

Social Inclusion Report Incorporating Annual Reports for 2013 & 2014



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí

Department of Social Protection

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Tánaiste's Foreword



I welcome the publication of this report which details the implementation of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) for the years 2013 and 2014. The report outlines progress on the 12 high level goals across the five lifecycle categories of children, working age, older people, people with disabilities and communities, while the 150+ actions in the plan are reviewed in a complementary online document.

It is very positive that the three goals relating to income support were all met in 2013-14. Despite extraordinary fiscal pressures and an increase in the number of welfare recipients, the Government maintained the minimum welfare rates and the state pension and kept the relative value of child income support at 33-35 per cent of the adult rate. These policies are reflected in the strong performance of social transfers in reducing poverty, with almost a quarter of the population being lifted out of the at-risk-of-poverty. This equates to a poverty reduction effect of 60 per cent, as compared to circa 50 per cent when NAPinclusion commenced. As a result, Ireland is the best performing country in the EU in its use of social transfers to reduce poverty.

In response to the economic crisis, labour market activation was intensified through the new Intreo service, while more training and education places were provided for the long-term unemployed under *Pathways to Work*. In addition, the Youth Guarantee action plan was launched in 2014, which assists young people not in employment, education or training.

The Department of Social Protection developed two new policy instruments to strengthen the implementation of the national social target for poverty reduction. The first of these is the Social Inclusion Monitor, which aims to provide regular, timely and accessible updates on key national and EU indicators of poverty and social exclusion. The second is Social Impact Assessment, an evidence-based methodology to estimate the likely distributive impact of policy proposals on income and social groups. Social impact assessment was especially important in informing government welfare and tax policies during the Troika Programme, which thankfully has now come to an end.

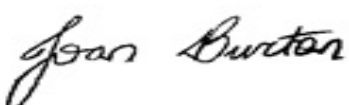
The European dimension of the fight against poverty expanded in 2013-14. Under the Irish Presidency, the EU Social Investment Package was launched, which sets out clear policy guidance for modernising social protection systems. Also, it was agreed that the next round of the European Social Fund would prioritise investment in measures to tackle poverty and social exclusion, and that a new EU Fund for European aid to the most deprived (FEAD) would be introduced.

Stakeholder engagement continued to be a core theme of government policy to tackle poverty. The annual Social Inclusion Forum was brought forward to the start of the year to better influence policy development, including the European Semester. Irish stakeholders were also represented at the annual Convention on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and at EU peer reviews.

Despite these achievements, the economic crisis has meant that progress on the national social target for poverty reduction is slower than desired. It is clear that the challenges in tackling poverty are now very different to when NAPinclusion was launched in 2007. Furthermore, many new initiatives have been developed which are not reflected in NAPinclusion. This includes the new child poverty target, which aims to lift at least 70,000 children out of consistent poverty, based on the 2011 baseline rate.

For these reasons, I decided to update the high level goals in NAPinclusion and to extend the lifetime of the plan by one year, to 2017. This will coincide with the timeframe for reporting on the interim national social target for poverty reduction (to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent). In addition, Government departments are implementing a multi-dimensional approach to tackle child poverty as part of *Better Outcomes, Better Futures*, the national policy framework for children and young people.

While Government policies are restoring economic and employment growth, the recovery is not yet reflected in household living standards. The Government is committed to delivering a new deal on living standards to ensure that the economic recovery is felt by low and middle income working families. Already, Budget 2015 increased support for families raising children, assisted unemployed families to returning to work and improved the financial position of vulnerable welfare recipients, including those living alone. It also provided a major investment in social housing. It is my intention that Government policies will continue to improve living standards in a manner that is felt in the daily lives of individuals, families and communities across the country.



Joan Burton, TD.

Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection

Chapter 1

Introduction & Context

National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016

This Social Inclusion Report is part of the monitoring and reporting mechanisms provided for in the NAPinclusion. The report covers the period from January 2013 to December 2014. Preparation and compilation of the report was coordinated by the Social Inclusion Division (SID) of the Department of Social Protection, with support from relevant Government Departments that provided report material. This is the fifth report, the previous four covering the periods 2007, 2008, 2009-2010 and 2011-2012 respectively. See www.socialinclusion.ie

NAPinclusion identifies a wide range of actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. The plan prioritises 12 high level goals in relation to children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities and communities. It identifies up to 150 actions across Departments and Agencies with a remit in social policy, as part of a strategic approach to make a decisive impact on poverty over the period to 2016.

NAPinclusion Reporting

The **Social Inclusion Report 2013 & 2014** of NAPinclusion goals and separate table showing progress on NAPinclusion actions will be made available to stakeholders and the general public on www.socialinclusion.ie and on www.welfare.ie In preparing this report, SID consulted widely with the other relevant Government Departments that have responsibility for delivering the programme of actions set out in the NAPinclusion. Co-ordinators /liaison persons, in place in each department, liaised with SID staff and assisted in collating material. Departments submitted updates on progress, key developments and other material.

A review of NAPinclusion actions was conducted in 2015 as part of this annual report to establish their continued relevance. This review indicated that some were completed or had been overtaken by circumstances or changes in policy and required updating. In such cases, appropriate text was drafted to describe new or similar activities, which was circulated to stakeholder departments for consideration /approval.

National Social Target for Poverty Reduction

In 2012 the Government revised and enhanced the national poverty target as originally set out in 2007 under NAPinclusion. It was renamed the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR) and is comprised of three component parts:

- The revised headline target is to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 (interim target) and to 2 per cent or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.3 per cent.
- The child-specific poverty target to lift at least 70,000 children out of consistent poverty, based on the 2011 baseline rate of 107,000, by 2020.
- Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target is to lift a minimum of 200,000 people out combined poverty (consistent poverty + at-risk-of-poverty + basic deprivation) between 2010 and 2020.

The Social Inclusion Monitor outlines progress towards the national social target for poverty reduction by providing regular, timely and accessible updates on key national and EU indicators of poverty and social exclusion. The Monitor is prepared by the Department of Social Protection based on the annual CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), along with EU comparative data provided by Eurostat.

The latest edition of the Monitor relates to 2013. It finds the at-risk-of-poverty rate fell for the first time in three years, to 15%. The main reason for the fall was the enhanced performance of social transfers, which lifted almost a quarter of the population above the poverty threshold. Ireland has the highest poverty reduction effect of social transfers in the EU at 63%, well in excess of the EU 28 norm of 36% consistent poverty increased marginally to 8.2% due to the increase in basic deprivation. This leaves a gap of four percentage points to be bridged to meet the interim poverty target by 2016.

