies.

- By end 2002, each local authority will review and update its statement of policy on housing management.

- By end 2002, local authorities either individually or, where appropriate, on a shared basis will employ tenant liaison officers to advance the local authority's housing and estate management policies.

- Community facilities, including, where appropriate, childcare facilities will be provided at construction stage of social housing developments where the number of dwellings warrant it.

- By end 2002, a special needs housing management allowance will be provided by health boards for the management of supported/sheltered housing schemes provided by the voluntary and co-operative housing sector.

- By end 2003, following surveys of their housing stock, social housing providers will adopt a scheme of planned maintenance for their rented dwellings.

- The Department of Environment and Local Government will explore the development of professional accreditation standards for housing management.

- The Private Residential Tenancies Board will be established on an ad-hoc basis by autumn 2001.

- Legislation to implement the proposed reforms, including those relating to security of tenure, rent regulation, graduated notice to quit and dispute resolution, will be enacted by 2003.

- The role of the Housing Unit in supporting the improved management and maintenance of local authority housing and dissemination of best practice will be enhanced;

- By end 2001, if possible, promote the undertaking by local authorities of pilot schemes to procure availability of good quality rental accommodation for low income households who would otherwise be dependent on rent supplementation. The extension of the scheme to low income households generally will be considered in the light of the outcome of the pilot scheme.

Building Sustainable Communities

The NAPS must support a process of development which is sustainable in economic, social and environmental terms, making a significant contribution to promoting equality, improving quality of life, and creating a built environment that adheres to the highest standards of urban design.

Such a process of sustainable development would result in a number of identifiable outcomes. These include:

- Nobody would be denied access to good-quality, suitable, affordable housing/accommodation.

- The housing system would not deepen or reinforce social inequalities or division.

- Housing would make a leading contribution to the creation of sustainable communities in order to provide adequate community and self-development opportunities for everyone.

- Residential development would be planned in an integrated manner to meet basic social, cultural and economic needs as well as providing accommodation.

- Communities would have a real influence over the fabric of their own built environments and would enjoy stability and security.

- Housing would continue to play a key role within broader processes of urban and rural regeneration.

- Priority would be given to the densification of existing urban areas, the re-use of previously developed land within urban areas, the bringing back into use of empty homes and, where appropriate, the converting of existing buildings to residential use.

- The needs of people would be placed before ease of traffic movements in designing the layout of residential developments.

- Good design would be promoted in new housing developments creating attractive, high-quality living environments.

A specific pilot initiative will be established by mid-2002 tasked with the development of a series of quantitative and qualitative 'sustainability' indicators. These sustainability indicators will be developed in conjunction with a number of stakeholders, including local authorities, other housing providers, communities, and

social partners, with the aim in the medium-term of establishing mechanisms for providing strategic policy advice, research, monitoring and evaluation, of sustainable residential development.

5. Preventing the Risks of Exclusion

5.1 Introduction

This part of the report deals with the following NAPincl objectives:

- To exploit fully the potential of the knowledge-based society and of new information and communication technologies and ensure that no one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities.

- To put in place policies which seek to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of social exclusion, such as indebtedness, exclusion from school and becoming homeless.

- To implement action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms.

Other actions relevant to this NAPincl objective are contained in other sections of the report and are not repeated here.

5.2 Objective 2(a) Exploiting fully the potential of the knowledge-based society and of new information and communication technologies and ensuring that no-one is excluded, taking particular account of the needs of people with disabilities.

5.2.1 Introduction

In an information society, one of the key challenges is to ensure that no group is left behind. The following are a number of key initiatives which, when implemented, will help address the digital divide and also improve access for everyone to State services.

5.2.2 CAIT Initiative

The CAIT (Community Application of Information Technology) Initiative was launched by the Minister for Public Enterprise in December 2000. The initiative will provide funding of up to €5.08 million (IR£4 million) over the period June 2001 to December 2002 for Community and Voluntary Sector projects which harness the new information and communication technologies for social development purposes. Grants of up to €0.13million (IR£0.1million) per project are available for 25 plus projects, expected to be commissioned by early June 2001.

The selected projects will impact on every county in Ireland and on a wide range of groups including rural communities, the farming community, the elderly, the unemployed, manual workers, the Travelling community, people with disabilities and young people at risk. The variety of projects to be undertaken include, access centres, training programmes, education and literacy, outreach programmes, independent living facilitation, communication and advocacy networks and mentoring through technology. A sizeable number of the projects will comprise access points and training programmes, ranging from basic computers to ECDL, VEC and City & Guilds.

5.2.3 "Universal Participation" Initiative

This initiative, launched in summer 2001, is designed to stimulate a demand for access and participation in the information age. It will focus on locally based community workers or 'champions' who will work within their communities to encourage participation through the promotion of literacy (including technology

literacy), beneficial links with industry, education and other local players and promote participation in e-learning and community building using the Internet. This will complement the CAIT initiative and link up with other community based initiatives focused on participation, which will emerge over the coming year.

5.2.4   REACH

REACH is a cross-Departmental agency, launched in September 2000, to improve the quality of service to customers of the Irish Public Service. REACH's particular mandates are to develop a framework to integrate public services and to specify and establish a single gateway to Government – the Public Services Broker. The Public Services Broker is a new model for the electronic delivery of public services. The Public Services Broker Bill proposes to provide the necessary legislative framework for the establishment and operation of the Public Services Broker. The Bill will be enacted in 2002.

5.2.5   Oasis

Oasis is a project recently launched by Comhairle, which provides on-line access to information and advice on public services. It works by structuring information around key life events e.g. birth, education, housing, work and retirement and provides an electronic one-stop-shop by gathering information from all relevant sources for each event. While public agencies have made great strides in providing and simplifying information about their services, many people are still intimidated by its volume and complexity. OASIS is a further step forward in giving instant access and independence to people who need information and advice on their entitlements.

The delivery of public services electronically is a new approach to the presentation and delivery of public service information on the Internet. OASIS will initially provide a wealth of information and will help people to discover the services, which are of use to them. In time, it will act as a gateway for direct access to these services with people enabled to do business electronically with a range of social services.

5.2.6   Europe Action Plan and Benchmarking

Rapid progress in developing the Information Society agenda is seen as vital for Ireland's future competitiveness. Electronic Government (eGovernment) forms an essential part of an Information Society and its implementation is also an integral part of reform of the public service and improved service delivery to public service customers. The eEurope Action Plan has been adopted to advance the development of the Information Society at European level. A set of benchmarking targets has been adopted to measure progress in each of the Member States to be measured. A list of twenty common public services has been agreed as the basis for the benchmarks. The degree to which these services are available online will be an indicator of progress in each Member State.

5.2.7   Public Internet Access Pilot Project

The Government's Information Society Action Plan included the objective of enabling Internet access for those who do not have PC/internet access at present. Four Internet Kiosks, for use by members of the public, are expected to be installed in the public office area of Ballyfermot (Dublin) Social Welfare Local Office in 2001.

5.3 Objective 2(b) Putting in place policies which seek to prevent life crises which can lead to situations of social exclusion, such as indebtedness, exclusion from school and becoming homeless

5.3.1 Introduction

For those that experience poverty, certain events in the lifecycle can exacerbate their position and specific targeted interventions are needed in these situations. These interventions include the activities of the DSCFA in tackling the problems of money lending and over-indebtedness and the Government's Homeless Strategy.

5.3.2 Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)

The DSCFA is involved in activities to tackle the problems of money lending and over indebtedness. Currently 50 local projects provide advice on money management and budgeting to families and persons who are experiencing difficulty. Challenges for the future include deepening the "community education" aspect of the service and strengthening the policy framework for the delivery of the MABS. The service will also be put on a statutory basis in 2002.

5.3.4 Homelessness

The Government's Homeless Strategy, which is based on the work of the Cross Department Team, was launched in May 2000. The strategy, for the first time, provides for an integrated response to homelessness by all the Statutory and Voluntary Agencies and bodies involved in providing services to homeless persons. It recognises that homelessness is not just about accommodation, but that other areas including care and welfare, health, education, training and prevention must be addressed if homelessness is to be tackled. Substantial additional funding has been made available to ensure that the recommendations of the Government 's Strategy are implemented.

Capital funding for the direct provision by Local Authorities of accommodation for homeless persons is being doubled from €25.39million (IR£20million) to €50.79million (IR£40million) over the next five years. Current funding is being increased by €7.62 million (IR£6 million) per annum to increase bed night contribution rates to voluntary bodies and to fund other support services such as settlement and outreach services. Additional funding of €7.62 million (IR£6million) will also be available from the Department of Health and Children to fund the provision of in-house care in hostels providing accommodation for homeless people. In addition, a special provision of €6.35million (IR£5million) over 2000/2001 was announced in Budget 2000 for the provision of two high support hostels for alcohol and drug users in Dublin. As part of the Homeless Strategy, a Homeless Services Agency has been established for the Dublin area to manage and co-ordinate the delivery of all services by both Statutory and Voluntary Agencies to homeless persons in Dublin.

A Preventative Strategy, to target key groups at risk of homelessness, particularly those leaving custodial or health-related care, is currently being prepared at national level by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, together with the Departments of Health and Children, Education and Science and Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This Strategy is currently being finalised and will be published shortly.

See also Section 4.7.5 for specific targets on homelessness.

5.3.5   Youth Homelessness

The Government's Youth Homelessness Strategy, which was launched in October 2001, provides a strategic framework for youth homelessness to be tackled on a national basis. The goal of the Strategy is to reduce and if possible eliminate youth homelessness through preventative strategies and where a child becomes homeless to ensure that he/she benefits from a comprehensive range of services aimed at reintegrating him/her into his /her community as quickly as possible. The Strategy requires each health board, within three months of the publication of the Strategy and following consultation with relevant statutory and voluntary bodies, to develop a two year strategic plan to address youth homelessness in line with specific actions required under 12 objectives in three broad categories: preventive measures, responsive services and planning and administrative supports. The Strategy also requires that a range of other bodies in the public sector either support the actions of health boards or take specific steps themselves.

5.3.6   Special Projects for Disadvantaged Youth

Under this Scheme, grants are allocated in respect of special out-of school projects for disadvantaged young people. The projects are aimed at facilitating the personal development and social education of youth at risk of drug abuse, juvenile crime, early school leaving, social exclusion, unemployment, welfare dependence, homelessness and marginalisation. In particular they seek to realise the potential of young people and to equip them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for their appropriate integration in society.

5.4   Objective 2c Implementing action to preserve family solidarity in all its forms

5.4.1   Family Affairs Unit

In line with its pro-family approach to the development of policy and services as set out in the Programme for Government "Action Programme for the Millennium", the Government established a Family Affairs Unit (FAU) in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

The functions of the FAU are to:

- co-ordinate family policy;

- undertake research;

- promote awareness of family issues, including parenting issues;

- support marriage, child and bereavement counselling services;

- provide a Family Mediation Service;

- develop the Family Services Project.

5.4.2 Family Support Agency

The Family Support Agency legislation passed all stages in Oireachtas, receiving cross-party support and the Family Support Agency Act, 2001 was signed by the President on December 22nd, 2001. The official establishment day has yet to be announced by the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs. Next steps include the formation of a designate board, the recruitment of a Chief Executive Officer and the provision of accommodation for the Agency.

5.4.3 Family Mediation Service

The Family Mediation Service is a free, professional confidential service, which enables couples, who have decided to separate, reach agreement on all issues related to their separation. It assists couples in addressing the issues on which they need to make decisions including post-separation living arrangements, finances, and parenting arrangements to enable children to have an ongoing relationship with each parent.

5.4.4 Families Research Programme

The Families Research Programme was established to support innovative, original research in the field of family policy and family services and in areas highlighted by the Commission on the Family in their report *'Strengthening Families for Life'* as being in need of further investigation. 12 research projects will be completed in 2001 - 2002 and a framework will be developed to follow up on the recommendations of the completed research projects.

5.4.5 Grants for Marriage, Child Counselling and Bereavement

The FAU administers a Scheme of Grants to voluntary organisations providing marriage counselling services, marriage preparation courses, child counselling services in relation to parental separation and bereavement counselling and support services. Some €6.09 million (IR£4.8 million) has been made available for the further development of this programme in 2001.

6. Helping the Most Vulnerable

6.1 Introduction

There is a growing recognition that poverty and social exclusion can have different and more pronounced effects on certain groups within society. For instance, Travellers, women and children in low income households, people with disabilities and members of other ethnic minorities, many of whom are early school leavers, are more likely to experience consistent and persistent poverty. Individuals and families living in disadvantaged urban areas or in peripheral rural areas can also experience more acute forms of poverty and exclusion.

Those experiencing consistent poverty, while substantially reduced in number, are more likely to reside in low income households, as a result of prolonged unemployment, illness/disability, or because the household reference person is retired or engaged full-time in the home. Such households tend not to benefit from a tight labour market due to a variety of factors such as low skills, poor educational levels, and difficulties in accessing and retaining employment.

Research has highlighted the fact that many women and children experience hidden poverty and exclusion, arising from a vicious and intergenerational circle of low income, prolonged unemployment, poor educational qualifications and inadequate access to the type of health, housing and other services that they require.

However, the evidence also suggests that targeted support measures can often be successful in addressing these issues. Many unemployed men and women, for example, can be helped to the point where they are much more "job-ready" (Barrett, Sexton and Whelan 2001)[12]. In the same vein, targeted measures aimed at enhancing the possibility of greater labour force participation for people with disabilities, lone parents, members of ethnic communities, can be effective when coupled with the necessary specialist supports.

6.2 Children

6.2.1 Challenges and Strategic Approach

Research has shown that a higher poverty risk exists for families with children when compared with non-child households. Among the reasons identified for this situation were unemployment, low pay and lone parenthood. Unemployment has been identified as the main reason for the high level of child poverty.

It has also been shown that poor children do less well educationally, are more likely to suffer ill health, are vulnerable to homelessness and delinquent behaviour and have fewer opportunities in life. It has been found that child poverty can seriously damage the life chances of many children, leading to a cycle of deprivation and social exclusion, which can be re-produced inter-generationally.

In this context it is worth noting that approximately 5,000 young people leave school early each year and a further 1,000 do not transfer from primary to second level. The majority of disadvantaged pupils live in rural areas (60 per cent) followed by Dublin (25.5 per cent).

Lack of childcare exacerbates the symptoms of poverty and social exclusion – for both parents and children.

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[12] "Employability" and its Relevance for the Management of the Live Register (May 2001) A. Barrett, C.T. Whelan, J.J. Sexton. ESRI Policy Paper.

The National Children's Strategy was published in November 2000. This Strategy contains many objectives and measures which are relevant to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and will be implemented by the Children's Office over a ten year period. The structures to be implemented over 2001 include:

- A Cabinet Committee for Children;

- An expanded role for the Minister of State with Special Responsibility for Children;

- A National Children's Office

- A National Children's Advisory Council;

- A Research Dissemination Unit;

- A Research Development Advisory Group

In relation specifically to child poverty a number of issues need to be addressed:

- Every effort should be made to ensure that no child lives in consistent poverty.

- Parents of children in low income households should have access to adequate health services to ensure that no children start life at a disadvantage

- All children should have access to appropriate education at pre-school through primary and secondary level, and into third level, with the aim of achieving basic numeracy and literacy skills for all children and the elimination of early school leaving.

- Children that need special educational supports due to poverty, the costs of education, special needs, or arising from their membership of the Traveller community or of another ethnic group, should be able to access such supports.

- Children who experience exclusion through homelessness, drug misuse or involvement in juvenile crime should be given every support possible to reintegrate them into normal society.

