



An Roinn Gnóthaí Sóisialacha agus Teaghlaigh

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An Fóram Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Sóisialta
National Economic & Social Forum

Social Inclusion Forum

**6th Meeting of the
Social Inclusion Forum**

2009

*conference
report*

Conference Report
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Sixth Meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum

4th November 2009

Conference report

NESF and Social Inclusion Division

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Foreword from the Chairperson

I am delighted to introduce this report of the sixth meeting of the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF). This Forum continues to attract a very large number of participants, with 251 attending in 2009. Once again, participants were very satisfied with the day, with over 60% considering it to be either excellent or very good. The quality of the presentations made at the Forum was particularly highly rated. Participants also enjoyed the opportunity to network with others, and to discuss issues in the four workshops.

The SIF was established by Government to provide an opportunity for a wide range of voluntary groups and individuals at local level to:

- Present their views and experiences on key policies and implementation issues relating to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS);
- Identify barriers and constraints to progress and to suggest how best these may be tackled; and
- Provide proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.

This year, the main themes discussed at the workshops were children and their families; access to quality work and learning opportunities for people of working age, especially young people and migrants; access to services for older people; and access to services for people with disabilities.

Participants availed of the opportunity to put forward their views and proposals with regard to the NAPS (National Anti-Poverty Strategy), and also to strongly emphasise a number of issues to senior officials from Government departments and state agencies. These issues included: the importance of protecting the existing services and provisions for disadvantaged groups in Irish society; the need for officials to work closely with participants in combating inequality and social exclusion in the areas targeted by the Forum; and the great uncertainty about the future of funding and work in relation to social exclusion against the backdrop of the crisis in the public sector finances.

This Forum Report will now be submitted to all Government Ministers and the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration, which is chaired by the Taoiseach. It will also go to the other institutions that support the NAPS, including the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, the Social Inclusion Division, and Social Inclusion Units in Government Departments and Local Authorities. It will be circulated to all Members of the Oireachtas, the European Commission and our own NESF members. And, of course, it will be sent to all those who participated in the Forum.

Finally, I wish to convey my deep appreciation to all who participated at the Forum. A special thanks to those who assisted in running of the Workshops - the chairpersons, rapporteurs and those who made specialist presentations. I also want to thank the staff in the NESF and NESDO Secretariat, the Social Inclusion Division, and the European Anti-Poverty Network who worked hard to make this Forum the success it was.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Maureen Gaffney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Dr Maureen Gaffney
Chairperson
Social Inclusion Forum
National Economic and Social Forum



Introduction

- 1.1 The Social Inclusion Forum is part of the institutional structures put in place by the Government to support the development of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). It is convened annually by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in collaboration with the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Social and Family Affairs¹. The Forum is a key element of the Government's commitment to consult with all relevant stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty and the groups that represent them in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.
- 1.2 The purpose of the annual Social Inclusion Forum is to provide organisations and individuals that are not involved in the social partnership process with the opportunity to:
 - a) Input their views on key policies and implementation issues;
 - b) Identify barriers and constraints to progress and how best these can be tackled; and
 - c) Provide suggestions and proposals for new developments and more effective policies in the future.
- 1.3 This report provides a summary of the sixth meeting of the Forum, which took place on 4th November 2009 at Croke Park, in Dublin. It includes a summary of the main points raised in four parallel workshops and in roundtable discussions; as well as the papers that were presented by guest speakers, and the questions posed, at the Plenary Sessions.
- 1.4 This report will be formally submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Children and Integration which is chaired by the Taoiseach.

¹ This new Division was created by the integration of the Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty Agency.



Opening Presentations and Plenary Session Discussion

- 2.1 The Forum was opened by Chairperson, Dr Maureen Gaffney, of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF). In welcoming delegates to the Forum she drew attention to the fact that 2010 would be the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. She also referred to the current economic situation with particular reference to the position regarding the exchequer finances.