In 2013, a further 23,000 children have been added to the target, giving a new figure of 138,000. The child poverty target now requires 100,000 children to be lifted out of poverty by 2020. No progress was made towards the Europe 2020 target. See [Social Inclusion Monitor 2013](#) for more details.

Stakeholder Engagement

The **Social Inclusion Forum** is part of the Government's structures to monitor and evaluate NAPinclusion. The Social Inclusion Forum was held in both 2013 and 2014. This annual event is part of the institutional structures put in place to underpin the implementation, monitoring and on-going development of the Government's social inclusion agenda. It provides a forum for wider public consultation and discussion on social inclusion issues, in particular for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the groups that work with them. The Forum also provides an opportunity for engagement between officials from Government Departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty in relation to the NAPinclusion. A conference report is prepared each year and is laid before both Houses of the Oireachtas. See www.socialinclusion.ie for conference reports.

Ireland's National Reform Programme

Under the Europe 2020 Strategy, an EU target to reduce poverty by 20 million by 2020 was adopted. Member states have to report on the target and related actions in the National Reform Programme (NRP).

The NRP is also the reporting mechanism for the Country Specific Recommendations (CSR). In 2014, Ireland received a CSR on tackling low work intensity and to address the poverty risk of children through tapered withdrawal of benefits and supplementary payments upon return to employment.

The evolution in household joblessness in Ireland from 2007 to 2014, using the Labour Force Survey measure shows that the proportion of adults (aged 18-59 years) in jobless households in Ireland doubled from 7.9% in 2007 to 15.9% in 2012, before falling to 13.6% in 2014. While the baseline share of children in jobless households is higher than for adults, the trend is similar: initial increase from 11.6% to 20.2%, with subsequent decrease to 17.7%. These trends are in accordance with the pattern in unemployment during the crisis. See [National Reform Programme 2015](#) for more details.

Social Impact Assessment

Social impact assessment is an evidence-based methodology to estimate the likely distributive effects of policy proposals on income and social inequality. Assessing the social consequences of budgetary policy is of particular importance in order to protect the most vulnerable in society and to monitor the crucial role of social transfers in preventing welfare and other recipients from falling into poverty.

An integrated social impact assessment to strengthen implementation of the national social target for poverty reduction and the new sub-target on child poverty and to facilitate greater policy co-ordination in the social sphere was developed in 2012. It is intended to apply social impact assessment to a range of policy issues, in conjunction with government departments and other stakeholders.

The Department of Social Protection published a social impact assessment of Budgets 2013 and 2014. The social impact assessment of Budget 2015 found that for the first time since the economic crisis, welfare and income tax policies will result in an increase in average household incomes of 0.7 per cent (equivalent of almost €6 per week), inclusive of the effect of the water charges. Furthermore, it found that households with children (earning and non-earning) generally gain more than those without children. There is no significant change in the at-risk-of-poverty rate though the income threshold increased, which suggests that social transfers continue to perform strongly in reducing poverty. See [Social Impact Assessment 2015](#) for further details.

Research on Poverty

The Department of Social Protection promotes the development of data strategies and research to inform anti-poverty and social inclusion policies and practice, facilitating improved monitoring of outcomes. In-house research, such as the publication of the Social Inclusion Monitor in 2013, along with externally funded studies, contribute to this objective.

The Department funds a three-year research programme with the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) for the **Analysis and Measurement of Poverty and Social Exclusion (AMPSE)**. The outputs from this programme in 2013 and 2014 were:

Thematic report: Social Transfers and Poverty Alleviation in Ireland, 2004 - 2011

This report examines the role of social transfers in income redistribution and poverty alleviation in Ireland. The study covers the period 2004 to 2011, a time of rapid economic change, spanning both strong economic growth and deep recession. The report provides insights on why social transfers played a greater role in alleviating poverty and deprivation in Ireland. It assesses the impact of social transfers across different life cycle groups and benchmarks Ireland against other EU15 countries. The findings were presented at a national conference in 11 December 2013.

Technical Paper: Implications of Income Pooling and Household Decision-making for the Measurement of Poverty and Deprivation

This technical paper focuses on the core assumption in conventional poverty measurement that income is shared within households to the benefit of all household members. The paper examines aspects of the household's financial regime, including which household members receive income, the extent to which income is contributed for the benefit of other household members and responsibility for financial decision-making. The findings were presented at an ESRI research seminar on 24 October 2013.

Technical Paper: Trends in Economic Stress and the Great Recession in Ireland

The purpose of this technical paper was to develop a measure of economic stress, which captures the change in economic fortunes of Irish households over the period 2004 to 2011. It goes beyond income to include items such as debt, housing costs, and the difficulties and stresses of managing on reduced household incomes. The paper examines trends in economic stress over time and considers how it is distributed across different socio-economic groups, particularly across income classes, social classes and the life-course (from younger adults to older adults). In doing so, it also explores whether 'traditional' social and income class factors, or 'new' factors relating to stages in the life-course and new social risks across all groups, are the main drivers of observed patterns of economic stress. The paper was presented at an ESRI seminar in April 2014 and to the Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee of the European Commission in June 2014.

In 2014, work commenced examining the transitions between household joblessness and work and on the measurement of household joblessness using the SILC and QNHS datasets. The reports are due for publication in 2015.

The Department, in conjunction with the Irish Research Council, funds the **Social Protection Research Innovation Awards** to develop high quality innovative research in third-level institutions. In 2013, the Department provided funding for an exploratory study on the social impact of gambling in Ireland. In 2014, a research study was funded to better inform the Department's policy approach to activating lone parents. Both of these reports are due for publication in 2015.

Funding under this stream was also used to support a UCC symposium on conceptualising and measuring poverty on 17th May 2013. It reflected on the 25th anniversary of the publication of the results of the first national survey on poverty.

A UCD Social Protection Policy Workshop was funded from 8th to 12th September 2014 to consider the challenges and opportunities for social protection policy in post-recession Ireland. It focused on developments in social protection and social welfare systems in the context of the recession and recovery as well as on the issue of the household within the welfare state.

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) supports the development of indicators and data for the measurement of poverty and the monitoring and interpretation of poverty trends. It is composed of experts in social research, social statistics and social policy from Government departments, academic organisations, state agencies and social partners. The group met twice in 2013 (11 March; 3 July) and three times in 2014 (5 February; 14 July and 24 November).