6.2.2 Overall Objective

To reduce and if possible eliminate, the number of children who are consistently poor and to move to a situation of greater equality for all children in terms of access to appropriate education, health and housing, thus breaking the cycle of disadvantage and exclusion experienced by certain children in society.

6.2.3 Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the NAPS will aim at reducing the numbers of children who are 'consistently poor' below 2 per cent and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty used by the ESRI.

- Reduce the gap in low birth weight rates between children from the lowest and highest socio-economic group by 10 per cent from the current level, by 2007.[13]

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[13] Reducing the gap in low birth weight rates between different socio-economic groups depends on wide social, economic and environmental action as well as the provision of accessible public services. Action is required across the full range of NAPS health targets.

Subsidiary targets are:

- All children in targeted disadvantaged areas will have access to early childhood education, including all special needs children;

- The proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties will be halved by 2006;

- The number of young people who leave the school system early will be reduced, so that the percentage of those retained to upper second level or equivalent will reach 85 per cent retention by 2003 and 90 per cent by 2006. This target will be subject to review during the period of the NAPS.

6.2.4   Overall Policy Approach

The overall policy approach will be to:

- To reduce to 2 per cent, and if possible eliminate, the number of children living in consistent poverty through the introduction of a range of measures aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion.

- To address known effects of household poverty on children by ensuring that, to the extent feasible and practicable, all children have access to health, educational and housing services commensurate to their needs.

- To implement the National Children's Strategy.

- To monitor the risk of relative poverty amongst children through the use of indicators.

6.2.5   Key Policy Actions and Measures

Income Adequacy

A number of measures in this area will have significant and positive effects on the income levels of families with children. These include the PPF commitment to substantially increase Child Benefit with a priority focus on moving towards a figure of £100 per month for third and subsequent children. The Minister for Finance reiterated this commitment in the Budget 2000 speech when the Government pledged to invest £1 billion in child benefit over three budgets (including the 2001 budget). The Social Welfare Benchmarking and Indexation Group also recommended that the appropriate equivalence level of child income support (i.e. Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances combined) should be set at 33-35 per cent of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate.

Health

By 2005, Springboard or equivalent intensive family support projects, targeted at young people at risk will be established in 12 additional areas following agreement with key stakeholders in the community.

With a view to providing timely access for vulnerable groups to child and adolescent psychiatric services, the recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on Child and Adolescent Services 2001 in relation to the provision of consultant-led multidisciplinary teams will be expedited.

By 2003, health boards will undertake an assessment of the need for supports for adolescents with mental health problems in Primary Care settings in line with the recommendation to this effect in the report "*Get Connected - Developing an Adolescent Friendly Health Service*" by the National Conjoint Child Health Committee.

A comprehensive injury prevention strategy to reduce higher injury rates in children at risk in lower socio-economic groups should be developed by 2003.

By 2003, the income threshold in the guidelines for the medical card will be increased with a view to removing impediments to access to health services and taking account of the particular needs of children.

By 2003, health boards will undertake an assessment of the need for supports for adolescents with mental health problems in Primary Care settings in line with the recommendation to this effect in the report "*Get Connected*".

Housing

By 2005, the incidence of youth homelessness will be reduced significantly, through increasing family and community based supports to prevent homelessness and providing appropriate emergency response so as to prevent young people staying homeless and to facilitate their reintegration into the community.

Make available suitable accommodation and care where necessary, in relation to youth homelessness as soon as possible but, in any event, not later than end 2007.

Community childcare facilities will be provided at construction stage of social housing developments where the number of dwellings warrants it.

Education

All children in targeted disadvantaged areas will have access to early childhood education, including all special needs children.

All special needs children will have access to early childhood education.

The proportion of pupils in designated disadvantaged areas with serious literacy difficulties will be halved by 2006.

Schools with a high concentration of at risk pupils will be supported with PTR of 20:1 in the junior classes (infants-2nd class) and a maximum of 25:1 in the higher classes (3rd-6th) except schools, which already have a lower ratio under an existing recognised programme;

Increased participation of students from unskilled/agricultural work backgrounds to 22 per cent by 2003 and 27 per cent by 2006.

Increase participation of students from the unskilled social class to 27 per cent in 2003 and 33 per cent in 2006.

To increase participation at third level by students with disabilities to 1.35 per cent by 2003 and 1.8 per cent by end of 2006;

6.3   Women

6.3.1   Challenges and Strategic Approach

Poverty can be experienced differently by men and women.   The way poverty is measured through national household surveys can mean that the gender dimension of poverty is not always evident and it has been suggested that women's poverty can be "hidden".   In addition, inequality and discrimination can increase the risk of poverty for women and these issues are often inextricably linked.

Research[14] shows that one in every four women raising children or managing households on their own experienced poverty despite the economic boom we have been experiencing in Ireland. If that woman is old, or a lone parent, her situation will have worsened over the past 10 years in relative terms. It has been found that women are at greater risk of poverty than men as they tend to enter poverty more frequently, stay in poverty situations longer and encounter additional obstacles in exiting from poverty situations to those found by men e.g. social welfare dependency, low paid employment, etc.

The burden of poverty often falls on women - often it is left to them to "manage the poverty". Their poverty goes beyond the material deprivation of poverty because of a number of factors. These include:

- the obstacles to social and economic participation resulting from child-rearing or caring or family responsibilities;

- economic dependence;

- parenting alone;

- barriers in accessing education, training or employment opportunities;

- lack of adequate, accessible or affordable child care facilities; or

- in some instances, women being the victims of domestic violence.

While the level of consistent poverty among women has declined, the trends in relative income poverty give rise to some concern. In 1994, there was little difference between men and women in terms of their risk of relative income poverty. By 1998, however, the risk for women was significantly higher than that for men. This gap is partly among older people and reflects the extent to which social welfare rates, upon which many of these women depend, have lagged behind average income. However, female lone parents who are unemployed are the only groups at high-risk of consistent poverty.

A number of subgroups of women therefore experience multiple disadvantage. Such groups include Traveller women, lone parents, women with disabilities and women from other ethnic groups. Many elderly women also live in poor conditions with inadequate access to health and other caring services.

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[14] Out of Sight - The Hidden Poverty of Women -
National Women's Council of Ireland Policy Discussion Paper - 2000

In relation specifically to women's poverty a number of issues therefore need to be addressed:

- The hidden poverty experienced by many women should be addressed and any barriers currently limiting their access to education, training and work should be removed.

- Every effort should be made to ensure that women can participate fully in the labour market, particularly lone parents, and this in turn requires the availability of adequate and affordable childcare.

- The particular health care needs of women should be adequately addressed, particularly in relation to cervical and breast cancer.

- As far as practicable, every effort should be made to ensure that older women have a healthy and independent life.

- Actions are required to prevent and eliminate violence against women.

6.3.2 Overall Objective

To reduce to 2 per cent, and if possible eliminate, the number of women living in consistent poverty and to improve access for women to appropriate health care, education and employment thus reducing the risk of poverty for such women and their families.

6.3.3 Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the NAPS will aim to reduce the numbers of women who are 'consistently poor' below 2 per cent and, if possible, eliminate consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty used by the ESRI.

- To increase the employment participation rate of women to an average of more than 60 per cent in 2010, as envisaged under the National Employment Action Plan 2001;

- To provide a total of over 67,000 childcare places (including maintenance of existing places and creation of new places) throughout the country under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme by end 2006; and

- To identify by the end of 2002, through the County Childcare Committees, the number of childcare places required.

6.3.4 Overall Policy Approach

- To develop a fully inclusive social insurance system, which would facilitate the combining of work and family responsibilities, and to progress the implementation of administrative individualisation within the welfare system.

- To complete the process of implementing the recommendations of the Review of the One Parent Family Payment, published in Sept. 2000;

- To increase the participation rate of women in the labour force and to remove any remaining barriers to women's access to the labour market, particularly for lone parents;

- To move towards the provision of accessible health services for women on a regional basis;

- To continue to support the development of childcare services that are accessible and of high quality; and

- To monitor the risk of relative poverty amongst women through the use of indicators.

6.3.5 Key Policy Actions and Measures

Income Adequacy

A number of measures in this area will have significant and positive effects on women's poverty. The proposals that the revised NAPS should aim to bring the number of women that are consistently poor below 2 per cent and that the risk of relative income poverty among women be monitored through the use of indicators are key examples. Plans to increase pensions in line with average industrial earnings will also have a positive effect on older women living in poverty. Agreed changes in the One Parent Family Payment will support lone parents in returning to education and work.

Health

Regional access for women to breast cancer treatment services will be improved by expediting the implementation of recommendations of the Report on Symptomatic Breast Cancer Services.

A comprehensive injury prevention strategy to reduce higher injury rates in people at risk particularly older women in lower social economic groups should be developed by 2003.

Respite services for older people and for people with disability will be improved which should improve quality of life and reduce stress for carers who are predominantly women.

Education

Women's participation in further education and training will be supported through the provision of a wide range of adult literacy and further education and training measures which will be of sufficient quality to allow women currently experiencing poverty to move out of poverty, and to prevent others from becoming poor.

Within the published 15 per cent quota of full time undergraduate places for mature students, each third level institution is required, by 2006, to double participation by mature disadvantaged students including Travellers and Refugees.

Provide 20,000 extra places per annum in the further education sector by 2006, 10 per cent to be reserved exclusively for community education providers.

Employment /Unemployment

The recommendations contained in Women's Access Report by end 2001 will be implemented with the aim of achieving the target of planned for increase in the employment participation rate of women to an average of 60 per cent or more over the period to 2010. FÁS is providing allowances for childcare in respect of persons who wish to take up training for the purposes of returning to work. Eligibility for the CE programme has been extended to adult dependants of long-term unemployed

persons, widows, persons in receipt of Deserted Wives Benefit and persons previously in receipt of Carers Allowance for a period of 12 months.

The Employment Action Plan intervention aimed at achieving increases in participation in employment of women in low-income households and lone parents will be rolled out within the time-scale of the NDP (2000-2006).

Childcare and Eldercare

The Government is committed under the NDP to meeting the diverse needs of parents and children, including key target groups, through supporting the development of childcare services that are accessible and of high quality. A further aim, addressing the need for maximum mobilisation of the available labour force, is to enhance the opportunities and remove disincentives to participation by parents, particularly mothers, in economic and social activity through adequate childcare provision. Priority will be given to the development of childcare services in areas of disadvantage. The total childcare allocation in the NDP for the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme for the period 2000 to 2006 is €436.79million (IR£344million). A significant proportion of this funding is being made available through the European Structural Funds and the European Regional Development Fund.

The target is to provide a total of over 67,000 childcare places throughout the country under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme by end 2006.

It is intended that Statutory training authorities and EU and State funded programme should ensure that childcare facilities are available for parents availing of the courses.

County Childcare Committees have been established in each local authority area. Their initial task is to prepare a County Childcare Plan, which will examine the childcare needs in the area, assess the current level of childcare service provision and make recommendations for the development of childcare service provision into the future.

Additional funding allocated to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to support initiatives such as out of school care and after school care again with a focus on disadvantage, will be expended over the period up to 2006.

With regard to eldercare, it must be recognised that women are primarily responsible for care. There is a need for supports for eldercare so that women can access education and training opportunities. There is a need also to move towards a fully inclusive social insurance system, which facilitates the combining of work and family responsibilities.

Carers

The Carer's Allowance is a means tested payment for carers on low income who look after people in need of full-time care and attention. There are over 17,000 carers in receipt of the payment. The Review of the Carer's Allowance, published in October 1998, considered the purpose and development of the Carer's Allowance scheme, both in terms of its current operation and its future development. Subsequently, a number of improvements to the scheme have been introduced. Notably, Budget 2001 in addition to the weekly rate increases of £8 for carers aged under 66 and £10 for those aged over 66, provided for an increase in the income disregards from £75 to £125 for a single person and from £150 to £250 for a couple.

The Carer's Benefit scheme, introduced in 2000, is intended to support people who must leave the workforce temporarily to care for someone who is in need of full-time care and attention. The scheme involves two central elements. The first is a weekly income support payment that is operated and paid by the Department of Social,

Community and Family Affairs. This is based on PRSI contributions paid by the carer. The second is the protection of the carer's employment rights, under the Carer's Leave Act, for the duration of the caring period, which is a key feature of the scheme.

Violence against Women

Violence against women is an issue that has received increased attention from Government in recent years. For example, the annual allocation for services in this regard has increased from £3m in 1997 to £8.3m in 2000. Government has established the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women to review and consider the implementation of the Report of the Task Force on Violence against Women. Very significant research is underway into both the need for services and the development of an appropriate intervention model for dealing with victims and perpetrators. When this work is complete, consideration will be given to establishing an appropriate target for the number of refuge spaces, as well as other measures.

Because violence to women gives rise to homelessness, the Department of Environment and Local Government has a role in addressing the problem, as well as the Departments of Health and Children and Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The cross-cutting nature of the issue means that the NAPS process could be a very effective means of expediting action in this area.

It is intended that this issue will be monitored closely within the NAPS with a view to ensuring the early delivery of an integrated and effective response.

6.4   Older People

6.4.1   Challenges and Strategic Priorities

While the risk of consistent poverty for most vulnerable groups has fallen, that for older persons who are living alone has risen. A contributory factor has been the fact that social welfare rates have lagged behind average incomes. Research has shown that one of the main factors in explaining the increase in the risk of poverty for older households, especially adult older households and those headed by women is the changing relationship between the poverty lines and the rates paid under different social welfare programmes. Those who are dependent on non-contributory old age pension for their income are seen to be particularly vulnerable to the risk of poverty. A decline in family and non-formal community care and support in urban areas may also contribute to the neglect, levels of loneliness and vulnerability experienced by older people. As with the other cross-cutting groups, data on the nature and extent of poverty amongst older people living in urban areas is very limited.   The Urban Disadvantage Working Group considered, however, that it is likely that crime is a particular issue of concern for such older people.

Disadvantaged older people can experience particularly acute problems in relation to poverty and social exclusion.

While, compared to other EU countries, the problem of an ageing workforce is not as acute in Ireland at present, this will become more significant over the coming decade. Older people, particularly those who are dependent on non-contributory old age pension, remain vulnerable to an increasing risk of poverty, particularly in the case of elder women.

Key issues in relation to older people are:

- Older people should have access to adequate and affordable health care.

- Older people should have access to adequate and affordable housing.

- Older people should be able to access supports that will facilitate them to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

6.4.2 Overall Objectives

To reduce to 2 per cent, and if possible eliminate, the number of older people living in consistent poverty, to improve their access to appropriate health care and housing, and to support older people to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

6.4.3 Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the NAPS will aim at reducing the numbers of older people who are 'consistently poor' below 2 per cent and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty used by the ESRI.

- By 2003, national guidelines will be put in place for the provision of respite care services to carers of older people.

- Access to orthopaedic services will be improved so that no one is waiting longer than 12 months for a hip replacement. This is an initial short-term action to improve quality of life for older people and it will be reviewed in 2003.

- By end 2007, adequate heating systems will be available in all local authority rented dwellings provided for older people.

6.4.4 Overall Policy Approach

To improve access for older people to the supports needed by themselves, their families and carers to enable them to be cared for in the community, where appropriate.