Dr Gaffney then introduced Ms Mary Hanafin T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

- 2.2 *Ms Mary Hanafin, T.D., Minister for Social and Family Affairs*

In comparing the current downturn to the 1980's Minister Hanafin, in her speech, outlined the many gains that had been made since then, which meant that Ireland is now very different to the place it was twenty years ago. There has been very significant growth in the numbers employed; many increases in social welfare payments, improvements in levels of education and training and a greatly improved infrastructure. She stated that work is on-going to meet the challenges which Ireland is now experiencing. Changes to welfare payments now encourage young people to enter training while the number of Fás courses offered has been doubled in 2009 leading to an extra 128,000 places being made available in education. In order to provide support for frontline services additional staff have been levied from other Government departments and many have been assigned to posts in Social Welfare Local Offices.

In respect of the McCarthy report on public sector expenditure the Minister outlined that the report offered a number of areas for potential savings and that the Government could implement the proposed changes over time. Nevertheless she said that expenditure cuts would have to be made and the social welfare budget could not be immune given that it makes up 37% of overall Government spending. The Minister finished by saying that she was interested in hearing the views of the participants of the forum in identifying priorities and how the most vulnerable in our society can be protected.

- 2.3 *Ms Anna Visser, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network (Ireland)*

Ms Visser outlined that the European Anti-Poverty Network would like the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010), to renew the political commitment to the involvement of those experiencing social exclusion in the decision-making process. This is important for a number of reasons:

- She said the insight of those experiencing poverty is crucial to address the challenges facing us while individuals and communities should be empowered to participate in formulating policy;
- increasing participation will lead to more effective measures to address the needs of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion;
- Participation is vital in connecting EU, national and local experience and so improve policy and its implementation.

She noted that participation requires commitment and resources, and the European Anti-Poverty Network prepares participants to engage in debates on policy at meetings of the European Union meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, organised every year by the country hosting the EU Presidency. She introduced Ms Karen Fitzpatrick, one of four Irish people who had attended this year's meeting in Brussels.

2.4 *Ms Karen Fitzpatrick of the European Anti-Poverty Network, and Vice-Chair of One Family*

Ms Fitzpatrick spoke of her own experiences as a single mother of two children who found herself dependent on social welfare and rent supplement. She decided to study, part-time, for a degree in community development in NUI Maynooth. As she did not enrol on a full-time course, funding towards fees was unavailable. After the first year Karen was awarded a Bank of Ireland Millennium Scholarship, which covered her fees for the remainder of her degree, which she was conferred with in 2007.

In 2008 she found a job as a special needs assistant in a school and decided to equip herself with a recognised qualification in the area. As she already has a degree she cannot access funding for this lower level course so has had to fund the course herself. Karen is only paid for days worked which leads to difficulties with her records when accessing the one-parent family payment and rent supplement.

Ms Fitzpatrick concluded by saying that at the moment she is working and continuing her education, but her family is still caught in the poverty trap. She wants to complete the transition from welfare to work, and become financially independent of social welfare. But she continually comes up against systemic obstacles in her attempts to do so.

Dr John Sweeney, Senior Social Policy Analyst of the NESC, in his keynote presentation, entitled 'Combining Retrenchment with Reform in Social Policy', discussed the nature of the current economic situation, the status of the most recent social partnership agreement "Towards 2016" and gave an insight into the activation programme as a means of addressing the significant increase in unemployment.

He examined these issues by addressing a number of questions:

1. *How did we get from the 'happy times' of the early 2000s to where we are now?*

Dr Sweeney outlined a number of issues for consideration:

- Between 1978 and 1983, the economy slowed by 8%
- Between 2007 to 2009, it lost 13% of growth leading to a sharp fall in government revenues and a rise in unemployment
- Construction accounted for nearly 25% of economic activity in this period
- The balance sheet of a particular bank grew by over 20% in a single year- Internationally this is a warning sign
- Irish banks borrowed the equivalent of 41% of GDP on the interbank markets for property related investment
- Irish price levels were almost 20% higher than the average for the EU 15 (excluding the states that joined in 2004 and 2007)

Other outside factors also contributed to the current difficulties, such as the crisis in the US sub-prime market, which led to a decline in global trade and in international markets.