EU Open Method of Co-ordination on Social Inclusion

Ireland works with the European Commission and EU Member States to coordinate policies on social inclusion through the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) in the areas of social inclusion, health care and long-term care and pensions. The main coordinating body for this work is the Social Protection Committee. Some relevant activities in this area include:

National Social Report

The [National Social Report](#) (NSR) is an EU policy reporting document prepared by Member States under the social OMC. The Department of Social Protection is responsible for co-ordinating the NSR with other supporting Departments. It is the main mechanism for Member States to report on their EU social policy obligations and focuses on Government policies concerning social protection, social inclusion, health and long-term care. These policies are connected with and supported by the broader economic and employment policies and high level targets set out in the National Reform Programme. The latest NSR documents key reforms in these areas, particularly

from June 2014 to April 2015. As part of its co-ordination role, the Department consulted with a broad range of national stakeholders.

Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (Poverty Platform Convention)

The European Commission established the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion as one of its seven flagship initiatives of its Europe 2020 Strategy. The Annual Convention is the successor to the previous Round Tables against Poverty and Social Exclusion. The third and fourth conventions, organised by the Commission, in association with the EU Presidency, were held in Brussels in 2013 and 2014 to take stock of progress made towards the headline target for poverty reduction and social inclusion, review the implementation of the activities announced under the Platform and consider suggestions for future actions.

In both 2013 and 2014 Ireland was represented at the Annual Convention by a delegation made up of a broad range of civil society representatives, NGOs, academics, elected public representatives and officials. More information on the Annual Convention of the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion can be found here:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=961>

Ireland's Presidency of the European Union

A particular highlight of 2013 was the 7th Irish Presidency of the European Union which began on January 1st and ended on 30th June. The three overarching priorities for the Irish Presidency were stability, growth and jobs. Some major social inclusion successes were achieved, particularly in the following areas:

- A Council Recommendation to Member states on a **Youth Guarantee** was adopted. The Recommendation encourages Member states to: “ensure that all young people under the age of 25 years receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education”;
- The Council reached conclusions in respect of the **Social Investment Package**, which set out a policy framework to give a fresh impetus to achieving the overall Europe 2020 target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty by 20 million and fighting social exclusion by developing policies designed to strengthen people’s skills and capacities and support them to participate fully in employment and social life;
- **A joint conference hosted by the Irish Presidency and the EU Commission**, to discuss the proposed **Social Investment Package**, took place in the Leuven Institute for Ireland in Europe, Belgium on 2nd and 3rd May. The conference featured speakers and contributors from the various Member States, the European Parliament and other international institutions and provided an opportunity for an audience of over 200 EU and government officials, public representatives and NGOs to discuss the package in advance of political discussions at the

Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) Council meeting later that June;

- Negotiations on the proposed **Fund for European aid to the most deprived (FEAD)** commenced under the Irish Presidency and a large measure of agreement was secured amongst the Member States which facilitated a final agreement under the Lithuanian Presidency. The fund is designed to support national schemes whereby food products and basic consumer goods for homeless people or for children are distributed to the most deprived through partner organisations selected by the Member States.

EU Peer Reviews

EU peer reviews are a key instrument in the social OMC by promoting policy learning, capacity building and support for exchange of good practice. In 2014, the Department of Social Protection participated in two EU peer reviews on topics related to poverty and social impact assessment.

- Belgium hosted a peer review in mid-January on the Belgian Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion EU 2020. Peer Reviewers met in Brussels to hear about the approach in Belgium to formulate policy recommendations in the context of the onset of the economic crisis, which increased the risk of poverty across Europe, making the need for action to fight poverty all the more pressing.
- Austria hosted a peer review on the use of micro-simulation models in social impact assessment. Such models can provide policy-makers with a useful evidence base, and can enable stakeholders such as NGOs to play a more active role in policy formation. Austria has broken new ground by creating an easy-to-use public website that enables any citizen to calculate the effects of tax and benefit changes on different sections of the population. Ireland's shared its experience of the use of the ESRI SWITCH model in conducting a social impact assessment of the annual Budget. More information on the peer reviews can be found here:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1024&langId=en&newsId=2098&furtherNews=yes>

Social Protection Committee

The Social Protection Committee is an EU advisory policy committee for Employment and Social Affairs Ministers in the Employment and Social Affairs Council (EPSCO). It monitors social conditions and the development of social protection policies across EU Member States. The SPC also produces reports for discussion of social protection and country-specific recommendations in relation to the Europe 2020 Strategy. It also develops EU social indicators and analytical frameworks to monitor progress towards agreed objectives/targets and works with Eurostat to improve EU social statistics.

Chapter 2

Children

NAPinclusion High Level Goal	Progress in 2013-2014
<p><u>Goal 1: Education</u> Ensure that targeted pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. (The introduction of a free pre-school year for all children obviated the requirement for a separate DEIS based intervention).</p>	<p>The free pre-school year under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme was introduced in January 2010. Almost every pre-school service (more than 4,300) in the State is participating, with up to 68,000 children, or 95% of the eligible age cohort, availing of the programme in 2014.</p>
<p><u>Goal 2: Education</u> Reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. The target is to halve the proportion from the current 27%-30% to less than 15% by 2016.</p>	<p>There has been a significant improvement over the period 2007 to 2013 in the reading and mathematics test scores of primary school students in DEIS schools with the proportion of primary school pupils with serious literacy difficulties reduced to 10% for 2013.</p>
<p><u>Goal 3: Education</u> Work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20-24 completing upper second-level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013.</p>	<p>The number of students completing the Leaving Certificate continued to increase with 90.6% of the 2008 entry completing the Leaving Certificate (2013). The rate of completion for the previous year's cohort was 90.1%.</p>
<p><u>Goal 4: Income Support</u> Maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate over the course of this plan and review child income supports aimed at assisting children in families on low income.</p>	<p>Expenditure on child benefit payments in 2014 was just over €1.9 billion. The 2013 CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions showed that social transfers reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children from 45.5% to 17.9%, thereby lifting a quarter of all children out of poverty. The combined value of child income support measures at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate was maintained.</p>

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020 (NPFYCYP) was launched by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on 16 April 2014. This represents the first overarching national policy framework encompassing the age ranges spanning children and young people (0 – 24 years). It adopts a whole of government approach and will accommodate a number of constituent strategies.

The Framework:

- Sets out and centralises common outcomes.
- Captures 163 policy commitments.
- Prioritises key transformational goals necessitating action.
- Ensures an innovative and effective way of working.