6.4.5 Key Policy Actions and Measures

Health

The range of actions set out under the NAPS Health theme will have a significant impact on older people whose health care needs are above the average for the community as a whole. The actions that will have particular impact include the following:

- The strengthening of primary health care and the provision of better access for patients to diagnostic and treatment services through their GP;

- The reduction in the difference in waiting times between public and private hospitals; and

- The development of a comprehensive injury prevention strategy to reduce higher injury rates in people at risk, including older people in lower social economic groups, by 2003.

Housing

The terms of the Special Housing Aid for the Elderly programme will be kept under review, to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the categories of person for whom they were intended.

Local authorities will, through their tenant liaison officers, pay particular attention to the needs of older people.

Local authorities' housing strategies will make provision for suitable sheltered and supported housing for elderly people.

Pensions

There will be continued emphasis on:

increasing the level of the social welfare pension in line with the recommendations of the Income Adequacy Group;

extending the coverage of the social insurance system, which provides entitlement to non-means tested pensions, and

the extension and enhancement of occupational and personal pensions coverage.

6.5 Travellers

6.5.1 Challenges and Strategic Priorities

Official statistics estimate that there are approximately 4,000 Traveller families accounting for approximately 25,000 people. Research has found that many Travellers have relatively low standards of living and are at risk of poverty. Up to 3,000 families live in standard local authority housing, group housing or are accommodated on halting sites. However, approximately 1,000 Traveller households live on the roadside and about 250 households live on temporary halting sites, many of which are without basic services such as toilets, electricity and proper washing facilities[15]. Traveller women live on average 12 years less than their settled peers and have over three times the risk of dying in a given year than settled women. In fact, mortality rates among Traveller children are over twice those of the settled community. In addition, there are very low levels of participation amongst Traveller children in the education system, particularly at second level.

The challenge now is to increase the retention rate of Travellers in second level education. While significant progress has been made in the provision of education for Traveller children in recent decades, it is estimated that of the 80 per cent who now transfer perhaps only 20 per cent of Travellers go on to senior cycle in second level schooling and that very few of these complete the full cycle. Furthermore, only a handful progress to third level.

Traveller participation in the mainstream labour force appears to be very low and this has been attributed to a number of factors: a preference for self-employment and work in the traditional Traveller economy, widespread discrimination, lack of skills and qualifications and nomadism. At present, the vast majority of Traveller households are dependent on social welfare.

Given the strong growth in the Traveller population, with an age structure skewed towards the younger age groups, if we do not now concentrate the requisite education and training resources on this young population, the numbers of this group

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[15] Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995

facing structural unemployment, poverty and life-long marginalisation will increase significantly in the years ahead. The realities set out here pose challenges not only to the State agencies providing services but also to the Travelling community in terms of response.

In relation to Travellers, a number of specific issues need to be addressed:

• Access by Travellers to suitable health services should be significantly improved.

• Traveller accommodation issues should be comprehensively addressed in a manner that is sensitive to their needs.

• Travellers should be supported to access education and training that will assist them to participate in mainstream labour markets.

• Traveller children should be supported and facilitated to remain within the school system and to obtain the type of education qualifications that will allow them a wider choice in terms of future careers and job prospects.

• Discriminatory practices against members of the Traveller community must cease, in line with the requirements of the new Equality Legislation.

• Travellers should be involved in the policy decisions affecting their lives to ensure that such responses are relevant and effective and have the full backing of Travellers themselves.

6.5.2 Overall Objectives

To improve the life experience of Travellers through the provision of appropriate education, health and housing services and to remove any remaining barriers to the full participation of members of the Traveller community in the work and social life of the country.

6.5.3 Key Targets:

• The gap in life expectancy between the Travelling Community and the whole population will be reduced by at least 10 per cent by 2007.

• Age appropriate placement of all Travellers in Primary school will be achieved by 2003.

• The transfer rate of Travellers to post-primary schools will be increased to 95 per cent by 2004.

• The retention of Travellers in post-Primary initially to complete junior cycle and to increase the numbers staying in school to complete senior cycle will be facilitated and supported.

• Each third level institution will double the participation by mature disadvantaged students, including Travellers and Refugees by 2006 (within the 15 per cent quota).

• All Travellers' families identified in the local authority five-year Traveller accommodation programme process as being in need of accommodation, will be appropriately accommodated by end 2004.

6.5.4 Overall Policy Approach

- To take appropriate action to reduce the gap in the life expectancy between the Travelling Community and the rest of the population.

- To address the accommodation needs of Traveller households by ensuring that they have access to affordable, good quality, culturally appropriate accommodation, which is located in a good environment, and as far as possible, in a tenure of their choice.

- To ensure that all Travellers' families, identified in the local authority five-year Traveller accommodation programme process as being in need of accommodation, will be appropriately accommodated by end 2004.

- To ensure that all school-going Traveller children are fully integrated into and educated in mainstream intercultural education provision with early career guidance, and to provide ongoing education and training to adult Travellers.

6.5.5 Key Policy Actions and Measures

Employment and Unemployment

To achieve a high rate of applications under the Social Economy Programme from the Traveller economy groups, which meet the funding criteria:

Health

The life expectancy and health status of Travellers will be monitored in order that targets can be reviewed and revised by 2003.

The adoption of the Travellers Health Strategy.

Health Boards will adopt more proactive approaches to ensuring the particular problems Travellers face in taking up the medical card are addressed.

The data systems set up to provide up to date life expectancy data for Travellers will be reviewed and improved over the period of the programme.

Housing

By end 2001, all local authorities will have set targets and time scales for the delivery of a range of accommodation options to meet the accommodation needs of Travellers in their area.

By end 2001, the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee will implement a system to monitor achievement of local authority targets and time scales.

By end 2002, the operation of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 (including section 32 in relation to unauthorised encampments) will be reviewed, in accordance with the recommendation of the first progress report of the committee, to monitor and co-ordinate the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community.

The review of the 1998 Act to take place in 2002 should, if 35 per cent of the accommodation needs identified in the local 5-year programmes have not been, or

will not be, provided before the end of 2002, include an examination of mechanisms to ensure that the end 2004 targets are met.

The Local Authority Census of Traveller Families will be standardised.

In situations envisaged under Sections 6, 7 and 8 of Guidelines for Traveller Accommodation, "*Basic Services and Facilities for Caravans pending the provision of Permanent Accommodation*", Travellers should, unless there are good reasons not to do so, be provided with appropriate basic services as defined in the Guidelines. 50 per cent of these services to be provided by March 2002 and the balance by June 2002.

Education

Literacy levels among Traveller children will be monitored through regular measurement of improvements in early year's literacy at schools.

Programmes of general education, vocational training and work experience, supported by guidance and psychological services will continue to be provided to over 700 Travellers in thirty senior Traveller training centres.

A range of supports will be maintained to support the continuing participation of Traveller children in schools e.g. resource teachers, psychological services, capitation grants, childcare and transport provision.

A particular emphasis will be on achieving age appropriate placement of Traveller children in Primary, retaining Traveller children in post Primary initially to complete junior cycle and to increase the numbers staying in school to complete senior cycle.

Databases will be used to track the participation rates of Travellers at second level and in further education to monitor progress in achieving the objectives and targets set in the strategy. Follow up surveys of participants will also be carried out to obtain information on their subsequent employment experience.

6.6   People with Disabilities

6.6.1   Challenges and Strategic Priorities

People with Disabilities are among the groups that traditionally have been at risk of unemployment or prolonged low pay/ low skill employment, even in an expanding economy. However the position of this group improved considerably between 1994 and 1998, with, for example, the risk of consistent poverty (at the 60 per cent relative income line) for households headed by an ill or disabled person falling from 43 per cent in 1994 to 28 per cent in 1998. However, despite these gains, the risk of poverty for these households is exceeded only by that for unemployed households.

The additional costs facing this group in accessing education, employment and other services represents an additional barrier for people with disabilities. A PPF working group is currently examining the feasibility of introducing a Cost of Disability payment, recognising the additional costs (including medical costs which derive from disability) borne by people with disabilities entering the workforce and their potential employment disincentive effects.

In order to further strengthen the basis of positive action in respect of people with disabilities, work is in progress on a Disabilities Bill aimed at providing a statutory basis for positive action measures to advance and underpin equal participation by people with disabilities in society. A second Bill is also in preparation aimed at putting

on a statutory basis the state's responsibilities in relation to the education of children with disabilities-The Education (Children with Disabilities) Bill.

The NAPS Review Income Adequacy Working group commented on the fact that the Living in Ireland survey does not specifically identify households headed by people with disabilities. Nor does the data identify people with disabilities within households, making it impossible to identify the number of people with disabilities living in poverty. The Group agreed that this situation should be examined further in the context of the Data Strategy being developed under the NAPS Review.

6.6.2 Overall Objective

To increase the participation of people with disabilities in work and in society generally and to support people with a disability, and their families, to lead full and independent lives.

6.6.3 Key Targets

Few specific targets have been set at this time for people with disabilities. This is largely because of the lack of available baseline data for this group. A key objective therefore over the period of the NAPS will be to develop appropriate data as part of the Data Strategy emanating from the NAPS Review. Once this is available, consideration will be given to the development of a range of appropriate measures for this group.

Meanwhile the following specific targets have been set:

- Increased participation by students with disabilities at third level to 1.35 per cent by 2003 and 1.8 per cent by 2006.

- Improvements will be made in access to planned respite care for carers of disabled people by 2003.

6.6.4 Overall Policy Approach

To reduce the barriers facing people with disabilities in accessing education, work and adequate housing.

6.6.5 Key Policy Actions and measures

Health

Improvements will be made in access to planned respite care for carers of disabled people.

Standardised rules for eligibility for community support services will be put in place, which will benefit disabled people, among other groups.

Housing

The terms of the Disabled Persons and Essential Repair Grants programme will be kept under review, to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the categories of person for whom they were intended.

Local authorities will, through their tenant liaison officers, pay particular attention to the needs of disabled persons.

Education

Literacy levels among students with disabilities will be monitored through regular measurement of improvements in early year's literacy at schools.

Databases will be used to track the participation rates of people with disabilities at second level and in further education and follow up surveys of participants will also be carried out to obtain information on their subsequent employment experience.

Employment

Under the PPF, a range of measures will be taken to improve integrated labour market opportunities for people with disabilities. Disincentives to people with disabilities entering the labour market will be examined and addressed as part of this process.

FÁS provide a range of supports aimed at increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. FÁS are currently reviewing existing vocational training programmes for people with disabilities, with a view to achieving a more integrated, mainstreamed approach. There will be an increased emphasis on people with disabilities in vocational training and in progression to employment.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment are currently reviewing the role and effectiveness of sheltered workshops and the type of supports provided by FÁS for people with disabilities.

In addition the PPF requires that each Government Department take appropriate action to ensure that agencies under its aegis achieve the 3 per cent target for the employment of people with disabilities at an early date. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has responsibility for chairing a committee tasked with monitoring and guiding progress towards achievement of the target. The Monitoring Committee comprises representatives of Government Departments, the Social Partners and disability interest groups.

Transport

The Department of Public Enterprise is involved in a number of initiatives aimed at increasing access to public transport by the elderly, people with disabilities and mobility impaired people. All three of the CIE operating companies have established consultative groups which include representatives from a range of disability organisations and designated staff from the three companies have been assigned responsibility for accessibility matters. In addition, the Public Transport Accessibility Committee, which includes representation from organisations working on behalf of the elderly, people with disabilities and mobility impaired people, is continuing its work.

Access to Services

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the National Disability Authority will monitor the commitment given in the PPF to make public services more accessible to people with disabilities over a five-year time frame to ensure that adequate progress is being achieved.

The Disabled Drivers Tax Concession is being reviewed and a report will be presented to the Minister for Finance in the near future.

Data Needs

Under the PPF, The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is currently putting in place arrangements to review and identify key statistical needs in relation to people with disabilities or categories of people with disabilities for the purpose of informing policy, planning and delivery of services.

Legislation

The Disabilities Bill aimed at providing a statutory basis for positive action measures to advance and underpin equal participation by people with disabilities in society is due to be published late 2001.

The Education (Children with Disabilities) Bill will also be published in the near future.

6.7   Migrants and Members of Ethnic Minority Groups.

6.7.1.   Challenges and Strategic Priorities.

Cultural diversity in Ireland has been highlighted by a significant increase in inward migration in recent years. However, it is important to note that cultural diversity existed in Ireland for many years. The Traveller community has an estimated population of 25,000 and remains the largest minority group in Ireland. There has been a long-established Jewish community and growing Islamic, Asian and Chinese communities in Ireland. Nevertheless, Ireland has undergone a demographic transformation in recent years. The situation regarding ethnic minority groups in Ireland is evolving rapidly. The Government is committed to flexibility and to partnership with the social partners and civil society in policy development in this area.

Migration

While emigration continues at a significant level, with in excess of 20,000 leaving the country in 2000, inward migration is estimated at 42,000 in the same period. The table below shows a breakdown of their country of origin:

Table 6.1: Breakdown of Immigrants by Country of Origin, 2000

Country	Number
UK	16,400
Rest of EU	9,800
USA	4,600
Rest of World:	11,500

There were 18,000 work permits issued in 2000 to immigrants seeking work in Ireland, which was a 300 per cent increase over the previous year. The top five countries from which those with work permits originated are shown below in Table 6.2. which also indicates the top five categories of employment sought.

Table 6.2 Work Permits: Top Five countries of Origin and Employments, 2000

Origin Countries		Employment Categories	
Latvia	12%	Service Sector	37%
USA	6%	Hotel & Catering	22%
Philippines	5%	Agric. & Fisheries	17%
Czech. Rep.	5%	Industrial	10%
Poland	5%	Medical & Nursing	8%

There are approximately 160 different nationalities living in Ireland.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

An asylum seeker is someone who is seeking to be recognised as a refugee, under the terms of the 1951 Geneva Convention. 10,938 asylum seekers entered Ireland in the year 2000. Most asylum applications (i.e. applications for refugee status) came from persons originating in Nigeria (3,404), followed by Romania (2,384), the Czech Republic (403), Moldova (388), and the Congo (Dem. Rep.) (358). In 2000, asylum applications were received from persons originating in 98 different countries. It is Government policy to meet directly the accommodation and subsistence needs of asylum seekers through an independent co-ordinating agency, the Reception and Integration Agency.[16]

A refugee is a person whose application for asylum has been accepted. Refugees are entitled to reside in Ireland, to work and to avail of the full range of education, health and social programmes available to Irish persons.

Given the diversity of the ethnic minority population in Ireland, it is inappropriate to make general statements categorising them as vulnerable to poverty. Nevertheless, experience in other countries shows that racialised groups, that is groups that are victims of, vulnerable to or subjected to racism, tend to suffer discrimination, disadvantage, marginalisation and poverty. Migrant workers and refugees, particularly the unskilled, are also vulnerable. One further aspect of racism that can be overlooked is that of racism amongst new arrivals in a country, frequently directed against other newcomers from the same source country. If Ireland is to be a successful modern, intercultural society, it must integrate ethnic minority residents in ways that respect their social, economic and cultural rights.

6.7.2   Overall Objective.

To ensure that members of ethnic minority groups resident in Ireland are not more likely to experience poverty than majority group members.

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[16]The Community and Voluntary Pillar contend that the system of direct provision is creating physical and mental health problems for asylum seekers and contributing directly to present and future poverty and increased racism. The lower £15pw SWA payment means unequal treatment of asylum seekers as compared to for example homeless people living in direct provision and directly contradicts the NAPS principle of self-reliance. Recent research by the Irish Refugee Council illustrates the links between social exclusion and direct provision for both children and adults. The Pillar believes that direct provision should be abolished. In the interim, no one should be longer than six months in direct provision and the SWA payment for those in direct provision should be raised to £35pw.