2. *What has happened to the "Towards 2016" agreement?*

Dr Sweeney identified Towards 2016 as a comprehensive agreement that touches on many aspects of Ireland's economic and social life and is linked to a host of national strategies and plans with responsibility for delivery shared between central and local government, public bodies and non-statutory bodies. However he noted a number of areas where the agreement has deficiencies, with the principal weakness being the assumption that social spending would continue to increase indefinitely. This has not been the case and it has impacted on the implementation of all elements of the agreement. Dr Sweeney also identified the lack of prioritising and sequencing of the multiple objectives of Towards 2016 as a weakness of the agreement. As a result the deliverables set out in the document effecting considerable areas of poverty and social exclusion have not been delivered as anticipated.

Dr Sweeney concluded his remarks on Towards 2016 by noting that despite these reservations the fundamental elements of the agreement are correct and that the delivery of these elements should be persevered with, however the time frame for delivery on its wide ranging objectives will necessarily be extended.

3. Employment Activation as an example of a policy approach

Dr Sweeney began this section of his presentation by discussing the nature of the unemployment situation in Ireland.

He stated that it is the duration which people are involved in a job search rather than the overall numbers of those currently unemployed that is most important. Long term unemployment is debilitating to the individual and to society as a whole and it is clear from the situation in Ireland in the 1980s and Finland in the 1990s that long-term unemployment and the social costs that go along with it tend to persist long after economic recovery sets in. As such the development of effective activation policies are crucial in tackling these issues.

In a review of Ireland's activation policies concluded in late 2008, the OECD found that the proportion of all those of working age who were dependent on means tested social welfare actually increased in Ireland between 2000 and 2007 during a time of relative economic prosperity. In light of this Dr Sweeney suggested that there is a need to review the social welfare code so that individuals who are seeking to leave social welfare and re-enter employment are fully supported by services and to ensure that these services are fully accessible to those who require them.

Dr Sweeney outlined that activation requires interdepartmental co-operation and it necessarily engages local government and the community and voluntary sector. However the OECD review found that employment activation services in Ireland suffer from a degree of fragmentation with roles sometimes overlapping between the agencies involved. They found that services centred on once off contact with little follow through or evidence of long term results for clients. He pointed out the examples of Nordic countries such as Finland in the 1990's where it was found that good levels of income support, combined with intelligent activation policies can help reduce the number of people on long-term social welfare. The Nordic experience indicates that activation policy must include methods of job creation, including the development of the role of employer of last resort by government, as well as providing individuals with education and training in order to facilitate their return to the workforce. Dr Sweeney then outlined that inflows to unemployment are triggered by events such as job loss, breakdown in health and family relationships. Strategies to support the large numbers relying on Job Seekers Benefit and the large numbers relying on Job Seekers Allowance need to be developed. It is not an either/or situation, these strategies must be designed to complement each other. In relation this Dr Sweeney pointed out that it is to outflows from unemployment that we must look and focus research into this area. What makes achieving successful outflows difficult tends to be high benefits withdrawal rates, erosion of skills and therefore diminishing prospects of good earnings.

In conclusion Dr Sweeney noted that the next five years will be a cross roads for social policy development in Ireland but that the current economic situation could act as a platform for radical transformation in how publicly funded services in these areas are delivered.

Plenary Session Discussion

2.6 A number of questions and comments made by conference delegates to the opening presentations are noted below:

- The quality of jobs created during the boom;
- Substantial groups of people still suffer from inequality;
- Investment in quality childcare is needed;
- Will cutting social welfare and driving down wages and earnings solve the current financial problems?
- The importance of work done by community organisations and the danger of cutting funding to these organisations.

In response Dr Sweeney outlined how the quality of job creation in Ireland during the boom was similar to that across Europe. A good national minimum wage is also in place. Now it is necessary to create a diversity of jobs which suit the diversity of people's home arrangements and needs.

2.7 Ms Bernadette Lacey, Secretary General of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, noted how the increase in the amount of community development work over the last 20 years has led to growth in the number of different structures to fund this, with corresponding levels of bureaucracy. This situation was recognised in the review the structures around community development, carried out to ensure that funding was being put to the best possible use.





Roundtable Discussions

3.1 In Round Table discussions with those who shared their table, delegates were asked to address the following questions:

1. What are the main priorities and challenges for policies and programmes for reducing poverty and social exclusion in the current economic climate?
2. How can the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) contribute to addressing these challenges?