An Implementation Team has been established to lead, coordinate and monitor implementation. Work on developing the Implementation Plan is on-going and will outline a 3-year schedule of actions associated with respective commitments for the period 2014-2016 and to determine the outcomes expected in 2017.

A Cross-departmental Sponsors Group has been established to drive implementation and provide a forum for problem solving. Each Sponsor has lead responsibility for a National Outcome area. A High-level Children and Young People's Policy Consortium has been established to have oversight and drive cross-Government implementation.

The Department of Education and Skills commented that there is a commitment within the National Policy Framework to build on existing good practice around clustering of schools to enable better access to educational supports, particularly for children with special educational needs, and explore the potential for further development of cluster arrangements, to encourage greater connections between schools, community and State services, including sharing infrastructure.

Multi-dimensional Approach to Tackling Child Poverty

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 adopts a multi-dimensional approach to tackling child poverty, in support of the child poverty target. As part of *Better Outcomes, Better Futures*, government departments are developing a whole-of-government approach to child poverty as a priority action in 2015. To inform the development of this approach, a national seminar on 'Investing in children – breaking the cycle of disadvantage' was held with the European Commission and attended by

national stakeholders in November 2014. The Advisory Council for *Better Outcomes, Better Futures* has also been consulted. The whole-of-government approach includes child and family income supports, prevention and early intervention services for children and parents in disadvantaged areas, a national programme to tackle educational disadvantage, a new physical activity plan and increased provision of school meals.

Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making

The Department of Children & Youth Affairs has reported that the first National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making, a constituent strategy of the national policy framework for children and young people, *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*, will be published in early 2015. The Participation Strategy contains a number of commitments from Government Departments and State Agencies to support, promote and facilitate the participation of children and young people, including those who are seldom heard. The priority action in the strategy for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs will be the establishment of a Children and Young People's Participation Hub, as a national centre for excellence. The Hub will support Government departments and other organisations in implementing the strategy through training, documenting best practice and working with education institutions to oversee the development of education on children's rights for professionals who work with and for children and young people. The Hub will also host a comprehensive online database of practical resources and literature.

A toolkit to support individuals and organisations, by providing best practice in participation in decision-making by seldom heard children and young people will be published alongside the Participation Strategy.

National Youth Strategy

A National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 is currently being developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and will be completed in 2015. This Strategy will also be a constituent strategy of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020*.

The National Youth Strategy 2015 to 2020 will set out Government's aim and objectives for young people, aged 10 to 24 years, so that they may be active and healthy, achieving their full potential in learning and development, safe and protected from harm, have economic security and opportunity and be connected and contributing to their world. It will be a universal strategy for all young people and will provide for the needs of young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, the poorest outcomes. It will detail priority actions to be advanced over 2015 - 2017 to be delivered by stakeholders such as Government departments, state agencies and by the NGO sector.

Tusla: the Child and Family Agency

On 1st January 2014 the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) became an independent legal entity, comprising the Health Service Executive, Children & Family Services, Family Support Agency and the National Educational Welfare Board, as well as incorporating some psychological services and a range of services responding to domestic, sexual and gender based violence. Tusla is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children.

Under the Child and Family Act, 2013 Tusla has responsibility for:

- Supporting and promoting the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families.
- Offering care and protection for children in circumstances where their parents have not been able to, or are unlikely to, provide the care that a child needs.
- Ensuring that every child in the State attends school or otherwise receives an education, and for providing education welfare services to support and monitor children's attendance, participation and retention in education.
- Ensuring that the best interests of the child guides all decisions affecting individual children.
- Consulting children and families so that they help to shape the agency's policies and services.
- Strengthening interagency co-operation to ensure seamless services responsive to needs.
- Undertaking research relating to its functions, and providing information and advice to the Minister regarding those functions.
- Commissioning services relating to the provision of child and family services.

Family Support Services

The Child and Family Agency's Business Plan for 2014 sets out a number of priorities in relation to family support services such as:

- Reflecting the transition of the former Family Support Agency programmes into the Child and Family Agency, a focus for the Agency in 2014 will be on the integration of these programmes within the new structure. The alignment of this activity will be considered along with the other Community Sector organisations
- Building on the significant strengths of the Family Resource Centres in meeting the Agency's mandate for community-based early intervention and family support. In that regard, the development of family support as a preventative and early intervention strategy will feature strongly with particular regard to the roll-out of the Child and Family Agency's National Service Delivery Framework and alignment of the Family Resource Centre Programme within the local community interventions.

TACTIC - Teenagers and Children Talking in Care

In June 2013, the members of the Voice of Children in Care Implementation Group re-named the group TACTIC. A suite of materials was developed by the group for children and young people when they are first going into care, aimed at providing reassurance and at highlighting how they can have their voices heard in their own care situations and in their care plans.

These sources were published in December 2014 by Tusla: the Child and Family Agency and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs.

Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)

The Department of Education and Skills reported that two evaluation reports on the National Action Plan: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) were published in 2013, by the Educational Research Centre (ERC).

In the first report “**Changes in Pupil achievement in Urban Primary Schools Between 2007 and 2013**” the following points were noted:

- Test scores at all grade levels where testing took place (2nd, 3rd, 5th & 6th) increased significantly between the collection of baseline data in 2007 and follow-up testing in 2010.
- Outcomes from the most recent round of testing in spring of 2013 indicated that, not only were the initial gains maintained, they were built on between 2010 and 2013.
- Gains are particularly evident in the junior grades and in schools that have high levels of disadvantage.
- While there has been a striking reduction in low-scorers (i.e. at or below the 10th percentile) in both reading and mathematics, the percentage of high achievers in both subject areas has been maintained or increased.
- Levels of pupil absence has also fallen from 10.8% in 2007 to 7.1% in 2013.

The second ERC report “**Characteristics and Achievements of pupils attending DEIS Rural Primary Schools**”, explores the difference between rural and urban DEIS schools. The achievement rates of rural pupils in DEIS schools are higher than those of their urban counterparts. Rural pupils improved their reading and maths scores between 2007 and 2010. Evaluation of data from pupils’ parents shows few differences between the home experiences of urban and rural pupils from families with medical cards. However, rural pupils had access to a greater number of educational resources in their homes, their parents had reached higher educational levels, they were read to more as pre-school children; their parents read books more regularly than their urban counterparts and there was a lower incidence of absent fathers among rural households.