6.7.3. Key targets

Very little quantitative information is available about the socio-economic situation of ethnic minority residents in Ireland. It is not possible, therefore to define specific targets for this group as a whole or for particular ethnic groups at this stage.

6.7.4. Overall policy approach.

The overall policy approach is to tackle barriers to the integration of ethnic minority residents, and in particular:

• Tackling racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance;

• Developing a new immigration legislative framework within which fair and sensible immigration policies to meet the changing needs of Irish society can be developed and implemented. Such legislation will be developed following widespread consultation and will be based on best practice elsewhere;

• Providing the resources for an efficient, fair, independent and transparent procedure for processing asylum applications with the target of deciding on applications within 6 months; and

• Commitment by the State, An Garda Siochana, statutory organisations and the social partners to ensuring the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation and to accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality irrespective of race, religion or belief, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins.

6.7.5. Key Policy Actions and Measures.

Legislation

The Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000 prohibit discrimination or harassment or permitting the harassment of a person on the ground of race, religion or belief, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins. This applies in the workplace or wherever goods are disposed of, services or accommodation provided and in educational establishments.

These Acts will be reviewed and amended, as necessary, to ensure they comply with the provisions of the EU Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.

Anti-Racism Awareness.

A National Anti-Racism Awareness Programme is being implemented by a Steering Group representative of ethnic minorities, social partners, Government Departments and State agencies in partnership with the Equality Division of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, will be launched on 24 October, 2001. The aim of the Programme is to contribute to creating the conditions for building an inclusive and intercultural society in Ireland where racism is effectively addressed and cultural diversity is valued. The Programme will have a budget of £4.5 (€5.7) million over 3 years.

Because of the crucial importance of education for cultural diversity, a Working Group on Education will be established by the Steering Group including experts on curriculum development and chaired by the Department of Education and Science.

National Plan against Racism

The Government, in partnership with civil society and with relevant national institutions established by law, will draw up a National Plan against Racism, to implement the Programmes of Action agreed at the European and World Conferences against Racism. It is expected that the Plan will be finalised by July 2002.

Health

The particular health needs of members of ethnic minority groups and the adoption of customer service strategies to meet the particular language, cultural and religious needs of such groups is a priority for the health services, if the health status of members of ethnic minority groups is to be improved. The needs of ethnic minority women and children in particular must be catered for. A more proactive approach to ensuring the uptake of the Medical Card, particularly by refugees and asylum seekers, is proposed. Suggested also is an audit of existing health services information to assess their appropriateness and to fill gaps.

Housing

The housing needs of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers since 1997 have had to be met in one of the tightest housing markets in Europe. The shortage of good private rented accommodation at affordable prices has caused particular problems for recently arrived persons. The policy of direct provision of accommodation and dispersal of asylum seekers was a response to this housing situation, since if the State were to continue to acquire suitable accommodation mainly in the Dublin area for asylum seekers, it would bid up prices in the area even more.

It is natural for persons belonging to particular ethnic groups to form communities. It is important, however, that poverty or housing policy does not lead to the formation of clusters where integration is made more difficult and where multiple deprivation is likely to arise.

Under the Equal Status Act, 2000, providers of accommodation are prohibited from discriminating on grounds of race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins, or religion or belief. Moreover, they are obliged not to permit anyone who has a right to be present therein to suffer racial or religious harassment. Those responsible for public and private housing provision should be reminded of their legal obligations in this regard.

Education

Access to education is available to all children irrespective of nationality or status. Additional educational support has been made available to primary and post-primary schools with children who have significant English language deficits. Other education initiatives proposed in the White Paper on Adult Education are:

- The doubling of participation in third-level institutions by refugees who are mature students;

- Free access to adult literacy, English language and mother culture supports to all asylum seekers. In addition, refugees and others who qualify to remain here would have access to active labour market programmes and to Back to Education initiative programmes;

▪ Proposed extension of the FAS skill-profiling service and related training opportunities to refugees, those allowed to stay on humanitarian grounds and to those who qualify to remain here by virtue of being a parent of an Irish born child.

Employment

Immigration procedures have been changed to facilitate inward migration. These include:

▪ The expansion of the work permit system operated by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and a quicker way of issuing visas by the relevant Departments to those who have been granted work permits;

▪ The introduction of the working visa scheme, which allows a fast track approach to be adopted in the case of those with certain skills;

▪ A reduction in the period before which a person from a visa-required country can be joined by his or her family from 12 months to 3 months in respect of high skills areas; and

▪ Introduction of arrangements that allow third level students from non-EEA countries to work up to 20 hours per week in casual employment.

Concern has been expressed about the vulnerability of migrant workers to exploitation by unscrupulous employers. Labour laws, including minimum wage legislation, apply to migrant workers as well as to Irish nationals and it is proposed that enforcement in respect of migrant workers should be stepped up. The social partners also have a duty to prevent exploitation in this area.

Some of the social partners have argued for asylum seekers to be given the right to work after a certain period, pending a decision on their status. It was suggested that such a concession would alleviate poverty and dependence on the State and would not create a pull factor.

The Government, however, is opposed to such a concession because, in their view, indiscriminate or blanket clearance for all asylum seekers to work would render inoperable the work permit system; access to work for asylum seekers would act as a major pull factor and encourage those involved in human trafficking. The Government is of the view that the greatest service we can provide to those who should be recognised as refugees is to ensure that their claims are decided speedily. Access to work for asylum seekers would delay the decision-making process.

It is clearly evident that the increase in processing capacity for asylum applications is already making an impact on the backlog of cases on hands and will progressively reduce processing times. Considerable progress is being made in achievement of the stated processing target of completing consideration of asylum applications within 6 months. By the end of 2001, all outstanding cases from 1998 to the end of 2000 will have been scheduled for interview with the overwhelming majority processed to finality. The 6-month processing target is expected to be achieved soon and most asylum seekers can expect to have their applications accepted or rejected within 6 months. Those whose applications are accepted will be given refugee status and the right to work. Thus, Government believes there is little justification any more for giving the right to work for those awaiting decisions on their applications.

Data and Research.

There is a paucity of research on the socio-economic status of migrants. Data on members of ethnic minority groups, in respect of income adequacy, housing, health, employment and other indicators is needed. It is proposed that the legal, privacy and

ethical issues concerning identification by ethnic origin be examined urgently in order to enable accurate and useful disaggregated data to be obtained. If at all possible, the deletion of the question on ethnic origin in the 2002 census should be reconsidered.

A research study on how best to reduce and prevent the risk of social exclusion of migrants should be commissioned during the reference period. Terms of reference should include:

▪ The extent to which migrants are more at risk of social exclusion than Irish nationals;

▪ The contribution of migration experience to social exclusion; and

▪ Best practice in other countries to counter social exclusion of migrants.

Another study proposed is to consider how migrant communities themselves and their countries of origin might provide support. Experience in Ireland, of the Irish in Britain and of other migrant communities in Europe might be examined.

Capacity Building

The development of a powerful voice for ethnic minority groups is crucial to the formation of policy that affects them. The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Inter-culturalism (NCCRI) provides a forum where community groups working closely with minority ethnic groups can engage with Government Departments and State bodies involved in developing and implementing policy in this area. NCCRI also supports community development strategies with minority ethnic groups. The aim is to empower ethnic minority groups to participate fully and on an equal basis in Irish society. The White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity stressed the importance of supporting community and voluntary infrastructure and supports.

6.8   Urban Poverty

6.8.1   Challenges and Strategic Approach

Public policy has increasingly recognised that there are spatial concentrations of unemployment, poverty and exclusion where individuals, families and communities suffer a form of cumulative disadvantage.

Communities in these areas tend to have high concentrations of low-income families – particularly the long-term unemployed and lone parents. They tend to live in a poor physical environment as local authority tenants, with poor infrastructure and service provision and to experience isolation from the wider social and economic network. Such areas often have high levels of crime, anti-social behaviour, vandalism and drug misuse. Persistent intergenerational educational disadvantage contributes to a cycle of low education levels, illiteracy and poor employment and income prospects.

Drug misusers, particularly heroin misusers, can often be clustered in a particular community leading to a general deterioration in the quality of life of local residents. Heroin misuse in particular is linked to neighbourhood crime and to the formation of criminal gangs. The cycle of drug dependence and crime can have a devastating effect on families and communities. There is a need to ensure that recovering misusers have access to housing, training and employment opportunities. Strategies to reduce drug misuse clearly must have both supply and demand reduction elements.

While data on the geographical distribution of crime are sparse in Ireland, the disproportionate concentration of crime in urban areas is an internationally observed

phenomenon. Crime is closely linked with a concentration of social ills that are manifested in disadvantaged urban areas. If crime is strongly prevalent in an area, people feel unsafe, employers are discouraged from coming into areas and it is difficult to raise children and families. This, in time, leads to communities seeing themselves as alienated, giving rise to anti-social attitudes and ambivalence towards law enforcement. A preventative as well as a corrective approach to crime is required.

6.8.2   Overall Objective

To tackle social exclusion in urban areas in a comprehensive and sustained manner by ensuring the provision of adequate income and by building viable and sustainable communities, through improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged urban areas and building social capital and community ownership of strategies. There will be a particular focus on:

- reducing the harm caused through drug misuse and the incidence of crime;

- improving family support services;

- increasing youth participation in education and training[17]; and

- ensuring that State services are delivered in an integrated way.

6.8.3   Key Targets

- Over the period to 2007, the NAPS will aim at reducing the numbers of those in urban areas who are 'consistently poor' below 2 per cent and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty used by the ESRI;

- To significantly reduce the harm caused to individuals and the community by the misuse of illicit drugs through a concerted focus on supply reduction, prevention, treatment, and research;

- To foster public safety and prevent crime through better detection, use of approved youth diversion programmes and restorative schemes, optimum use of community-based sanctions and reducing the level of re-offending; and

- To ensure that the basic needs of all families, especially young parents, lone parents, older people, and ethnic minorities are met through enhanced and better co-ordinated State support services.

6.8.4   Key Policy Actions and Measures

Income Adequacy

The target groups identified under this theme - lone parents, older people and ethnic minorities - are reliant to a substantial degree on social welfare payments. The target proposed for NAPS to establish the lowest adult social welfare payments at 27 per cent of Gross Average Industrial Earnings (GAIE) by 2007 will have a very positive impact on the incomes of urban dwellers in general, and on these groups in particular.

Drugs Misuse and Poverty

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[17] As initiatives in this area have impacts outside urban areas, they have been dealt with in the section on access to education.

The National Drugs Strategy (NDS) 2001-2008 was launched in May 2001. The new Drugs Strategy contains a number of objectives with appropriate performance indicators around the four pillars of supply reduction, prevention, treatment and research. The Drugs Strategy has an important contribution to make to the NAPS objective in relation to urban areas.

Key areas that need to be focused on in implementing an effective drugs strategy include:

- The importance of supply reduction as part of a broader drugs strategy;

- Education and awareness – the need for such activities to be continued and reinforced;

- The need for a more fully integrated and holistic treatment service; and

- The need for a wider variety of rehabilitation supports.

The following actions and measures are envisaged:

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) to be provided in all schools in Local Drugs Task Force areas during the academic year 2001/02;

- Increased Garda Resources in all Local Drugs Task Force areas by end 2001, based on the lessons learned from the Community Policing Forum model;

- An increase in the number of treatment places for opiate misuse to 6,000 by end 2001, and to 6,500 by end 2002;

- Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) to be provided in all schools by the start of the academic year 2002;

Crime and Poverty

As outlined above, crime is closely linked with a concentration of social ills in disadvantaged urban areas. The actions and measures proposed will have an important contribution to make to the overall NAPS objective in relation to urban disadvantaged areas.

In relation to crime, the following actions are envisaged:

- Increasing the number of Community Liaison Officers;

- Introducing Family Conferencing for young people at risk of developing criminal and anti-social behaviour;

- Promoting the structured development of Garda Youth Diversionary Projects;

- Developing guiding structures for Neighbourhood Watch;

- Anti-racism training for the Gardai

- Introducing further CCTV systems in selected areas of urban disadvantage in consultation with local communities; and

- Developing a broad range of community-based sanctions and other alternatives to imprisonment for young offenders and the use of restorative justice and mediation.

Integration of State Services

Integration of Service Delivery

There is a growing recognition that policies and programmes dealing with urban disadvantage must be based on the concept of providing integrated state services to disadvantaged communities. Many services in urban areas are delivered by community and voluntary organisations and there is a need for these services to work in an integrated way with State agencies to deliver a cohesive and holistic approach. This approach is manifested in the work of the City and County Development Boards and the Integrated Services Process[18], which was established in 1998 and piloted in four areas. The Integrated Services Process framework is now being used to develop the RAPID Programme in the 25 designated urban areas.

The RAPID Programme fulfils a commitment in the PPF to identify the 25 most disadvantaged areas in the country and develop a focus across the social inclusion measures in the National Development Plan. Fourteen of the RAPID areas are in the Greater Dublin Area, four are in Cork, three in Limerick, with Waterford, Bray, Drogheda and Dundalk also being represented.

This initiative will benefit 165,000 people. The major needs and problems of the areas will be identified and the problems that arise will be resolved. The Programme will ensure that priority attention is given to these areas by Government Departments, Local Authorities and State Agencies through front loading funding which is available to them under the National Development Plan.

Key issues to be considered in developing a strategy in this area include:

- The involvement of local people and structures to give communities a strong input into the plan for their own areas;

- Effective links with the RAPID Programme;

- Ensuring senior management commitment;

- The development and implementation of inter and intra agency training.

The key actions proposed are to:

- Establish protocols to determine appropriate time-frames and resource needs - in consultation with State Agencies - to enable community participation in planning and development initiatives/programmes such as the RAPID Programme;

- Revised selection procedures and provision of intra-agency training in all relevant Government Departments and State Agencies on integrated ways of working by end of 2003; and

- Develop area regeneration to develop social, physical and community infrastructure which involves local residents and disadvantaged groups - in

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[18] Integrated State services involve state agency personnel conducting their business in an integrated way, in partnership with local communities.

conjunction with local authorities in the 25 RAPID areas by end of 2003 and subsequently, in all areas of urban disadvantage by end of 2005.

<u>Family Support Services</u>

Recent Government initiatives in the social inclusion area - such as the Integrated Services Process - indicate that Family Support Services are an important way of measuring both organisational change within State Agencies and quality of life improvements in disadvantaged urban areas. Many of the problems of disadvantaged urban areas can only be addressed through developing co-ordinated and early forms of intervention, targeting children and their families, people with disabilities, older people, low paid workers and their families and vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities.

Family Support Services primarily involve the need for enhanced family support systems, especially for families with young children and also lone parents, the disabled, older people, the travelling community and asylum seekers. Enhanced family support systems are needed in areas such as housing, health, employment and benefit supports and education. Other pertinent issues are the need to localise service delivery and provide easier access to information both for the client and in inter-agency exchanges.

The aim of the Family Services Pilot Projects is to provide enhanced access to information services for families in their own locations through development of the one stop shop concept. An enhanced programme of support is available to a small group of families with complex needs, e.g. very young lone mothers, other lone parents, and dependent spouses in households depending on social welfare. The pilot projects are underway in three local offices: Waterford, Cork and Finglas in Dublin. An evaluation of the first phase of the pilot period was completed in 2000 and is under consideration by the Department. The Government has provided €15.24million (IR£12million) in the NDP for the development of the successful aspects of the pilot project over the years 2000 - 2006. Total funding for the Family Services Projects for 2001 is €1.27million (IR£1million).