The main issues raised at the round table discussions are outlined below.

3.2 Question one

What are the main priorities and challenges for policies and programmes for reducing poverty and social exclusion in the current economic climate?

Delegates identified a number of key policy areas and programmes which they viewed as important for reducing poverty and social exclusion. The role of Social Welfare payments was identified as central to government policy in this regard and participants emphasised the importance of maintaining benefits at their current levels to groups experiencing difficulties, however it is crucial that these benefits do not become a disincentive to work for individuals who are in receipt of them. Delegates also suggested that improvements could be made to ensure that services are easily accessible for those who require them.

The need to develop an integrated strategy, focusing on education, training and job creation in order to assist in getting people back into employment was identified by delegates as being vital in the current circumstances. The identification of those groups who are most at risk of long term unemployment and a need for a policy focus on these groups was also raised.

Community projects and their role was discussed at a number of the groups. Delegates identified the work of these projects as low cost and acknowledged the important role they played in addressing social exclusion at local level. There were calls to maintain resources for these projects and for the setting up of a working structure at national level to offer support for community development projects.

The necessity for the development of policy to deal with the social repercussions of the current economic situation was raised. Issues such as support for those with mental health difficulties, those experiencing domestic violence and potential increases in homelessness and suicide were all raised in this context.

3.3 Question two

How can the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) contribute to addressing these challenges?

The principal observation made by delegates in regard to the abovementioned question was that events must be held at local level involving local stakeholders in order for the year to have an impact on poverty and social exclusion. A number of participants suggested that co-ordination between stage agencies and local groups is vital to ensure that these events are delivered successfully and can maintain their legacy beyond 2010.

Participants regarded the European year as an opportunity to have a long term effect and events must be used to develop strategies and creative solutions in dealing with poverty and social exclusion issues. However delegates noted that a large body of work is being carried out on an ongoing basis and the European Year can be used to highlight best practice and celebrate the success of ongoing social inclusion initiatives.

The communication of the central themes of the European year to the general public will be crucial in keeping poverty and social exclusion issues to the forefront of the ongoing government agenda. Creating awareness of these issues and utilising imaginative methods of communication will help to ensure that this happens.

Finally delegates identified the European Year as an opportunity to enhance existing structures and assist in the development new structures and ideas, thus ensuring a long term legacy for the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010).

IV

Key Themes Raised at Workshops

4.1 Forum participants then divided into four parallel workshops in order to consider key issues of interest to them. The themes of each workshop were linked to the Irish programme for the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) and reflected the four cross cutting themes outlined in the NAPsInclusion 2007-2016. These themes are as follows:

- Children and their Families;
- Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities – People of Working Age, especially young people and migrants;
- Access to Services for Older People; and
- Access to Services for People with Disabilities

These cross cutting themes, reflecting the priorities for social inclusion set down in the National Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSSPSI) Report for the EU, were discussed under the heading “How to best support vulnerable households through access to services and employment”. Account was also taken in the discussions of the principles underlying the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) which are:

- Recognition of the right of people in poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to play a full part in society
- An increase in the public ownership of social inclusion policies, emphasising everyone’s responsibility in tackling poverty and marginalisation
- A more cohesive society, where no one doubts that society as a whole benefits from the eradication of poverty
- Commitment of all actors, because real progress requires a long-term effort that involves all levels of governance.

A presentation was given in each workshop on a key policy issue related to the specific cross cutting theme and the findings of each workshop were presented to the final plenary session by a rapporteur assigned to the group. The key issues raised at each workshop are outlined below.

Workshop 1 - Children and their Families

- **Chairperson:** Liz Canavan, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
- **Speaker:** Jim Mulkerins, Social Inclusion Unit, Dept of Education and Science;
- **Rapporteur:** Joan O'Flynn, Social Inclusion Division, Department of Social and Family Affairs.

4.2 Mr Mulkerins' presentation outlined the relationship between poverty and educational disadvantage. It highlighted the range of influences on educational disadvantage. These include:

- a child's access to and enjoyment of a positive and supportive experience of accommodation, health and home-based emotional and education supports;
- a supportive community and school experience.