As of 1st September 2014, the number of schools participating in DEIS are as follows:

- Primary Urban Band 1 Schools: 195
- Primary Urban Band 2 Schools: 141
- Rural Primary Schools: 321
- Post Primary Schools: 192

In parallel with the ERC's research on pupil attainment in DEIS schools, the Department's Inspectorate has conducted evaluations of planning in DEIS schools. A number of reports from this evaluation work covering the period 2010 to 2014 are currently being finalised for publication at end 2014.

Early School Leaving

The Department of Education and Skills continues to adopt a broad-based approach to tackling early school leaving. Enhancing attendance, progression, retention and attainment are central elements of DEIS. Some €600m was provided in 2014 for a variety of inclusion measures to tackle educational disadvantage. In addition, there are interventions in support of youth and in providing "second chance education" for young people and adults. A number of measures have been put in place to attempt to reduce the percentage of early school leavers, including:

- a. Implementation of the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion: DEIS.
- b. Integration of educational welfare services under Tusla.
- c. National Strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people.
Children who do not learn to read and write and communicate effectively are more likely to leave school early and, hence, the strategy will support achievement of the national early school leaving target.

The latest **Report on Retention Rates** is based on an analysis of those students who entered secondary school in 2008, the majority of whom completed their Leaving Certificate in 2013 or 2014. The analysis examined the progress of 56,075 students through second-level.

The main findings of the report are:

- The number of students completing the Leaving Certificate continued to increase with 90.6% of the 2008 entry completing the Leaving Certificate.
- The rate of completion for the previous year's cohort was 90.1%.
- The rate of completion a decade ago (1998 cohort) was 83.6%.
- The retention rate for males continues to improve and the gender gap for those students entering secondary school was 2.67%. This compares to a difference of 3.59% for the previous year's students. For the 2008 cohort 91.93% of females completed the Leaving Certificate while 89.26% of males completed the Leaving Certificate.
- The average retention rate for DEIS schools continues to increase with 82.1% of those entering secondary school in 2008 completing the Leaving Certificate. By comparison the completion rate in 2001 was 68.2%.

SOLAS - Further Education and Training Authority

The Department of Education & Skill reported that SOLAS, the new Further Education and Training Authority was established on 27th October 2013, with its main objective being to develop, fund and oversee an integrated further education and training sector. SOLAS published its **Further Education and Training Strategy** on the 12th May 2014. The Strategy is organised around 5 key goals to provide skills for the economy including strong employer engagement, to support the active inclusion of citizens, to improve how Further Education and Training (FET) is planned and funded with a strong emphasis on targeting and evaluation of outcomes, to raise the quality of FET and to improve the standing of FET as a strong option in the overall education and training sector.

Child Income Support

Altogether, the Department of Social Protection spends in the region of €3 billion in providing income support for children and families. The 2013 CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions showed that social transfers reduced the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children from 45.5% to 17.9%, thereby lifting a quarter of all children out of poverty. This equates to a poverty reduction effect of 60.7% in 2013.

In Budget 2013 the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) was reduced from €150 to €100 for children aged 4 to 11 years and from €250 to €200 for children aged 12 to 17 years or aged 18 to 22 years in full time education. It was withdrawn in Budget 2014 for children over the age of 18 years, other than those attending secondary school.

In Budget 2015, announced in October 2014, the monthly rate for Child Benefit was increased by €5, from €130 to €135 at a cost of €72 million. Budget 2015 also included other child-specific measures such as, €22 million for the new back to work family dividend and an additional €2 million on the school meals programme.

The combined value of child income support measures at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate was maintained in 2013 and 2014.

Afterschool Childcare Scheme

The Afterschool Childcare Scheme (ASCC) that was announced in Budget 2013 was implemented with funding of €14m in 2013 that was allocated from savings in the Department of Social Protection. In 2014 this funding was re-allocated with €2m allocated to ASCC, €7.5m allocated to the Community Employment Childcare (CEC) programme and €4.5m allocated to quality improvement initiatives within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The ASCC scheme was continuously reviewed and revised by the Department of Social Protection since its introduction in 2013, based on feedback from all stakeholders with the last release on 14th July 2014. This release included expanding the scheme to additional customers, reducing the parental contribution to €15 in line with the CEC programme and introducing a pick-up option at no additional cost to the parent.

The ASCC scheme and the CEC programme build on the existing supports that are provided for, and implemented by, the D/CYA in the child care sector. The Government invests €260 million annually in high quality, accessible and affordable childcare for parents, benefiting over 100,000 children of which 25,000 are of low-income parents. This is delivered through a range of childcare programmes for children, including the free pre-school year provided under the ECCE programme and as a range of supports provided to low income parents (i.e. Community Childcare Subvention Programme, Childcare Education and Training Support Programme, ASCC and the CEC Programme).

Free GP Care

The Government made a commitment to introduce, on a phased basis, GP care without fees within its first term of office. The Department of Health reported that the Health (General Practitioner Service) Act 2014, which provides an entitlement for all children aged under 6 years to a GP service without fees, was enacted on 25th July 2014. GP services without fees was implemented for this group of children in July 2015.

Chapter 3

People of Working Age

NAPinclusion High Level Goal	Progress in 2013-2014
<p><u>Goal 5: Employment and Participation</u> Introduce an active case management approach that will support those on long-term social welfare into education, training and employment. The target is to support 50,000 such people, including lone parents and the long-term unemployed, with an overall aim of reducing by 20% the number of those whose total income is derived from long-term social welfare payments by 2016. This target will be reviewed in the light of experience.</p>	<p>In 2013, over 130,000 unemployed people attended group information/engagement sessions while some 186,900 people attended in 2014, of whom approximately 56,000 were long-term unemployed. Initial one-to-one guidance interviews were held with 169,000 people, of which some 47,000 were with long-term unemployed persons. Places on a range of further and higher education courses were reserved for 57,000 people who were long-term unemployed.</p>
<p><u>Goal 6: Income Support</u> Maintain the relative value of the lowest social welfare rate at least at €185.80, in 2007 terms, over the course of this Plan, subject to available resources.</p>	<p>In Budgets 2013 and 2014, there were no changes to the rates of primary weekly social welfare payments, which were maintained at €188.00. The Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate was maintained at €186.00.</p>

Pathways to Work Strategy

The Pathways to Work Strategy sets out a comprehensive reform of the State's approach to helping unemployed jobseekers return to work. It was initiated in 2012 and is designed to complement the Action Plan for Jobs as part of a twin-pronged approach to tackling the jobs crisis that emerged in the final years of the last decade.