Key issues to be considered in developing a strategy in this area include:

- the need to focus on young parents, including lone parents;

- the provision of quality childcare supports;

- the importance of ensuring that effective estate management systems are in place;

- the need to meet the needs of older people living in tenanted local authority flat complexes;

- the importance of recreational facilities for children;

- the need to provide supports for newly arrived immigrant families; and

- the need to ensure that the services needed by disadvantaged urban communities are available locally.

The key actions envisaged are:

- Continued implementation of the National Child Care Programme;

- Sustained maintenance of all local authority environments to remove graffiti, eradicate litter problems, develop and maintain green spaces and enhance recreational activities;

- Tenant Liaison Officers to be employed, either individually or on a shared basis, in local authority flats complexes and housing estates, where necessary, in areas of urban disadvantage by end 2003; and

- The full implementation of the recommendation of the National Children's Strategy, which commits itself to provide adequate play and recreational facilities for all children and youth by end 2003.

6.9 Rural Disadvantage

6.9.1 Challenges and Strategic Approach

Poverty and social exclusion impacts on rural populations in a number of different ways. It has been established that villages and small towns in rural areas have relatively high levels of consistent poverty.[19] This requires a response that is particularly focused on these communities, which are often subject to multiple disadvantage.

Farmers have a much lower risk of being in consistent poverty than the non-farm rural or urban population[20] but twice the risk of being in consistent poverty than households headed by self-employed persons generally.[21] Measures to promote rural development are key to improving the living standards of low income farmers, in addition to the very considerable farm income support already delivered through the Common Agricultural Policy measures, and the targeted assistance from the Farm Assist scheme.

With regard to rural areas, the problems deriving from relatively high levels of poverty are compounded by the impact of social exclusion. The trend of rural depopulation can contribute to the creation of marginalised rural communities. Both public and private service delivery may deteriorate, as services are concentrated in urban centres. The difficulties experienced by vulnerable groups such as older people, women and people with disabilities can be acute.

The problems of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas have a distinct impact on women. Economic dependency, isolation, unequal opportunity and participation are compounded by the problems of distance from services and amenities. The absence of an adequate transport service and affordable childcare services in many areas make it difficult for women to avail of training and education or to enter into or retain employment.

The White Paper on Rural Development, the National Development Plan (NDP), and the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) are major policy initiatives in promoting rural development.

The White Paper on Rural Development sets out a strategy for rural development. The elements of the overall strategy for rural development that the Government will put in place are:

- a regional approach to development;
- service and infrastructure provision;
- sustainable economic development;

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[19] See Nolan B et al., Where are Poor Households? Oaktree Press, 1998.
[20] Annual Review of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development 2000/2001.
[21] See Layte R et al., Monitoring Trends and Exploring Poverty Dynamics in Ireland. ESRI June 2001.

- human resources development; and
- a determined focus on poverty and social exclusion.

The NDP builds on the approach of the White Paper through the allocation of resources for the development of rural infrastructure, the farm and food industry sectors and rural enterprise. In addition, rural communities will benefit from other NDP investments, e.g., development of human resources, national roads, housing, health and regional transport.

A key objective of the NSS is to obtain a more even spread of development throughout the country, by *inter alia* improving the sustainability of rural areas. The NSS, when finalised, will support the potential of smaller towns and villages, thereby ensuring that rural areas in their hinterlands will share in economic development.

The creation of dynamic rural economies provides the best opportunity to address disadvantage in rural areas. However, while competitiveness and economic efficiency are vital and necessary economic policy objectives, they will not, in themselves, address the problems of poverty and social exclusion. If these problems are to be tackled effectively, sustained economic growth must be accompanied by action through the NAPS to address the underlying problems of marginalisation and by parallel efforts to promote social inclusion. These actions need to be underpinned by data collection and analysis to help define more precisely the extent and nature of social exclusion as experienced by rural dwellers.

6.9.2 Overall Objective

The overall objective is to tackle social exclusion in rural areas in a comprehensive and sustained manner by ensuring the provision of an adequate income, through employment and income support, access to adequate services and infrastructure on a timely basis, and co-ordination of responses and empowerment of local people and communities.

6.9.3 Key Targets

- To reduce below 2 per cent, and if possible eliminate, the level of consistent poverty among farm and non-farm rural dwellers, over the period to 2007;

- To improve transport services to rural dwellers through a combination of State support and community-based provision; and

- To improve access to employment, health, education and housing services for rural dwellers.

6.9.4 Overall Policy Approach

The overall policy approach proposed is:

- To provide sufficient income to rural dwellers and low income farmers to enable them to move out of poverty;

- To improve transport services to rural dwellers;

- To provide a focused response to area-based multiple disadvantage;

- To improve access to other services – employment, health, housing, and education; and

- To help the most vulnerable single adult households, households headed by someone working in the home, women, children, older people, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, the long-term unemployed, low income non-viable farms, border area rural communities.

6.9.5   Key Policy Actions and Measures

Income Adequacy

The target proposed for NAPS to establish the lowest adult social welfare payments at 27 per cent of Gross Average Industrial Earnings (GAIE) by 2007 will have a very positive impact on the incomes of rural dwellers in general. As under-employed farmers are supported through social welfare schemes such as the Farm Assist Scheme, this group will benefit from the enhanced social welfare rates envisaged.

Improved Transport Services

The Rural Transport Initiative is a process designed to encourage the emergence of public transport services in rural areas provided by community led organisations. It was developed in conjunction with the Rural Transport Sub-committee of the Public Transport Partnership Forum. The initiative, for which the National Development Plan makes a provision for £3.5m, will fund a number of pilot public rural public transport projects. The experience gained from these projects will feed into the development of a rural public transport policy.   This initiative is being administered by Area Development Management (ADM) on behalf of the Department of Public Enterprise. The closing date for applications was 17th September 2001 and the proposals received are now being assessed by ADM in line with the eligibility and other criteria governing the initiative. The potential impact on gender, equality, poverty and rural development issues will be among the general criteria used in considering all applications.

In conjunction with the Department of Public Enterprise, the Directors of Community and Enterprise of each county are engaged in drawing up an audit of public transport services and needs throughout the country. This audit has already been piloted in four counties, Kerry, Mayo, Laois and Westmeath with a view to bringing that experience to bear in the auditing of the other counties. It is hoped to have the work completed by the end of this year.

In addition, a new inter-Departmental committee, chaired by an official of the Department of Public Enterprise, was established recently to bring forward recommendations for a rural public transport policy.   Among other things, the committee will draw on the experience gained from the pilot projects under the Rural Transport Initiative and will take on board the results of the county audits in completing its work.

Through these and other developments, an enhanced transport service will be provided to rural dwellers.

Area-based Disadvantage

The Local Development/Social Inclusion Programme

Thirty-eight Area Based Partnerships - both urban and rural - were established in areas designated by the Government as disadvantaged. Partnerships are Private Companies, which focus on combating disadvantage and social exclusion. The Board of each Partnership consists of representatives from the community and voluntary organisations active in economic and social development in their areas, state agencies, the social partners at local level and elected public representatives. These

Partnerships and a further 33 Community Groups are supported under the Local Development Measure of the Social Inclusion Programme of the Regional Operational Programmes. The funding amounts to €279.3million (IR£220million) over the life of the NDP. It was allocated by Area Development Management (ADM) to those Area Based Partnership Companies and Community Groups that adopted a partnership approach to tackling local issues on the basis of comprehensive integrated local action plans designed to counter social exclusion. Services for the Unemployed, Community Development and Community based Youth Initiatives form the three key action areas in each integrated action plan. Actions are targeted at the areas, within the catchment of the Partnership, which are most in need and at the people who are most excluded. This includes those who are long term unemployed, young people at risk, lone parents, Travellers, asylum seekers, etc. During 2000, plans were prepared by each local group and appraised by ADM. Funding has been committed for the period from 2000-2003 inclusive.

CLÁR

CLÁR is a programme designed to tackle the problem of depopulation, decline and lack of services in rural areas. The sixteen areas included in the programme include parts of the counties of Connacht and Ulster, parts of five counties in Munster as well as parts of four counties in Leinster.

The areas selected are those which have suffered the greatest depopulation since independence, with the one exception of the Cooley peninsula (which has been included based on the serious difficulties caused by Foot and Mouth Disease). On average, these areas have lost 50 per cent of their population in the last seventy-five years, the decline in some communities in Leitrim far exceeds this.

In a determined bid to put an end to this continuing decline of rural communities, the CLÁR programme will fast-track National Development Plan spending in the selected areas. An extra, dedicated budget of £20 million has been allocated to ensure the success of the programme.

It is anticipated that there will be significant input from the communities themselves on how this money should be spent. Priority investments identified by the communities, which are eligible for funding will include infrastructure, social and community services.

The CLÁR initiative is part of a comprehensive series of measures to focus on quality of life issues in rural and urban Ireland. It will complement both the RAPID programme announced by the Government earlier this year for disadvantaged urban areas and the programme for provincial towns to be announced soon by the Minister for the Environment and Local Government. It is intended that CLÁR will operate using existing structures and work closely with state agencies to complement the range of initiatives and programmes already in place.

Access to Services

Lack of access to services is a key concern of rural dwellers. In this context, many of the targets and actions identified in Section 4 and aimed at improving participation in employment and access to services have particular relevance for rural dwellers. These are highlighted below:

Employment and Unemployment

The key targets set under this theme have relevance to rural dwellers. In particular, the target of reducing the unemployment rates of marginalised groups towards the average should help to reduce the gap in unemployment rates between the most

disadvantaged rural areas and the overall average for the State as a whole. In addition, underemployment is a key underlying problem on low-income farms.

The specific actions identified to improve access to training and employment should benefit farm and non-farm rural dwellers in particular.

Health

The Health theme envisages that there will be increased equity of access to effective primary health care services by 2007. This will take the form of better access for patients to diagnostic and treatment services through their GP by increasing the services carried out universally in general practice. This will be of particular benefit to rural dwellers.

The Report of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy Group found regional variation in access to certain procedures such as angioplasty and coronary artery bypass graft. In relation to cancer, a recent Report of the Variations in Cancer Treatment and Referral Practices in Ireland highlights some inequities in access to cancer treatment services for the years 1994-1997.

The health theme is supporting more equitable access to available effective interventions for cardiovascular disease and cancers by 2007.The strategy will focus on ensuring equity of access for poor and excluded people in the implementation of the national strategies in relation to cardiovascular disease and cancer, including improving regional access to services.

Regional access (as measured by age standardised discharge rates by health board of residence) for procedures such as angioplasty and coronary artery bypass graft will be improved in line with the basic levels of service recommended in the Report of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy Group.

Access to services for cardiovascular disease will also be monitored in relation to the availability of pre-hospital emergency care, for populations at a distance from acute hospitals.

Regional access for women to breast cancer treatment services will be improved by expediting the implementation of recommendations of the Report on Symptomatic Breast Cancer Services.

Education

The key targets set for education relating to child and adult literacy and access to third level education have at least as much relevance for rural dwellers as for the population as a whole.

Among the supplementary targets for education, a number of targets have specific relevance to rural dwellers. These are:

- That all children in targeted disadvantaged areas will have access to early childhood education, including all special needs children;

- That the participation in third level education of students from agricultural backgrounds be increased to 22 per cent by 2003 and 27 per cent by 2006;

Some of the actions envisaged under the education theme also impact particularly on rural dwellers, such as:

- An expansion of early education pre-school services, focusing particularly on the areas selected under the RAPID, CLAR, and provincial town programmes;

- Extension of the support teacher project to RAPID, CLAR and identified provincial towns.

- Ensuring that all schools are connected to the Internet and are equipped with multi-media resources.

Housing and Accommodation

The targets set in relation to access to housing will bring considerable benefits to rural dwellers as they should lead to an increase in the affordable housing stock in rural areas for people living in poverty.

Because rural dwellers are more likely to have substandard housing, the subsidiary targets set in relation to sub-standard dwellings and fuel poverty have particular relevance for this group.

7. Mobilising All Relevant Bodies

7.1 Introduction

A strategy for implementation of the revised NAPS is required to ensure that the necessary structures and mechanisms are set in place to achieve the agreed objectives, and also to ensure that progress in achieving these can be effectively monitored and evaluated.

As referred to in Section 1, recent assessments of the NAPS process have concluded that while substantial progress has been made, there are a number of areas where the implementation procedures require some strengthening. In general terms, there was concern that:

- the NAPS process has not fully bedded down in Government Departments, so that the impacts on the policies of those Departments have not been fully realised;

- the institutional structures, notably the NAPS unit and the Departmental Liaison Officers, required better resourcing;

- the involvement of the social partners needed to be enhanced through the development of appropriate consultative and participatory structures; and

- there was a need to incorporate the strategy at local level.

Given the revised strategy that is now emerging, other issues have emerged:

- the need to put in place a strategy to ensure that data for indicator and target setting and monitoring become available; and

- the need for an ongoing programme of research, incorporating existing research, embracing both existing and new thematic areas that have emerged, and focusing in particular on the development of baseline data.

Successful implementation of the NAPS strategy requires that the structures and other implementation mechanisms:

- facilitate strong political leadership and control of the process;

- encourage ownership of and commitment to the process on the part of those charged with its implementation;

- deal successfully with the cross-cutting nature of the process, including the need to incorporate a geographical dimension to the analysis;

- conform with the principles of good governance as enunciated in *Delivering Better Government;*

- have a strong consultative element so that the major stakeholders can influence the process; and

- encourage participation of all relevant bodies, including those who have a direct experience of poverty and also the private sector.

In relation to NAPS, the prime elements of an effective implementation process are:

- The partnership approach

- The institutional structures;

- Poverty proofing;

- Data and research;

- Monitoring and evaluation

- Communications; and

- Resources.

7.2   Social Partnership and the NAPS

A distinctive feature of the Irish political landscape since 1987 is the existence of national social partnership agreements, whereby a shared understanding of the challenges to be faced is built and a broad consensus is adopted. The ten-year NAPS was developed following wide-ranging consultation with the Social Partners and launched by the Government in 1997. The NAPS principles include ensuring equal access and encouraging participation for all, and the development of the partnership approach building on national and local partnership processes. The Social Partners have an ongoing role in relation to the monitoring of the NAPS.

7.3   Institutional Structures

The current structures for NAPS comprise the following elements:

- A Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach;

- A Senior Officials Group to support the Cabinet-Committee;

- An Inter-Departmental Policy Committee to drive the Strategy;

- A NAPS Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs;

- NAPS liaison officers in Government Departments;

- The CPA in a supportive monitoring and evaluation role; and

- The NESF, in its role of monitoring the social inclusion element of Partnership 2000.

A number of these structures, such as the Cabinet Committee and the Senior Officials Group have a wider brief than NAPS.

These institutional structures, and particularly the involvement of the Taoiseach, promote strong political oversight of the process. This will be further strengthened by the direct involvement of the Oireachtas. This could in turn be facilitated by the presentation of regular progress reports by the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs and occasional reports to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European

Affairs. The Senior Officials Group will continue to support the Cabinet Committee, and deal with NAPS affairs as they arise.

The NAPS Steering Group has worked successfully in steering the review of the NAPS. This Group includes the social partners and anti-poverty experts, as well as key Departmental representatives. It is proposed to continue the involvement of these actors through the establishment of a **NAPS Consultative Group**, in which other relevant bodies will be invited to participate. The NAPS Consultative Group will meet twice a year to offer its advice and observations on the process as it develops. This will strengthen the involvement of the social partners. However, it is also considered vital that individual members and representatives of the community and voluntary sector have an opportunity to contribute to the process. Accordingly, it is proposed to convene an annual **Social Inclusion Forum**. Progress in relation to NAPS will be reported to this Forum.