The presentation drew attention to the impact of disadvantage on children, including lower levels of self esteem, lack of access to sport and cultural resources, and poorer physical and mental health.

The wide range of government interventions to tackle educational disadvantage were described such as DEIS, the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion; the National Education Welfare Board; the School Completion Programme; literacy and numeracy supports; reduced pupil-teacher ratios for the most disadvantaged schools; and psychological supports, amongst others.

The presentation also referred to an ongoing policy and research debate on the merits of targeting resources on disadvantaged schools, an element of which is the extent to which the targeting is effective in reaching children and schools. For example:

- the DEIS programme accounts for 876 of 4,035 schools in the State (22 per cent);
- 50% of 'disadvantaged children' attend 22 per cent of schools; and
- 50% of 'disadvantaged children' attend 78 per cent of schools.

The distinction was drawn between learning supports to address the experience of disadvantage, and supports to address the experience of learning difficulty, was also highlighted.

The workshop discussion among participants then focused on access to services and income support.

4.3 In the discussion on access to services, the dominant issue was the importance of developing integrated approaches to address educational disadvantage. In particular, it is important that educational service development and implementation would effectively link children, their families, schools, and communities. Interventions to support early education, prevent educational disadvantage, promote literacy and support the completion of formal schooling by more young people were highlighted. Interventions need to recognise and value the diversity of school and community populations and, at the same time, be child and person-centred rather than uniform.

4.4 The wide range of community-based structures and programmes that complement the statutory provision of education was also highlighted. It was suggested that these local community services are key and need effective and sustainable resources to continue their work in offering pre- and after-school supports to vulnerable children and families.

- 4.5 In the discussion on income support, there was a strong focus on the need for income supports for people who are unemployed to be responsive to their circumstances. The diversity of people who were unemployed was highlighted. For example, people who continue to remain long-term unemployed; people who are first-time or short-term unemployed; people who are working reduced hours; and groups such as young men and lone parents all have different circumstances, and responses need to be tailored to each. It was suggested that social welfare rates should be sufficient to support people to live with dignity.
- 4.6 Flexible policy responses that recognise the skill-base of the unemployed were also required. These include responses that facilitate people to undertake education and training, volunteer, and work in communities. The idea that State-funded schemes act as an 'employer of last resort' was also highlighted. Participation in these types of initiatives should be considered as a positive support to people, and not result in reduction in income support levels.
- 4.7 The vulnerability and emotional stress associated with recent or new unemployment was also highlighted. Policy responses need to address the possible impacts of this including at-risk behaviours and emotional and mental health impacts.



Workshop 2 - Access to Quality Work and Learning Opportunities – People of Working Age, especially young people and migrants

- **Chairperson:** Deirdre Shanley, Employment Support Services – Department of Social and Family Affairs
- **Speaker:** Anne Gilton, Social Inclusion Unit - Fás;
- **Rapporteur:** Dr Anne Marie McGauran, Senior Policy Analyst – National Economic and Social Forum.

4.8 Anne Gilton's presentation outlined Fás' work to promote social inclusion and respond to the current crisis. This includes:

- Equality proofing of policies, programmes and services;
- An increase in training for job seekers; and
- Community-based programmes to make learning accessible in local areas, organised with community, voluntary and public organisations.

A social inclusion model is also being piloted with lone parents in the Dublin area, targeting those who do not access the full range of Fás programmes.

4.9 Attention is also being focused on young unemployed people (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training – NEETs). The rate of unemployment among those aged 15 to 19 has doubled in the last year. Similarly more attention is being given to the low skilled, including promoting employee training for those with low skills.

4.10 In the workshop discussion which followed, many issues were raised by participants in the first hour of discussion, and of these six key topics were picked for more in-depth discussion in the final hour of the workshop. These six key topics were:

1. The need for job opportunities and job creation;
2. The need for meaningful training and education interventions for all;
3. A variety of issues for migrants and/or asylum seekers, including
 - a. desire for work permits rather than social welfare,
 - b. access to training,
 - c. the duration of the asylum-seeking process, and
 - d. recognition of qualifications;
4. Responsiveness of statutory agencies;
5. Role of community organisations in the crisis – who will do their work if they are not there? and
6. Equality and social inclusion need to be in action, not just talked about.