The **Action Plan for Jobs** is focused on stimulating employment growth and Pathways to Work on making sure that as many as possible of these new jobs, and other vacancies that arise in the economy, are filled by people who are unemployed jobseekers. Since its inception in 2012, employment and entitlement services have been brought together in 'one-stop shop' Intreo centres with new schemes and employment supports introduced, while some existing schemes have been expanded.

There has been a transformation of jobseeker services through Intreo:

- A 'social contract' of rights and responsibilities between jobseekers and the State has been implemented.
- The Further Education and Training (FET) sector has been significantly re-organised and a new five year FET strategy adopted.
- A Labour Market Council has been established, comprised of industry leaders and labour market specialists to monitor and advise on the implementation of the Pathways to Work Strategy.
- Profiling is now in place for all jobseekers.

Pathways to Work reforms adopted earlier continued to have an enhanced impact in 2014 including:

- Increasing initial one-to-one guidance interviews with jobseekers (with the number of interviews, at 169,000, up 8% on 2013).
- Making 57,000 FET places available to the long-term unemployed.
- The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan (YGIP), under the Pathways to Work, was launched in January 2014, and measures were progressively introduced throughout 2014.

Pathways to Work 2015

Launched mid-2014, this takes account of the input from the Labour Market Council and the recommendations contained in the interim report of the Council. The objective of Pathways to Work 2015 is to build on the progress already made and, in particular, to bring a sharper focus on actions to help tackle long term and youth joblessness, to improve the quality and frequency of engagement between Intreo and employers, and to improve the financial return to work for unemployed jobseekers with children.

Youth Guarantee

Youth Guarantee sets a medium-term objective of ensuring that young people 18-25 years receive an offer of employment within four months of becoming unemployed. Due to the universal nature of the unemployment most of those classified as not in education, employment or training are registered with the Public Employment Service. The main plank of the guarantee therefore is assistance to young people 18-25 in finding and securing sustainable jobs through the Public Employment Service. For those who do not find employment, additional offers are provided, with most offers (over 70%) in further education or training. Others are in community-based employment programmes such as CE, Gateway and Tús, or through the JobsPlus employment subsidy for private employment. During 2014, almost 25,000 places were taken up under the Youth Guarantee.

Income Support

In Budgets 2013 and 2014, there were no changes to the rates of primary weekly social welfare payments, including increases for qualified adults or qualified children. The rates of primary weekly social welfare payments were maintained at €188.00. The relative value of this rate fell by 2.1% based on 2007 figures.

The Supplementary Welfare Allowance rate was maintained at €186.00. The relative value this rate has fallen by 3.1% in 2007 terms.

In 2013, social transfers other than old age and survivors' pensions continued to perform strongly in reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate of working-age people, falling from 39.6 per cent to 15.3 per cent after all social transfers. This is equivalent to a poverty reduction effect of 61.4 per cent .

Reform of One-parent Family Payment

The Department of Social Protection outlined a significant development in 2013 by introducing the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment to take account of the specific caring responsibilities of lone parents with young children. This arrangement caters for One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) recipients who lose their entitlement to the OFP payment, who have a youngest child aged 7 to 13 years inclusive and who continue to be a lone parent.

These customers are exempt from the Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) conditions that require them to be available for, and genuinely seeking, full-time work. As such, no lone parent with a youngest child aged under 14 years is required to take up employment in order to receive income support from the Department of Social Protection. They can also move into education and/or employment, including into part-time employment (for example, during the mornings, when their children are at school), if they so wish, and still receive payment, subject to a means test. As such, the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment allows these customers to adequately balance their education/work and caring responsibilities and, significantly, reduces their requirement for child care. The payment also offers a tapered support to these customers as their children get older.

Recipients of the Jobseeker's Transitional Payment also gain access to a one to one meeting with a case officer who will assist them to produce a personal development plan to help them move towards or into employment. Once the youngest child reaches 14 years, if the customer still needs income support, s/he will move to the full JA conditionality.

National Women's Strategy 2007 – 2016

The Mid-Term Review of National Women's Strategy published in March 2014 by the Department of Justice & Equality concluded that the strategy continues to be of relevance and Government Departments and Agencies should continue to deliver the actions which, collectively, will help to achieve the Strategy's vision of "An Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential, while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life". A Progress Report for 2014 is currently being prepared and is expected to be published in July 2015.

Chapter 4

Older People

NAPinclusion High Level Goal	Progress in 2013-2014
<p>Goal 7: Community Care</p> <p>Continue to increase investment in community care services for older people, including home care packages and enhanced day care services, to support them to live independently in the community for as long as possible.</p>	<p>Key Data 2013 & 2014:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • €185m to provide 10.3m Home Help Hours to 50,000 clients • €130m to provide Home Care Packages (HCP) to 10,870 people at any one time • Additional €10m to support 190 clients with high dependency levels with Intensive Home Care Packages (introduced 2014).
<p>Goal 8: Income Support</p> <p>Maintain a minimum payment rate of €200 per week, in 2007 terms, for all social welfare pensions over the course of this Plan and, if possible, having regard to available resources and the Government's commitment in Towards 2016, to enhance this provision.</p> <p>The overall pension structures and system to provide income supports for pensioners will be reviewed in the light of the forthcoming Green Paper on Pensions, to be finalised at end March 2007. This will review all the pillars of pension provision. (The Green Paper on Pensions was published in 2007 and the National Pensions Framework in 2010)</p>	<p>In Budgets 2013 and 2014, there were no changes to the rates of primary weekly social welfare payments, including increases for qualified adults or qualified children. The payment rate for the state pension (non-contributory) is €219 per week. The relative value has increased by 6% in 2007 terms.</p>

Community Care

The Department of Health reported that the Health Service Executive (HSE) is continuing to progress a range of measures to improve home care provision overall, to standardise services nationally and to promote quality and safety. In 2014 the HSE began a full review of home care services with a view to improving services generally.

Key Data 2013 & 2014:

- €185m to provide 10.3m Home Help Hours to 50,000 clients.
- €130m to provide Home Care Packages (HCP) to 10,870 people at any one time.
- Additional €10m to support 190 clients with high dependency levels with Intensive Home Care Packages (introduced 2014).

Free GP Care

The Government made a commitment to introduce, on a phased basis, GP care without fees within its first term of office. In July 2014, the Government approved the drafting of a Bill to amend the Health Act 1970 to provide a GP service without fees for all persons aged 70 years and over. Drafting of this legislation is nearing completion and the Government's objective is to implement the over-70s phase by mid-2015.