The Inter-Departmental Policy Committee, the NAPS unit and the NAPS liaison officers form the core of the NAPS delivery process. The demands put on these institutional elements will be much greater than heretofore because of the:

- extension of the NAPS to cover the additional themes of health and housing and accommodation and the new cross-cutting area of racism;

- greater complexity of the strategy as it is emerging; and the

- need to ensure that the administrative impediments occasioned by the cross-cutting nature of the process are overcome.

It is considered that these institutional elements need considerable strengthening. It is proposed therefore that consideration be given to establishing a **National Office for Social Inclusion,** reporting to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs. This will take over the functions of the NAPS unit. The Director of the Office will be a high level appointment and it will be staffed by experts seconded from relevant Departments and agencies, as well as by specialist staff.

The work of the National Office would be overseen by a management group of Assistant Secretaries drawn from the relevant Departments. The involvement of Departmental officials at the highest level should ensure that relevant departments and agencies buy-in fully to the Strategy. These institutional arrangements will take over the roles previously undertaken by the NAPS unit and the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee. The Department of the Taoiseach will be represented on the management group.

The bedding-down of the NAPS in relevant Departments should be further strengthened by the establishment, where they do not already exist, of **Social Inclusion Units** in the Departments that have prime responsibility for implementing the actions now being adopted by NAPS. **NAPS Liaison Officers** would continue to operate in other Departments. NAPS liaison officers will be offered training support to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their briefs.

7.4   Poverty Proofing

Poverty proofing of Government policies was introduced on a pilot basis, and has been reviewed by the National Economic and Social Council. This review concluded that the pilot programme has an important impact in terms of sensitising policy makers to the poverty dimension of policies. However, it was also clear that compliance with poverty proofing was often of a formal nature only, and did not significantly influence policy making.

The National Office for Social Inclusion should be resourced to drive the proofing process and to ensure that it is fully operationalised in all relevant Government Departments. This will require additional work to:

- establish new guidelines,

- address data deficiencies;

- develop indicators;

- undertake some major impact assessments so as to highlight the benefits of the process;

- establish cross-Departmental teams;

- provide the necessary resources and training; and

- extend the scope of poverty proofing to other State agencies as appropriate.

Rural and gender proofing procedures are also in place, and have a role to play in promoting social inclusion. Increased co-ordination of these proofing measures will be required.

The revised NAPS will be gender proofed prior to its adoption by Government.

7.5 Data and Research Requirements

The measurement of levels of poverty has relied on the Living in Ireland Survey, which is undertaken by the ESRI in co-operation with the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Combat Poverty Agency. This survey, which focuses on the income of households and their access to resources and services, forms part of an EU-wide data collection exercise – the European Community Household Panel Survey.

The European Community Household Panel is to be replaced with an enhanced new survey to be known as EU-SILC (Statistics on Income and Living Conditions). The CSO will now have responsibility for such data collection. It is essential that the data collected are sufficient to meet the needs of the revised NAPS, given that this new arrangement will replace the Living in Ireland Survey, which has been the source of the basic data used in NAPS to date.

However, the successful implementation of NAPS will require a broader data collection effort to ensure that:

- Data on those not in households, such as Travellers and homeless people are gathered;

- Data on relatively small population groups, such as people with disabilities are developed;

- The data collected will be disaggregated so that information on the vulnerable groups that have been identified within the Strategy, including women and children, will be forthcoming;

- Relevant poverty-related data are obtained from administrative systems, such as, for example, in relation to housing waiting lists, health records, and educational attainment; and

- Spatially based data are developed to inform the Strategy at local and regional levels.

The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness includes commitments reflecting these data needs.

Performance indicators are crucial to the effective monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy. Data collection systems must therefore be structured so as to provide the raw material for the development of indicators. To ensure that data collection takes place in a focused and integrated manner, it is proposed that a formal **Data Strategy** be adopted within the NAPS process. The development of baseline data will be a prime focus of the Data Strategy.

Given the complexity of the task, it is further proposed that a **Technical Support Unit** be established within the National Office for Social Inclusion to develop the Data Strategy. The Technical Support Unit should be supported in this task by a **Technical Advisory Group,** which would meet at least every six months. This group would be made up of specialists in data collection and research, including the CSO, the ESRI as well as Departmental and agency representatives.

The NAPS review process has highlighted gaps in knowledge in many areas. For example, understanding of the social determinants of health in Ireland is relatively limited. Research is also the means by which appropriate indicators are identified. It is proposed that a formal and separately budgeted **Research Programme** be adopted within the NAPS process. This would be administered by the National Office for Social Inclusion and would integrate current research activities and budgets. The research would focus on the key themes identified in NAPS and on the related vulnerable groups. There will also be a need to co-ordinate these research activities with those being undertaken by other bodies, such as the CPA and the Equality Authority. The Technical Advisory Group would advise on this Programme also.

7.6   Role of the Combat Poverty Agency

The Combat Poverty Agency has played a significant role in the development of NAPS to date. It is important that the considerable expertise and knowledge that the Agency has amassed continues to be available to inform the NAPS process. The Agency has a statutory remit to engage in policy advice, research, project innovation and evaluation, and public education in relation to poverty issues. These are all areas that will be of major concern to the proposed National Office for Social Inclusion. It is important, therefore, that the two bodies operate in a synergistic manner and that duplication of effort and resources is avoided. This will require a planned and programmed approach to the work of the two bodies.

The Combat Poverty Agency could have a key role in relation to the following areas:

Policy Advice

The Agency has a key function of providing policy advice on economic and social issues. In relation to NAPS, the Agency could have a number of advisory roles including drawing out the experience of national anti-poverty strategies abroad;

Support

The Agency has traditionally provided support to those implementing anti-poverty strategies and has particular expertise in this area. The Agency could continue this work through:

- Supporting the extension of NAPS to local government level;

- The development of poverty and equality proofing at local level; and

- Making the links between practice and policy in promoting social inclusion.

Consultation and Participation

The Agency has a track record in involving the community and voluntary sector in policies and programmes that affect them. The Agency could develop and support the work of the NAPS through promotion of Guidelines for Effective Involvement.

Data and Research

The Agency has played a major role in developing data sources on poverty and initiating research into the trends in poverty and the underlying causes. In the context of the co-ordinated Research Programme, which it is proposed will be adopted within the NAPS process, it is envisaged that the Agency would undertake:

- Production of issue based reports as required;

- Continued research into the causes and nature of poverty;

- Assimilation of relevant international research in this area.

Public Education and Communication

The Agency, in keeping with its remit, has developed considerable expertise in informing and educating the public about the original NAPS. The role of the Agency within the broader NAPS communication strategy should be defined, but may include:

- Dissemination of poverty research;

- Publicising NAPS work through its communications mechanisms, including the publication, "*Poverty Today";*

- Providing educational resources for training purposes and for schools.

7.7   Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Effective monitoring and evaluation systems are a key element of the strategy. The systems put in place should be compatible with the monitoring and evaluation requirements of the European National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPsincl). These plans are to operate on a two-year cycle, with the first plans covering the period 2001–2003. It is proposed that formal evaluation of the Strategy be undertaken by the National Office at two-yearly intervals, to feed into the NAPsincl process.

The National Office should produce an Annual Monitoring Report for Government, which would also inform the deliberations of the Social Inclusion Forum. The Combat Poverty Agency would have a supporting role in this process and could contribute by:

- Assisting in monitoring progress towards the meeting of targets;

- Advising on the overall evaluation;

- Commissioning elements of the evaluation;

- Contributing to review and commentary on NAPS.

The European Union Social Protection Committee, which comprises representatives of the Ministers for Social Affairs in member states, is charged with the monitoring of the NAPincl plans. The National Office will be required to ensure that the information needed to meet the monitoring and evaluation needs of that Committee will be made available.

The European Commission has proposed a set of seven indicators for assessing national performance.[22] Further work is continuing to revise these indicators and to supplement them with other supporting indicators. It is possible that a common three-tier approach to indicators will emerge as follows:

- Level 1 consisting of a restricted number of lead indicators;

- Level 2 to support these indicators and to describe other dimensions of social exclusion; and

- Level 3 that the Member States themselves decide to include in their National Actions Plans on Social Inclusion to highlight specific national concerns and to help interpret Level 1 and Level 2 indicators.

This is a flexible approach which would accommodate the various indicators and targets that have emerged from the NAPS review process, as well as providing an international comparative context for the revised NAPS. It is proposed that NAPS will adopt this approach when the details are finalised. In effect, because this document has established primary and secondary targets for each policy area, Level 3 indicators will have these two aspects.

7.8 Facilitating Participation at Local Level

The Local Government Bill 2000 emphasises the need for the Local Authority to engage actively with its local community. Recognition is given to the role of the County and City Development Boards recently established. Their key remit in relation to the preparation of county and city strategies will give a key role to the Local Authorities and the elected members in the setting of strategic development objectives across the full range of public services. In addition, recognition is given to the strategic policy committees and municipal policy committees in County and Urban Government. The inclusion of these measures in the Bill underpins the continuing emphasis on partnerships and the inclusion of all relevant players (State, Local Government, Social Partners, local development) in drawing up strategies for the economic, social and cultural development of their area.

7.9 Volunteering

In December 2000, the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs launched a National Committee on Volunteering to mark 2001 as the United Nations International Year of Volunteers. Membership of the National Committee on Volunteering is drawn from relevant Government Departments and relevant stakeholders. The Government has allocated a budget of €1.27 million (IR£1million) to the workings of the Committee. The National Committee on Volunteering will run until the end of 2002 and will report to the Government at that time.

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[22] These refer to the distribution of income, the poverty rate before and after social transfers, persistence of poverty, jobless households, regional cohesion, early school leaving and the long-term unemployment rate.

7.10 Corporate Social Responsibility

The Foundation for Investing in Communities was established in November 1998 as a joint venture between Government and employers to provide a focus and increased recognition of businesses who are making Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) a part of their business practice. A unique feature of this Foundation is the building of an Endowment Fund to help disadvantaged groups/communities with a particular focus on children's needs. The Foundation aims to encourage businesses to make CSR and community involvement part of their mainstream business practice. This work is carried out by Business in the Community. The Foundation also encourages philanthropy and is building an independent civic endowment fund to serve the Irish community. The permanent civic endowment fund is being raised through the Community Foundation for Ireland and The National Children's Trust. During 2000, twenty founder members joined the Foundation and grants were made available to approximately thirty groups, organisations and societies

7.11 Communications

As referred to above, a strong communication strategy is required to ensure that there is widespread knowledge and related information on what the NAPS is set up to do, both within and outside the public sector. This will require the development and implementation by the National Office for Social Inclusion of an internal and an external communications plan on NAPS. This communications plan should address the following issues:

- Improving knowledge and awareness within the public sector;

- Promoting NAPS in the local authorities;

- Keeping the social partners informed of progress;

- Providing information to communities doing anti-poverty work; and

- Informing the public generally.

The success of NAPS will undoubtedly depend on the various actors in the process embracing the cross-cutting nature of the Strategy and forsaking a narrow view of their responsibilities. Communications policy will have a vital role to play in engendering such an approach and promoting multi-agency co-operation in implementing NAPS.

7.12   Rights and Access to Services

7.12.1 Strengthening Rights and Access to Services

Citizenship rights encompass not only the core civil and political rights and obligations but also social, economic and cultural rights and obligations that underpin equality of opportunity and policies on access to education, employment, health, housing and social services. The need for a rights-based approach to the NAPS has been a strong feature of the NAPS consultation process.

Wide ranges of social rights are specifically provided for in the Irish Constitution and in international conventions ratified by Ireland. In addition, legislation including, most recently, the Employment Equality Act, Equal Status Act, the Education (Welfare) Act and the forthcoming Disabilities Bill are strengthening the rights available to the citizen.   Government is also committed to developing a strong infrastructure to promote and protect a range of rights and has established and resourced several institutions in this area including the Equality Authority, National Disability Authority, Comhairle and the Human Rights Commission.

In accordance with the NAPS strategy, detailed standards in relation to access to resources, right, goods and services will be set out. The Strategy will develop indicators to monitor these standards and will establish accessible, transparent and effective mechanisms for ensuring the implementation of and adherence to these standards. The Strategy is based on this approach to rights and to the provision of quality services.

Across the EU, there is now a major quality improvement drive underway in the public services ranging from standards set at the national level to those locally developed. Increasingly, indicators are being developed to measure good quality, and user entitlements. At the same time, user participation has become a central objective of many of the reforms in the public services.

A further trend is the diversity of providers whereby contracting-out of services to private, semi-public, non-profit and social economy organisations rooted in the voluntary and community sector is becoming more commonplace. Much of the debate around citizens' rights in the area of public service provision are based on broadly agreed values such as that:

- Clients participate in, or are consulted about, decisions on the level and type of service to be provided;

- They are informed as to the level and type of services to be provided;

- They can reasonably expect to receive this level of service;

- They have rights of complaint and redress if the appropriate level is not provided;

- Service delivery agencies are required to set quality targets and to report their performance against them.

Much of the work emanating from the SMI process in the Irish public service is inspired by such values. In delivering services that are customer focused, a number of challenges exist, such as the needs of all the stakeholders involved in delivering such services.   Account therefore has to be taken of the potential for conflicts of interests in terms of what is understood by quality customer service and it must be understood that many services are diverse and complex and roles, budgets and responsibilities are generally set externally.

In the context of this strategy there is a commitment to:

- Move towards a more formal expression of entitlements across the range of public services and to set standards and guidelines regarding the standard of service delivery which can be expected by the customer;

- to monitor, by means of indicators access to services of a given standard and to work to improve performance over time;

- to continue to pursue a much greater focus on effective outcomes and indicators to monitor outcomes, particularly in relation to the drive for integrated approaches to the problems of disadvantage at local level;

- to drive forward in a comprehensive way the range of proofing mechanisms necessary to ensure that policies and programmes are developed in such a way as to achieve the maximum impact in reducing and eliminating poverty and social exclusion.

The National Office for Social Inclusion will be mandated to ensure that access to public services and specified services standards is developed, as part of SMI, as a key strategy within NAPS. The National Office will explore with relevant departments and agencies how these bodies might be involved in further strengthening the NAPS. Finally, the principles set out in the International Convenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other international human rights instruments adopted by Ireland will inform the future development of social inclusion policy.

7.12.2 Quality Customer Service (QCS) Principles

Another important development in terms of social inclusion has been the recognition of the need to adapt administrative and social services to the needs of people suffering social exclusion and ensuring that front-line staff are sensitive to these needs. In July 2000, the Government approved revised Quality Customer Service (QCS) Principles and asked Departments to draw up new three-year Customer Action Plans based on these Principles. Among the Principles is one on Equality/Diversity, which requires Departments to ensure quality service delivery to groups covered by equality legislation. The Principles enable Departments, in their dealings with customers, to identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services. The Government also decided that these Principles should be extended to non-commercial bodies under the aegis of Departments.

Work is currently being done by the QCS Working Group's sub-group on Equality and Diversity on a support pack on the equality and diversity aspects of QCS for the civil service, and on research in this area.