Most discussion focused on the first four of these.

4.11 On issue one, Job opportunities and job creation – There was some discussion on the idea of an employer of last resort which could offer the unemployed person some kind of employment with the state if it was not possible to find it elsewhere.

4.12 Concern was also raised about 'jobless growth'. It is important to have a specific focus on job creation, as well as on general economic growth.

- 4.13 Volunteering - Can the skills of the unemployed be matched to needs in the community? Organisations can benefit from volunteers, and individuals can gain new skills through volunteer work. Issues such as childcare costs, and travel costs for volunteers are important to consider, as well as any difficulties which volunteers might face in obtaining social welfare benefits while volunteering.
- 4.14 Some participants noted that not all employers are acting responsibly in this crisis, with some using the recession as an excuse to let staff go, or to exploit employees.
- 4.15 One suggestion made to deal with unemployment is to reduce the working week to four days instead of five in order to preserve existing jobs.
- 4.16 On issue two, meaningful training and education interventions: Training offered to those who find themselves unemployed should be appropriate to the individual and their personal skill sets. For example, an unemployed IT specialist is unlikely to want training in welding.
- 4.17 People also need to be trained for jobs which are available. In one community, a Family Resource Centre trains people in jobs which are available locally. Community organisations and statutory agencies could work well together to promote this approach.
- 4.18 Participants also queried why people had to be unemployed for a number of months before being eligible for Back to Education allowances.
- 4.19 On issue three, migrants and asylum seekers: Asylum seekers would like to be able to work while their application is being processed. Currently they can volunteer, or undertake up to Level 4 of Fetac training. Otherwise, they are likely to become de-skilled. The processing time for an asylum application also contributes to this.
- 4.20 Migrants without Irish citizenship or residency cannot access a number of services. For example if a migrant's child is not an Irish citizen they must pay triple fees at university regardless of the fact they may have been educated in this country. For both asylum seekers and migrants, recognition of qualifications gained abroad is an issue.
- 4.21 On issue four, responsiveness of statutory agencies: Participants commented that Fás' response to the unemployment crisis is too slow, and its courses outdated. They asked how Fás decides what courses to run, and could local unions, employers and government be involved in choosing them? It was also suggested that it would be useful for Fás to be predictive by identifying areas of the labour market which will grow, and so provide training for jobs which are likely to be available.
- 4.22 Meanwhile there is no strategy to deal with the different needs of different groups of people in the current crisis. A strategy is needed that will look at the needs of young people, migrants, the newly unemployed, etc. An overarching strategy should be developed, within which local actions can be progressed.
- 4.23 Systemic barriers which people face in moving from welfare to training and employment, and to work, also need to be tackled.

Workshop 3 - Access to Services for Older People

- **Chairperson:** Gerry Mangan – Director, Social Inclusion Division – Department of Social and Family Affairs;
- **Speakers:** Michael Murchan - Office for Older People, Ed Murphy - President Irish Private Home Care Association;
- **Rapporteur:** Liz Sullivan - Social Inclusion Division.

4.24 Mr Murchan's presentation detailed the three main strands to health and social services for people over 65. These are residential care services, community based services and the Fair Deal. There were no cutbacks in services to older people in 2009. The main focus of policy is to retain older people within their communities, and in line with this, the HSE has rolled out home care packages over the last three years. Two evaluations of these schemes have recently been undertaken.

4.25 Mr Murphy stressed that we have an opportunity to learn from other countries, where a focus on services for older people has been to put the infrastructure, resources and personnel required within communities in place. It is important to do this in Ireland also, as the number of older people will rapidly increase over next few years. In addition, a social inclusion/social care strategy for older people is needed, which should include the full range of services required. Older people should be given choice, access and availability around quality services.

4.26 Mr Mangan then again emphasised that the main thrust of policy for older people is to optimise homecare. The key issue within this is how that care is provided. Home/family care needs to be complemented by range of services and resources. There is a need for an integrated approach around housing, health, and community infrastructure. Meanwhile Irish policy in this area compares well with that in other countries, but the key issue is effective implementation of the policies chosen.