National Positive Ageing Strategy

The National Positive Ageing Strategy was published in April 2013 and provides the blueprint for a whole of Government and whole of society approach to planning for an ageing society. A Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative has been established to implement the research objective of the Strategy and will run from October 2014 to December 2017, with a commitment to funding for a further two years. The Initiative will monitor changes in older people's health and wellbeing linked to the goals and objectives of the Strategy. This will be done primarily through the development of positive ageing indicators to be published every two years.

National Carers' Strategy

The National Carers' Strategy was published in July 2012 and sets the strategic direction for future policies, services and supports provided for carers. The Strategy contains a roadmap for implementation with a suite of actions and associated timelines and identifies the authorities responsible for their implementation. The first Annual Report on the implementation of the Strategy was published in November 2013 and the second [Annual Report](#) in January 2015. The Department of Health and the Health Service Executive met with carers' representatives at the Annual Carers' forum hosted by the Department of Social Protection in February 2015.

Income Support

The Department of Social Protection reported that in Budgets 2013 and 2014, there were no changes to the rates of primary weekly social welfare payments, including increases for qualified adults or qualified children. The payment rate for the state pension (non-contributory) is €219 per week. The relative value has increased by 6% in 2007 terms.

Budget 2015, announced in October 2014, increased the Living Alone Allowance (paid to pensioners and people with disabilities living alone) from €7.70 per week to €9 per week.

In 2013, social transfers including old age and survivors' pensions continued to perform strongly in reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate of older people, falling from 89.3 per cent to 9.2 per cent after all social transfers. This is equivalent to a poverty reduction effect of 89.7 per cent.



Chapter 5

People with Disabilities

NAPinclusion High Level Goal	Progress in 2013-2014
<p>Goal 9: Employment and Participation Increase the employment of people with disabilities who do not have a difficulty in retaining a job. The immediate objective is to have an additional 7,000 of that cohort in employment by 2010. The longer term target is to raise the employment rate of people with disabilities from 37% to 45% by 2016, as measured by the Quarterly National Household Survey. The overall participation rate in education, training and employment will be increased to 50% by 2016. These targets will be reviewed in the light of experience and the availability of better data.</p>	<p>The 2011 census showed 33% of people with disabilities of working age in work, compared to 66% of non-disabled people. In total, there were 112,000 people with disabilities in employment.</p> <p>Since 2013 the National Disability Authority has led on the development of a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy will be published shortly [mid 2015].</p>

Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities

Since 2013 the National Disability Authority has led on the development of a **Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities**. The Strategy will be a cross-government approach that brings together actions by different Departments and State Agencies in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on the employment of people with disabilities. Substantial work on developing the Strategy was undertaken in 2014 with a strategy document drafted and discussed by stakeholders. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy will be published shortly [mid 2015].

Analysis from the Quarterly National Household Survey equality module(2010) indicated that people with a disability had a labour market participation rate of 36%. This compared to a rate of 71% for those without a disability. The 2011 census showed 33% of people with Disabilities of working age in work, compared to 66%of non-disabled people. In total, there were 112,000 people with disabilities in employment.

The **Department of Jobs, Enterprise & Innovation** is currently developing a new website which will include, as committed under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy,

- a. In conjunction with the Department of Social Protection (DSP), provision of links to allow employers to disseminate information on retention of employees who acquire a disability.
- b. Subject to the provision of appropriate links from relevant Departments and Agencies, and in conjunction with DSP and the Department of Health, highlight the supports that are available to facilitate the employment of people with disabilities in the open labour market.

Income Support

The Department of Social Protection provides a wide range of income supports and labour market services for people with disabilities, which facilitates their increased participation in the labour force. These include the Wage Subsidy Scheme, a supported employment programme (EmployAbility) and the Reasonable Accommodation Fund.

The Department of Social Protection also manages the Disability Activation Project, co-funded with the European Social Fund, the aim of which is to increase the capacity and potential of people on disability/illness welfare payments to participate in the labour market, based on a case management approach. The project commenced in late 2012 and is due to end in April 2015.

People on a range of disability and illness income support payments can also participate in Community Employment, which provides participants with an opportunity to engage in useful part-time work within their communities on a temporary, fixed-term basis.

Number of People with disabilities on the D/SP Employment Support Schemes / Programmes at year end:

Year	Wage	Supported Employment	DACT	Community Employment
	Subsidy Scheme			
2014	1,548	2,936	797	2,352
2013	1,159	2,872	1,178	1,817

National Disability Strategy

The **Department of Justice and Equality** has reported that the National Disability Strategy is a whole of Government approach to advancing the social inclusion of people with disabilities. The National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-2015 (NDSIP) was prepared and agreed by the National Disability Strategy Implementation Group (NDSIG) as part of a commitment in the Programme for Government, to progress the National Disability Strategy. It was published in July 2013 and sets out practical measures that will be taken to advance the National Disability Strategy over this period.

The High Level Goals of the Plan are that people with disabilities are free from discrimination; are supported to live the life they choose; live ordinary lives in ordinary places, participating in the life of the community; and are enabled to reach their full potential. Each Goal has specific objectives and actions through which it will be achieved. The Plan, as approved, contains strong oversight mechanisms to ensure delivery of these actions. Progress on the Plan is reviewed by the National Disability Strategy Implementation Group through thematic meetings which deal with specific issues. Such meetings are attended by all relevant bodies to ensure cross-sectoral input and review. All actions in the Plan relevant to the chosen issue are discussed and the progress made is mapped against commitments in the Plan.

Three such thematic meetings have been held to date and focused on the themes of Irish Sign Language, Housing and Employment. Consultations are underway on the follow up to the current NDS Implementation Plan, which expires at end-2015, and on reviewing the approaches to consultation with people with disabilities to ensure that there is real participation by them in monitoring the existing strategy and in development of themes, objectives and actions for the successor measure. It is expected that a new National Disability Inclusion Strategy will be in place as from early 2016.

In the meantime, an Additional Programme of Actions in relation to Autism is being finalised and will be included and developed in the existing NDSIP and in the new Inclusion Strategy.

The **Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport** reported that accessibility improvements to public transport services are being advanced in the context of Transport Access for All, the Transport Sectoral Plan under the Disability Act 2005. The Plan is premised on the principle that through accessibility improvements to the public transport system for people with disabilities access for all people will be improved. Transport Access for All was first published in 2006 and a review was published in 2013.