7.12.3 Integration of Service Delivery - Integrated Services Process (ISP)

The integration of service delivery is important in ensuring that excluded people attain maximum benefits from service deliverers. The lessons learned from the Integrated Services Process are, therefore, very important. External Evaluators for the ISP, Price Waterhouse Coopers, presented their final report in March 2001 and this formed the basis of the final Progress Report by the National Steering Committee to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. The Committee endorsed the Report and an ISP style framework and mechanisms are being used to establish the new RAPID Programme and will underpin the manner in which it will operate. A history of ISP has also been compiled as well as a series of case studies on a number of areas, as examples of

best practice. These include Community Participation, Services to Support the Welfare of Children and their Families and Early School Leaving.

7.13   Resources

Given the emerging Budgetary environment, it is clear that Government will have to consider carefully the allocation of resources to the Strategy, including the issues of prioritisation and phasing of measures and actions, and the potential to re-allocate and refocus existing resources wherever possible.

7.13.1 Key Targets

(i) In the area of income adequacy, the key proposals are that the lowest social welfare rate should be increased to reach 27 per cent of GAIE by 2007 and that the level of child income support should be at 33-35 per cent of that basic welfare rate. In relation to social welfare rates, the Report of the Benchmarking and Indexation Working Group stated that a rough estimate of the total costs arising over the period to 2007 would indicate that additional expenditure of the order of £2.9bn (€3.7bn) would be required. It noted also that annual increases would, in any event, be provided for, such that the net additional cost of this proposal, compared to a continuation of existing policy, would be less than the above sum.

In relation to Child Income Support, aggregate additional expenditure of some £363m to £526m on Child Benefit payments would be needed, over and above existing Government commitments for the period to 2003, over the period to 2007 in order to achieve the level proposed.

(ii) In the areas of Employment/Unemployment and Education, it is not envisaged that the achievement of the key targets would give rise to significant net additional expenditure requirements. Moreover, achievement of the targets in the area of Employment/Unemployment, in particular, would lead to increased tax and PRSI revenues and further reductions in Social Welfare costs.

(iii) The key target in the area of Health is to reduce the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest social economic groups by at least 10 per cent for circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries by 2007. It is noted that this will require integrated action across all the NAPS thematic areas and that it is supported by targets already set out in the National Health Promotion Strategy and the National Strategies to reduce cancers and cardio-vascular disease. It is expected that the National Health Strategy will also support the policy actions necessary to achieve the key target. It is estimated that the additional spending to be incurred under already-announced Government policies will be sufficient to achieve the key target.

(iv) In the area of Housing, the key targets proposed are, firstly, that (a) by end 2007, 70 per cent of low income and disadvantaged households assessed by local authorities as being in need of accommodation will have available to them suitable and adequate accommodation within two years of their acceptance on the housing list and (b) by end 2010, 90 per cent of low income and disadvantaged households, assessed by local authorities as being in need of accommodation, will have available to them suitable and adequate accommodation within 18 months of their acceptance on the housing list.

The appropriateness of these targets is to be reviewed in the light of the information gathered in the next statutory assessment of housing needs (March 2002) on the length of time housing applicants spend on the waiting list. The targets will be reviewed in order to ensure that they are appropriate in the light of housing need, building capacity and financial commitments. The extent to which these targets will give rise to net additional resource requirements, i.e. over and above the existing NDP provisions, cannot be precisely quantified at this time but will be very

considerable and well in excess of existing provisions.   A better view of this cost will be available in 2002, which will facilitate a more precise assessment of resource requirements in the period to 2007.

7.13.2 Subsidiary Targets

The range of subsidiary targets identified could involve significant additional costs over the period of the NAPS, and would have to proceed to implementation in the light of availability of resources.
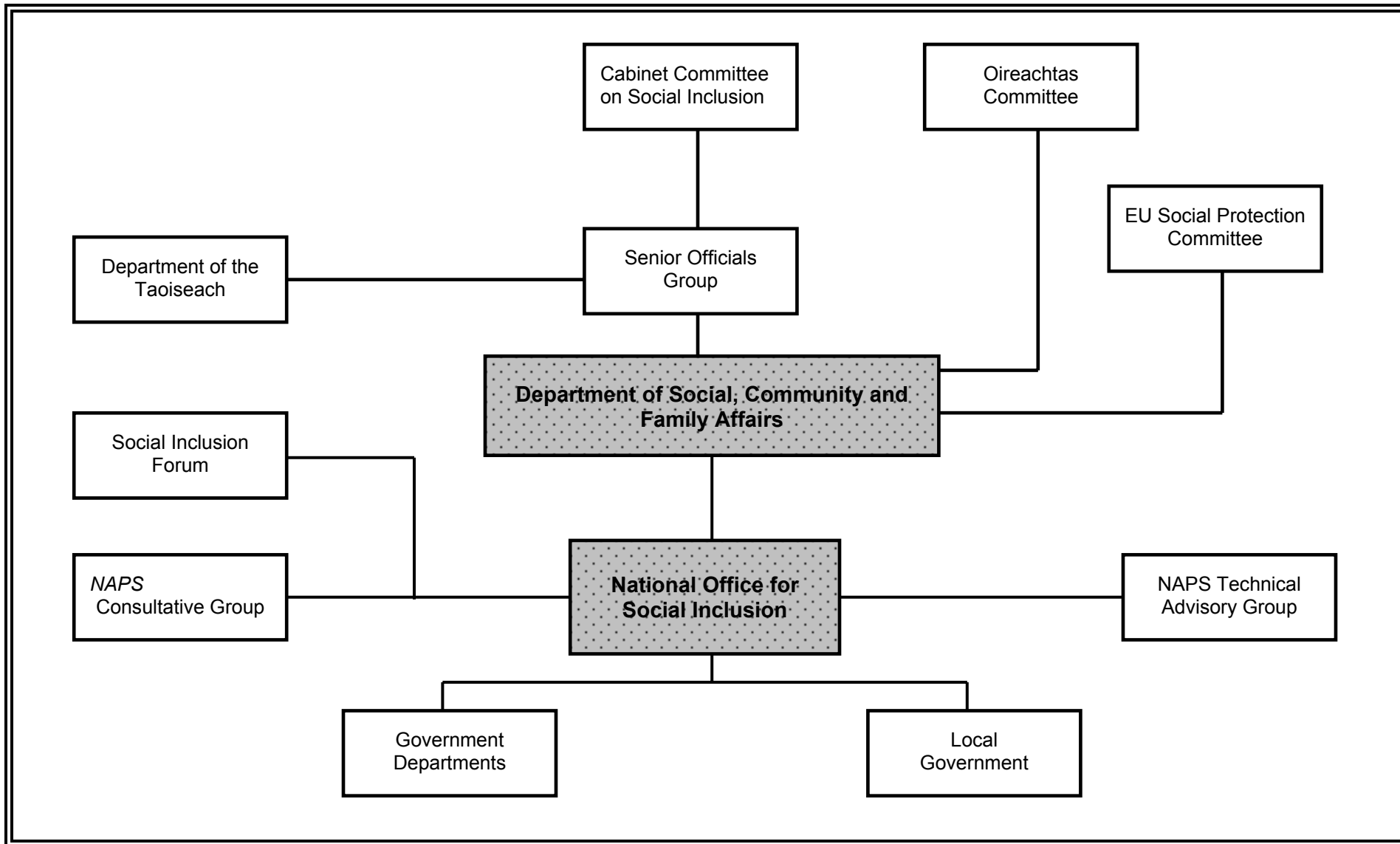
The revised NAPS will also require appropriate administrative resources to fund the National Office for Social Inclusion. Specific budget allocations for areas of work, such as data development, research, and communications will be required. These allocations should incorporate existing budgets in these areas.

7.14   Conclusions

Significant strengthening of the institutional framework for NAPS is required to ensure that the objectives of the Strategy are met. Figure 7.1 summaries the proposed institutional structure and Table 7.1 identifies the major institutions involved and their roles.

Table 7.1: NAPS Institutions and Their Roles

Institution	Role
Cabinet Committee	Overall direction of the Strategy
Senior Officials Group	Support to the Cabinet Committee
Oireachtas Committees	Advice on development of NAPS at political level
EU Social Protection Committee	Monitoring of NAPS at EU level
Department of the Taoiseach	Support to Senior Officials Group Active engagement in guiding the work of the National Office
Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs	Overall responsibility for and leadership of the NAPS
National Office for Social Inclusion	Implementation of NAPS, research and data development, monitoring of progress.
Government Departments	Implementation of NAPS at Departmental level
Social Inclusion Units	Implementation of NAPS at Departmental level
Social Inclusion Forum	Consultation with the wider social partner sector
NAPS Consultative Group	Advice to National Office on development of NAPS
NAPS Technical Advisory Group	Technical advice to National Office on data and research issues

Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion		Oireachtas Committee

| Department of the Taoiseach | Senior Officials Group | EU Social Protection Committee |

Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs

| Social Inclusion Forum |

| *NAPS* Consultative Group | **National Office for Social Inclusion** | NAPS Technical Advisory Group |

| Government Departments | Local Government |

Appendix A

Summary List of Actions Identified

Appendix A1: List of Actions under Employment and Unemployment

Access to Employment and Training

- To roll out the Employment Action Plan intervention process to the stock of long-term unemployed (LTU) by end 2003 in order to identify and address barriers to employment, with the effect of achieving the following increases in participation in employment, training and educational programmes:

  - A 15 per cent increase in 2001;

  - A 30 per cent increase by 2003; and

  - A 65 per cent increase by 2006.

- To implement recommendations contained in the Women's Access Report on Labour Market Participation by end 2001 so as to increase the employment participation rate to an average of more than 60 per cent in 2010, as envisaged under the National Employment Action Plan 2001;

- To review of Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) under the PPF by 2002 to ensure that the focus of ALMPs in the future is clearly structured in favour of participation by the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups likely to benefit from such participation;

- To achieve a 30 per cent increase in number of childcare places by 2003, by full implementation of Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000 - 2006

- To achieve a high rate of applications under the Social Economy Programme from the Traveller economy groups, which meet the funding criteria;

- To extend the skills profiling service and related training opportunities provided by FÁS for eligible asylum seekers to those persons granted Refugee status, to persons allowed to remain on humanitarian grounds, and to the growing number of those who qualify to remain here by virtue of being a parent to an Irish born child.

Medical Card

- It is recommended that the medical card guidelines, insofar as they concern retention of eligibility, should be uniformly applied by all Health Boards, so that withdrawal of the medical card does not act as a disincentive to taking up employment, education or training opportunities.

In order to maximise the incentive for those groups, who are more distant from the labour market to remain in employment, the Group recommends that:

- persons who take up open market employment after completion of the Job Initiative should have a direct entitlement to retain the medical card for three years.

- persons who remain in employment after completion of the Back-To-Work Allowance Scheme be allowed to retain the medical card for three years.

- The PPF working group which is examining the feasibility of introducing a Cost of Disability payment should have due regard to the additional costs (including medical

costs which derive from disability) borne by people with disabilities entering the workforce and the potential employment disincentive effects thereof.

- To facilitate the transition to work for formerly workless households, the Group recommends that the retention of medical card eligibility criteria that apply to long-term unemployed persons taking up employment, should continue to apply for the balance of the retention period, in the event that the dependent spouse or partner subsequently takes up employment.

Local Authority Differential Rents

Having regard to the potentially adverse impact, which, in the view of the NAPS Working Group, local differential rents can have on the incentive to work, and the PPF commitment to extend the NAPS process to local authorities, it is recommended that a decision be sought endorsing the Goodbody Report[23] recommendations in relation to:

- the exclusion of Family Income Supplement in the income assessment for differential rent purposes;

- the adoption of the proportional method of calculating differential rents with a view to achieving more uniform implementation of the above recommendations by Local Authorities.

Training Schemes and Secondary Benefits

In the interests of ensuring that the need to obtain paid childcare does not prevent people, in particular, lone parents from accessing State training opportunities, it is recommended that the new FÁS childcare allowance when introduced is exempted from the means assessment for Rent Supplement purposes.

Income Eligibility Limit for Retention of Secondary Benefits

It is recommended that the £250 per week Gross Household Income Limit, which has applied to the retention of secondary benefits since 1994 should be reviewed to take account of the increase in living costs in the intervening period.

Liaison Group

It is recommended that the Liaison Group on Secondary Benefits should be reconvened, as soon as is practicable, to address the information and policy issues highlighted by the Goodbody report in regard to retention of secondary benefits to report by 2003.

Audit of Barriers

With a view to removing any remaining barriers in the social welfare system to employment, training or education opportunities, it is recommended that a report on the outcome of the welfare to work audit of social welfare schemes and programmes be provided by 2003.

Treatment of earnings of spouses of Old Age Non-Contributory Pensioners

It is recommended that consideration be given to the provision of an earnings disregard targeted at the spouse/partners of Old Age (Non-contributory) Pensioners, in recognition of the need to improve the incentive to work for older workers.

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[23] The Disincentive Effects of Secondary Benefits. Goodbody Economic Consultants, 1997.

The following actions are supported:

- As committed by Government under the PPF, those on the national minimum wage should be taken out of the tax net over time;

- A range of Life Long Learning options should be introduced that are specifically designed to assist people currently in low paying jobs to acquire the skills that will lift them out of poverty.

A more holistic approach to those who experience difficulties in the labour market should be provided, so as to provide a continuum of supports for unemployed persons, those recently

Appendix A2: List of Actions Identified under the Education Theme

Children

Early Childhood Education and Care

- An expansion of early education pre-school services, particularly Early Start in all designated disadvantaged areas, focusing particularly on the areas selected under the RAPID, CLÁR (Rural) and provincial town programmes.

- The development of proposals to establish an Early Childhood Education Agency.

- Introduction of a pilot project, which will develop quality standards in this area, leading to 'Quality in education' mark.

- Improved co-ordination and collaboration between Government Departments to ensure integrated service provision.

- Consultation with relevant agencies and community representatives.

- Incremental build up of pre-school services for children with special needs.

Literacy and Numeracy

- Systematic identification of children with literacy and numeracy difficulties at the earliest time and no later than the end of the child's second year at primary school, with the necessary intervention to be put in place within 3 months of assessment.[24]

- A comprehensive range of supports that are based on individual needs be put in place. These include:

  - Measures to ensure the provision and retention of qualified teachers;

  - Access to literacy specialists;

  - Reductions in class size;

  - Before/after school supports;

  - Home school links;

  - Access to age relevant books at both primary and second level;

  - Back to School footwear and clothing allowances

  - Extension of the support teacher project to RAPID, CLÁR and identified provincial town areas;

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[24] Methodologies for identification and assessment are to be the subject of further discussions through a 'National Literacy Committee'.

- All school development planning will include a focus on literacy and numeracy, and the setting of targets in these two areas;

- Introduction of new primary Maths and English curricula;

- Introduction of a programme support team to underpin and guide this work;

- Regular reporting on these initiatives and on their impact;

- Pre-service and in-service training on literacy, understanding socio-economic disadvantage and appropriate methodologies;

- Comprehensive in-career development for learning support teachers in second level schools serving disadvantaged communities (with caseloads for learning support teachers to be no more than 30 pupils at any one time);

- Development of Learning Support Guidelines at second level;

- A national programme of in-service training at second level on the integration of literacy and numeracy teaching into all aspects of the curriculum.

- Introduction of initiatives to involve parents in supporting children's learning;

- Establishment of a National Literacy and Numeracy Committee;

- Carrying out of research to explore best national and international practice.