4.27 A number of priority issues from the workshop discussions were then agreed, as follows:

- The overall policy focus should be to retain older people in their homes and communities, complemented by full range of services and resources.
- Integration and coordination of a range of services (e.g. health, housing, leisure, community infrastructure) is needed, at local and national levels
- Not all older people have medical or care needs. It is important to acknowledge the experience and contribution of older people, and support their active participation.
- The main focus of the Positive Ageing Strategy should be to enhance quality of life for older people, and to encourage their active participation.
- The needs/situation of particular groups e.g. Travellers, older people experiencing dementia, need to be supported.
- Ireland will need to plan for an increasingly older population; and learn from other countries.
- It is important to support the role of carers
- The availability and accessibility of home care packages is important.
- There is a need for regulation and a standardised approach to home care packages.

4.28 The workshop participants then chose three questions to be fed back to, and addressed by the Panel of chairpersons in the final Plenary Session. These were as follows:

1. If we accept that the overall policy focus is to retain older people (including those from diverse backgrounds and with particular needs) in their homes and communities, complemented by a full range of services/resources, then how will this be reflected in policy, especially the Positive Ageing Strategy?
2. How can the acknowledged need for integration/co-ordination of a range of services (e.g. health, housing, transport, leisure, community infrastructure) be given expression both locally and nationally?
3. There is strong acknowledgment of the need to support active participation, to value and utilise the contribution of older people. How can this be safeguarded into the future, particularly when funding for this work is currently under threat? What role can the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) play?



Workshop on Access to Services for Older People

Workshop 4 - Access to Services for People with Disabilities

- **Chairperson:** Siobhan Barron, CEO - National Disability Authority;
- **Speakers:** Siobhan Barron, CEO - National Disability Authority;
- **Rapporteur:** Carol Bourke - Social Inclusion Division, Department of Social and Family Affairs.

4.29 First Ms Barron gave a short presentation outlining the role of the NDA and the various structures and platforms in place to highlight key issues for people with disabilities.

4.30 A number of priority issues from the workshop discussions were then agreed, as follows:
Broad-ranging issues:

- Access to public buildings, toilets, and crossing roads continues to be a problem, with little apparent thought for those using wheel-chairs and people with disabilities in general, in the planning of such services.
- Transport continues to be a key issue for people with disabilities who want to be able to travel independently and without assistance, but find this a challenge in some of the services available.
- The government and various NGO's have drafted good strategies, but now increased emphasis is needed on specific actions to ensure that the required outputs are achieved. The current economic climate creates a challenge in this regard.
- The group expressed the hope that the Government would continue their commitments to people with disabilities, and that progress would continue in ensuring that 'disability' is recognised as a 'social inclusion' issue, rather than merely a 'medical' issue.
- The significant contribution made by carers needs to be acknowledged.
- In the forthcoming budget, it was hoped that the funding for schemes relating to disabilities and carers would be maintained.

4.31 Priority Issues

- A tangible link between education and employment needs to be put in place in terms of early interventions such as screening, psychological testing and special needs assessment, at both pre and primary school levels, to ensure that the right supports are provided at this early stage.
- The supports need to continue after people have left school, and should include outreach services, pre-employment assistance and career-guidance, both before and during college or employment.
- A person-centred focus is preferable when deciding the level and type of supports needed, than the current system which is perceived as being somewhat 'rigid' with a 'we know best attitude'.
- The change in focus should involve closer and more meaningful consultation with the person with the disability and their family members, to agree on the best supports needed.
- The supports available should be flexible and varied to suit the needs of both parties (the carer and the person with the disability). The relationship between the person with the disability and the carer should be similar to a formal contract-type agreement where mutual respect and flexibility are predominant, along with the longer-term goal of helping the person with the disability to attain independent and dignified living in the community.

4.32 Some General Issues

- Attitudes to people with disabilities need to change although it is accepted that this will be difficult.
- The language used eg 'disability', 'handicap' or 'disadvantage' can invoke negative images. The focus should be on 'ability' and increased emphasis on the positive contribution which people with disabilities can make to improve their own lives in seeking to attain independent living within their community.
- It is essential that those working with the public receive extensive training and coaching in dealing with people with disabilities. This training needs to be delivered from the top-down in every service-type organisation as well as pre, national, post-primary schools and colleges. The focus of any type of training or awareness-building needs to address both social inclusion issues as well as the more practical health and safety considerations.