Participation and Achievement in School

- Agreement on broadly based assessment tools incorporating a range of indicators relevant to educational disadvantage e.g. literacy, attendance, social skills, language development, and so on;

- Development of tracking systems to ensure that all pupils transfer from primary school;

- Development of the primary pupil database;

- Requirement that all schools in disadvantaged areas implement a transfer programme no later than 5th class which links effectively with 2nd level schools;

- No school to assess pupils prior to their acceptance at 2nd level;

- The assessment process to include oral and reading skills, rather than focusing exclusively on written work;

- Continuing implementation of "Giving Children an Even Break" and of the School Completion initiatives (combining the Early School Leaver and Stay in School Retention initiatives).

- Ensure that all schools are connected to the Internet and are equipped with multi-media resources by the end of 2001 and that all teachers needed are skilled in the use of these tools by 2002;

- A preferential pupil/teacher ratio of 10:1 for second level schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged students;

- The NCCA will publish a consultative paper on the nature of provision at senior cycle. Arising from this, it is planned to develop models of modularisation. It is intended to have a part-time Leaving Certificate Applied framework available by the end of 2002;

- Establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board;

- Completion of planned expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service;

- Appropriate assessment, provision and resourcing of alternative places/schools, including Youthreach;

- Review of the exam fee's abolition and exemption processes to ensure sensitivity and confidentiality;

- Review of standard textbooks in context of literacy levels and needs;

- Implementation of the book rental scheme more comprehensively;

Third Level Access

- Provision of extra financial supports;

- Access to the Millennium Fund/Mature Access Fund;

- Provision of pre-entry orientation courses plus guidance, mentoring, peer support, personal and academic support and study facilities;

- Establishment of a National Access Office;

- A review of current income levels for student supports;

- Implementation of the White Paper on Adult Education;

- Development of flexible entry, delivery and assessment arrangements;

Adults

Adult Literacy

- A strengthening of the scale, scope and quality of adult literacy provision through the National Adult Literacy strategy. (This will include the provision of outreach, strengthening links with the formal education sector, and the development of family and workplace learning programmes);

- Utilisation of various media to encourage participation on available literacy programmes;

- Improved assessment programmes;

- Meeting the specific literacy and language needs of non-nationals;

- Developing of partnerships between adult literacy providers and the formal school system;

- Inclusion of a National Adult Basic ICT Skills Programme as part of the Back to Education Initiative;

- Establishment of a National Literacy and Numeracy Committee;

Further Education and Training

- Implementation of the White Paper on Adult Education by 2006;

- Ongoing implementation of the Back to Education Initiative;

- The establishment of an Adult Learning Council by 2002;

- A review of the PLC sector, including increased support for structured literacy provision for PLC participants, based on assessed need;

- Development of Management Information systems to identify Traveller participation, people with disabilities, Social Welfare recipients, refugees and asylum seekers.

Appendix A3: List of Health Measures and Actions

Increased Equity of Access to Primary Health Care Services

Specific actions to achieve this overall target should include the following

- By 2003, primary health care will be significantly strengthened through multidisciplinary working and local case management (i.e., where an identified member of staff assists in the co-ordination of services for a patient).

- By 2003, better access will be provided for patients to diagnostic and treatment services through their GP by increasing the services carried out universally in general practice.

- By 2003, health boards will undertake an assessment of the need for supports for adolescents with mental health problems in Primary Care settings in line with the recommendation to this effect in the report "*Get Connected - Developing an Adolescent Friendly Health Service by the National Conjoint Child Health Committee*".

- By 2005, Springboard or equivalent intensive family support project targeted at young people at risk will be established in 12 additional areas following agreement with key stakeholders in the community.

- By 2005, the incidence of youth homelessness will be reduced significantly, through increasing family and community based supports to prevent homelessness and providing appropriate emergency response so as to prevent young people staying homeless and to facilitate their reintegration into the community.

- By 2005, a community development approach will be integrated into health and personal social services, with a focus on primary health care. The approach will use existing networks and create new alliances to encourage participation in needs assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Increased Equity of Access to Public Acute Hospital Services

Specific actions include the following:

- By 2003, the difference between public and private patients in waiting times for public acute hospital care will be reduced with a focus on:

  - increasing bed numbers in line with relevant measures in the National Development Plan and the recommendations of the Bed Capacity Review;

  - more service delivery by senior clinical decision makers in line with the recommendations of the Report of the Forum on Medical Manpower; and

  - reducing incentives for use of public beds by private patients.

- Access to orthopaedic services will be improved so that no one is waiting longer than 12 months for a hip replacement. This is an initial short-term action to improve quality of life for older people and it will be reviewed in 2003.

- By 2005, the difference between public and private patients in waiting times for acute hospital inpatient care will be further reduced from the position achieved in 2003.

Increased Access to Effective Interventions for Cardiovascular Disease and Cancers

Specific actions are outlined below:

- Particular attention will be paid to the needs of people who are poor or socially excluded in the implementation of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy. This will be pursued in consultation with the groups responsible for the implementation of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy and the management committees for the relevant programmes.

- In line with the Chief Executive Officer's Report on Developing General Medical Practice, work will take place at general practice level to improve the care of patients with cancer at all stages. This will include the development of protocols for urgent referral to hospital diagnostic and therapeutic services by 2003 and guidelines for shared continuing care between hospitals and general practice and for improved palliative care at general practice level by 2005.

- Regional access (as measured by age standardised discharge rates by health board of residence) for procedures such as angioplasty and coronary artery bypass graft will be improved in line with the basic levels of service recommended in the Report of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy Group.

- Access to services for cardiovascular disease will also be monitored in relation to the availability of pre-hospital emergency care, for populations at a distance from acute hospitals.

- Regional access for women to breast cancer treatment services will be improved by expediting the implementation of recommendations of the Report on Symptomatic Breast Cancer Services.

Increased Equity of Access to Community Supports

The specific actions proposed are set out below:

- By 2003, national guidelines will be put in place for the provision of respite care services to carers of older people;

- By 2003, improvements will be made in access to planned respite care for carers of disabled people;

- By 2005, there will be nationally standardised rules for eligibility for community support services;

- With a view to providing timely access for vulnerable groups to child and adolescent psychiatric services, the recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on Child and Adolescent Services 2001 in relation to the provision of consultant-led multidisciplinary teams will be expedited.

Injury Prevention Strategy for People at Risk in Lower Socio-Economic Groups

A comprehensive injury prevention strategy to reduce higher injury rates in people at risk (children, young men and older people in lower social economic groups) should be developed by 2003.

This is a clear example of the need for the type of "joined up" working being proposed in the public policy target

Income Eligibility Limits for the Medical Card

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Implementation should focus on:

- By 2003, the income threshold in the guidelines for the medical card should be increased with a view to removing impediments to access to health services and taking account of the particular needs of children.

- Health boards will have a more proactive approach to ensuring uptake of the medical card by those entitled to one, including addressing the particular needs of specific groups such as Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers.

- By 2005, access to an increased range of services should be provided under the General Medical Services Scheme, in particular to cervical screening and counselling.

Integrating an Equality Dimension into Health and Social Services

Equality proofing will focus on all of the nine grounds established in equality legislation. It will involve a screening mechanism to identify those areas of policy and provision in the health and personal social services that are a priority for equality proofing. Equality proofing will involve the four steps of:

- establishing equality objectives and/or equality dimensions to mainstream objectives;

- implementing an equality impact assessment on policy or provision to assess its contribution to equality objectives and its impact on the nine grounds;

- securing a participation of equality interests in carrying out this impact assessment; and

- monitoring to track the actual contribution and impact of the policy or provision.

The implementation strategy for equality proofing will follow a timetable to be discussed with the Equality Authority, which has a national brief on this issue.

 Other specific actions in relation to integrating an equality dimension include:

- By 2003, awareness and sensitivity training will be provided for health care staff in relation to NAPS groups / groups covered under the nine grounds under the Equal Status Act. The first phase of this up to 2003 will focus on an audit of the current situation and development of appropriate training modules.

- Information and education materials will be provided that are culturally appropriate. They will be provided in a manner that accommodates diversity in society. In the

context of a multicultural society there will be particular attention to issues of ethnicity and racism, including the need for trained interpreters who have an understanding of cultural difference. An audit will be carried out of existing information and education materials on health and health services to assess their appropriateness and to prioritise gaps. New materials will be developed and disseminated in consultation with representatives of relevant groups and the National Adult Literacy Association (NALA).

- Agreed equal status policies and codes of practice in relation to the nine grounds covered under the Equal Status legislation will be developed in conjunction with the relevant vulnerable groups and statutory and voluntary agencies. Considerations under the gender ground will include issues such as domestic violence and rape. These will link to, and build on, work already underway e.g. in A&E departments in relation to victims of domestic violence. In the context of a multicultural society, there will be particular attention paid to issues of ethnicity and racism.

- By 2005, a phased programme of undergraduate and in service awareness and sensitivity training in relation to NAPS groups/ groups covered under nine grounds of the Equal Status Act will be undertaken during the period 2003 to 2007. Health Board Service Plans will include information on training planned and delivered.

Development of a Multi-sectoral Approach to Health and Health Impact Assessment

It should be Government policy that all relevant sectors recognise and accept their responsibility for health by developing multi-sectoral working and the adoption of Health Impact Assessment by 2007

Two ways of addressing the determinants of health and developing healthier public policies are incorporated into this target:

- Multi-sectoral working for health; and

- Health Impact Assessment.

The following actions are envisaged in relation to multi-sectoral working:

- Awareness raising (by 2003) and additional resources for multi-sectoral working (by 2005);

- Leadership by the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Health and Children of cross-Departmental collaboration for health within and between Government Departments.

- Utilisation and mobilisation of existing structures and networks to provide leadership for multi-sectoral working (by 2003);

- Developing of mechanisms for engaging citizens and communities, including establishment of a community development and health network to facilitate community participation in multi-sectoral working (by 2003);

- Establishing a Public Health Alliance to bring together all those working for public health from all sectors to promote the reduction of health inequalities (by 2003);

- Benchmarking the quality of the structures and process adopted for multi-sectoral work using international benchmarks;

- Establishing a research programme on the determinants of health and the effectiveness of measures to improve health by acting on the determinants of health (by 2003); and

- Integration of multi-sectoral work for health in training programmes in relevant sectors.

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is an approach by which a policy, programme or project can be judged for its impact on health. As HIA is a method for addressing inequalities in health, achieving equity is a core component of HIA.

The proposed actions in relation to HIA include:

- Establishment of a steering group to drive HIA development (by 2003);

- Determination of the approach to HIA (by 2003);

- Development and operation of a programme of prospective and retrospective, rapid and comprehensive pilot HIAs;

- Establishment of a national HIA function to lead the HIA process (by2005); and

- Integration of HIA in training programmes in relevant sectors (by 2005);

Appendix A4: List of Housing and Accommodation Actions

Access to Housing

- Local authorities will, in 2001, adopt housing strategies that will indicate the manner in which they propose to meet their social housing needs over the period covered by these strategies

- Local authorities will ensure that the social and affordable dwellings provided in the context of these strategies address the needs of all categories of households on the waiting lists;

- Local authorities' housing strategies will make provision for suitable sheltered and supported housing for elderly people;

- Local authorities will be pro-active in identifying and responding to the housing and accommodation needs of people with disability living in their area who cannot afford to meet their accommodation needs from their own resources;

- Local authorities will work to develop a greater range of accommodation suitable for people with disabilities;

- Local authorities will assess the housing needs of all applicants for housing;

- Local authorities will achieve 25,000 housing starts during the period 2000-2003. The annual output of the Voluntary and Co-operative housing sectors will increase from 1000 in 2000 to 4000 in 2006, yielding 15,000 dwellings in the period 2000 to 2006 as provided for in the National Development Plan;

- 2000 housing units will be provided annually through the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes;

- At the end of 2002 the Department of the Environment and Local Government will review all social housing programmes in the light of the results of the local authority assessments of housing needs to ensure that their scale and pace are sufficient to meet objective 1;

- All housing provision schemes will be reviewed periodically to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the categories of person for whom they were intended;

- The process by which housing applicants are assessed by local authorities should be as speedy and transparent as possible and the Department of the Environment will monitor this process;

- The Department of the Environment and Local Government will publish key data in the Annual and Quarterly Housing Statistics Bulletins.

Substandard Dwellings

The availability of funding for the existing housing grants available for low-income households will be reviewed when the 2001 National House Condition Survey becomes available. The terms of the Disabled Persons and Essential Repair Grants and the Special Housing Aid for the Elderly programme will also be kept under review, to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the categories of person for whom they were intended.

Fuel Poverty

As part of the process of addressing fuel poverty, the adequacy of the fuel allowance scheme will be kept under review.

Homelessness

In 2001 integrated strategies to address homelessness will be adopted by all local authorities. These strategies will make provision for:

- emergency accommodation for households with no accommodation;

- move-on accommodation for households in institutional or emergency accommodation;

- improved access to health, treatment and community care services;

- improved access to advice, information and referral services;

- eliminating rough sleeping;

- permanent affordable accommodation suitable for formerly homeless people;

- programmes to prevent homelessness;

- setting targets which can be monitored to ensure that homelessness is comprehensively addressed;

- By end 2002, health boards, in conjunction with local authorities and the voluntary agencies, will have put in place appropriate support services for homeless people to coincide with the finalisation of local action plans;

- By end 2002, systems will be established by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, in consultation with local authorities and voluntary agencies, to ensure that local authority assessments of homelessness are as accurate as possible;

- The Homelessness Fora, representative of local, statutory and voluntary organisations working with the homeless, which are being established at county level, will ensure that the full range of appropriate services are provided for homeless people and that service provision is effectively co-ordinated;

- By end 2002, funding schemes for homeless services will be reviewed and, if appropriate, reformed;

- Best practice, as formulated by the Homeless Agency, will be disseminated to local authorities.

Management of Social and Private Rented Housing and Accommodation

By the end of 2003, all social housing providers will have in place housing and accommodation and estate management strategies to provide the basis for:

- the adequate repair and maintenance of their rental properties;

- adequate estate facilities and management systems, with particular emphasis on more effective participation by tenants and residents in matters affecting their estates; and

- adoption of good management strategies for the control of rent debt and minimising losses from vacant dwellings.

A number of measures will be adopted to achieve this target as follows:

- By end 2002, each local authority will review and update its statement of policy on housing management;

- By end 2002, local authorities either individually or, where appropriate, on a shared basis will employ tenant liaison officers to advance the local authority's housing and estate management policies;

- Local authorities will, through their tenant liaison officers, pay particular attention to the needs of categories such as older people, disabled persons and ethnic minorities;

- Systems will be in place to ensure that best practice in relation to housing management and tenant participation is widely disseminated and adopted by all social housing providers;

- Community facilities, including, where appropriate, childcare facilities will be provided at construction stage of social housing developments where the number of dwellings warrant it;

- By end 2002, a special needs housing management allowance will be provided by health boards for the management of supported/sheltered housing schemes provided by the voluntary and co-operative housing sector;

- By end 2003, following surveys of their housing stock, social housing providers will adopt a scheme of planned maintenance for their rented dwellings;

- The Department of Environment and Local Government will explore the development of professional accreditation standards for housing management.

As part of a strategy towards building sustainable communities the Department of the Environment and Local Government will examine the impact of the following factors in tackling social exclusion:

- Housing management systems and practices;

- Access to services such as shopping, medical, childcare, public transport and leisure facilities;

- The Private Residential Tenancies Board will be established on an ad-hoc basis by autumn 2001;

- Legislation to implement the proposed reforms, including those relating to security of tenure, rent regulation, graduated notice to quit and dispute resolution, will be enacted by 2003;

- Full compliance with the requirements to be specified in the proposed legislation in relation to the registration of tenancies.