Workshop on Access to Services for People with Disabilities

V

Key Themes Raised at the Plenary Session

- 5.1 At the final plenary session, each rapporteur provided a summary to the forum of the key issues and priorities identified at their workshop. These issues and priorities are detailed in section IV above. The chairperson then opened the floor to delegates for questions and comments.

Amongst the issues raised by delegates was the need for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to be included the dialogue, discussion and the decision making process on the development of social policy. The delegates also emphasised the need to see the community and voluntary sector as having a role in the response to the current situation. The Chair in response broadly agreed with the delegates and said that this was not an ideological issue and that people experiencing poverty and social exclusion would have vital information and input into the design and implementation of policy.

A number of other issues were raised including the need for interventions which promote independence and inclusion in the community for both people with disabilities and elderly people. Gerry Mangan responded to this by stating that there is clear support for overall thrust of policies to ensure that as many people as possible can remain in residence in their communities however there is need for special provision for these vulnerable groups. In this regard Mr Mangan also referred to the importance of integrated services. He said that while there are many sources for various services the integration of these services would ensure better use of resources, better implementation and ultimately better policy in this area.



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The Chair also touched on the area of the mental health of families who have been impacted by unemployment. Dr Gaffney stated that there is broad psychological evidence that unemployment, particularly long term unemployment, can be devastating for people. Emphasis should be placed on the development of an emotional intelligence agenda to help people to become aware of their own competencies and coping strategies for people who find themselves in this situation. This kind of thinking should be applied to every programme introduced because effective social policy isn't just about the provision of and access to services.

A number of representatives of community development projects raised their concerns regarding changes to the Community Development Programme initiated by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The Department provided clarification and explained that the Centre for Effective Services had been asked to examine the integration of the Local Government Social Inclusion Programme and the Community Development Programme into one streamlined structure from 2010.

5.2 Mr Gerry Mangan, Director of the Social Inclusion Division, then outlined the plans for the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, to take place in 2010.

The European Council and the European Commission have designated 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The proposal to designate 2010 as the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion is intended to reaffirm and strengthen the initial political commitment of the EU at the start of the Lisbon strategy, March 2000, to making "a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty".

Four main objectives lie at the heart of the European Year

- Recognition of the right of people in poverty and social exclusion to live in dignity and to play a full part in society
- An increase in the public ownership of social inclusion policies, emphasising everyone's responsibility in tackling poverty and marginalisation
- A more cohesive society, where no one doubts that society as a whole benefits from the eradication of poverty
- Commitment of all actors, because real progress requires a long-term effort that involves all levels of governance.

The broad structure of the Irish National Programme to support the implementation of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion involves cross cutting themes reflecting the priorities for social inclusion set down in the NAPsInclusion 2007-2016 and in the National Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NSSPSI) Report for the EU namely: Child Poverty, Access to quality work and learning opportunities, access to services for Older People and People with Disabilities.

A number of specific themes have also been chosen that will be looked at individually including urban and rural disadvantage; migration and ethnic minorities; travellers; and the homeless. Two specifically designated social inclusion weeks will take place in May and October 2010, and will focus mainly on locally based initiatives, and showcase and highlight best practice at local level, particularly community development initiatives.

A website for the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) has been developed and will provide general information and updates on news and events during the course of the year.

The European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) will be officially launched in Madrid on 21 January 2010, and will be followed by the launch of the Irish programme on 5 February in Dublin Castle. It is planned that the concluding event will be the Social Inclusion Forum at the end of next year.

Concluding remarks

- 5.3 Finally, Dr Maureen Gaffney stated that very profound issues were raised during the forum and that the apprehension people feel about the future was clear. However this can be assuaged if we can provide certainty about what is going to happen for people and communities through dialogue and discussion.

The Chairperson then invited participants to send any additional comments to NESF by phone, email, fax or by post and asked participants to complete the evaluation forms that had been circulated.

- 5.4 She then thanked all participants for attending for their inputs as well as their ongoing work with people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. She also thanked all those who had organised the Forum, in NESDO and in the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

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