The **Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht** has been active in relation to activities which will promote greater social inclusion for people with disabilities. In particular, visitor facilities, trails and all new signage in National Parks will, where possible, contain appropriate enhancements for those with disabilities and the Department is working with the Office of Public Works to facilitate similar initiatives at national monuments in State care. This is mirrored by initiatives to improve signage and information panels in our cultural institutions. The art and cultural sector is also working to increase opportunities for artists and audiences with disabilities and is seeking to promote improved access at all venues.

Chapter 6

Communities

NAPinclusion High Level Goal	Progress in 2013-2014
<p><u>Goal 10: Housing</u> Deliver high quality housing for those who cannot afford to meet their own housing needs and to underpin the building of sustainable communities (the remaining text has been omitted as it is outdated). The National Housing Strategy targets the provision of over 110,000 units for social housing purposes up to 2020.</p>	<p>Approx. 23,500 households benefitted in 2013 through the various social housing delivery, improvement and support mechanisms, while approx. 30,000 households benefitted in 2014. The Social Housing Strategy 2020 was published in November 2014.</p>
<p><u>Goal 11: Health</u> Develop 500 primary care teams by 2011 which will improve access to services in the community, with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of holders of medical cards.</p>	<p>At the end of December 2014, there were 420 primary care teams in operation with core team staff amounting to approximately 3,000, comprising nursing, therapy and support staff.</p>
<p><u>Goal 12: Integration of Migrants</u> Develop a strategy aimed at achieving the integration of newcomers in our society (the remaining text has been omitted as it is outdated).</p>	<p>In March 2014, a Cross Departmental Group on Integration, chaired by the Department of Justice & Equality, was established with a view to producing a new updated overall integration strategy.</p>

Social Housing

The Department of Environment, Community & Local Government reported that approx. 23,500 households benefitted in 2013 through the various social housing delivery, improvement and support mechanisms, while approx. 30,000 households benefitted in 2014. These totals include units improved under the Energy Efficiency Retrofitting programme – 13,107 in 2013 and 20,343 in 2014 – some of which were existing housing authority clients and therefore would not represent new households having housing needs met.

The [Social Housing Strategy 2020](#) was published in November 2014 It will:

- Provide 35,000 new social housing units, over a 6 year period, to meet the additional social housing supply requirements as determined by the Housing Agency.
- Support up to 75,000 households through an enhanced private rental sector.
- Reform social housing supports to create a more flexible and responsive system.

The Strategy will be implemented in two phases with an expected 50,000 units provided in the period to 2017. It will be overseen by a high-level group led by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government. The actions will be delivered by a Project Board, a newly established Dublin Social Housing Delivery Taskforce and five dedicated Work-Streams.

Homelessness Policy Statement

The Government published its [Homelessness Policy Statement](#) in February 2013. The Statement emphasises a housing-led approach to homelessness and confirms the Government's objective to end involuntary long-term homelessness (a commitment in the Programme for Government) by the end of 2016.

The Implementation Plan on the State's Response to Homelessness was finalised in May 2014 outlining the Government's approach to this objective setting out 80 actions to secure a ring-fenced supply of accommodation for the homeless and to mobilise the necessary supports by the end of 2016. Progress in implementing the plan is reported to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Service Reform on a quarterly basis.

In December 2014 a 20-point Action Plan to Address Homelessness was formalised by Government to tackle immediate and short-term issues of homelessness including an immediate response to rough sleeping in Dublin. It committed to over €20 million in expenditure and included the immediate provision of 260 additional emergency beds for people sleeping rough in Dublin, a Nite Café to provide a contact point for homeless people who do not want to be placed in emergency accommodation and the provision of transport with support services to bring people sleeping rough to emergency accommodation where they will be cared for.

Housing Assistance Payment

Significant work has been done in 2013 and 2014 to achieve the Department of Social Protection's strategic policy objective of returning rent supplement to its original objective of being a short-term income support payment through the development of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). HAP is being administered by local authorities, under the auspices of the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government.

The Department of Social Protection has been working closely with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in order to progress the legislative, technical and operational elements of the scheme. The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 was enacted on 28th July 2014 and HAP is being introduced on a phased basis.

At the end of 2014 there were almost 500 cases transferred to HAP. There is a target to achieve some 8,400 HAP cases in 2015 as set out in the "**Social Housing Strategy 2020: Support, Supply and Reform**". A HAP homelessness pilot was commenced on 18th December 2014 and Dublin City Council will administer it on behalf of the other Dublin local authorities and will specifically target homeless households.

Warmer Homes – A Strategy for Affordable Energy in Ireland

Published in 2011, this was the first Government strategy aimed at specifically making energy more affordable for low-income households in Ireland. Despite the challenging economic circumstances, considerable progress has been made.

- New area and community based retrofit schemes have been introduced.
- The number of electricity and gas customers facing the disconnection of their energy supplies has fallen considerably and all energy consumers now benefit from a range of statutory protections.
- More than 285,000 homes have received Government assisted energy efficiency upgrades, with around 120,000 of those being delivered free of charge to households in energy poverty.

The Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources reported that three years after the publication of *Warmer Homes*, a comprehensive review of the Affordable Energy Strategy is taking place and will include a public consultation that will seek stakeholder input into what actions should be prioritised in the next iteration of the Government's Affordable Energy Strategy.

The consultation aims to stimulate a broad and informed debate on energy affordability. It seeks input from all interested parties on questions such as how best to measure energy poverty in Ireland, what programmes have been the most effective in mitigating energy poverty and how best to measure success and deliver accountability. It also seeks input on whether liberalised energy markets are delivering the benefits of competition to those consumers in energy poverty or just to the most sophisticated consumers. After the conclusion of the public consultation process it is hoped to publish a new Affordable Energy Strategy by end May 2015.

Health

The Department of Health reported that it has been estimated that up to 95% of people's health and social service needs can be properly met within a primary care setting and Primary Care Teams (PCTs) contribute greatly to enhancing community based health services in these areas. The key objective of the **Primary Care Strategy** is to develop services in the community which will give people direct access to integrated multi-disciplinary teams of general practitioners, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others.

The **Health Service Executive (HSE)** has identified a need for 485 Primary Care Teams to be developed nationally. The development of the teams is a work in progress with enhancements occurring in terms of team membership and organisational delivery over time. At the end of December 2014, there were 420 primary care teams in operation with core team staff amounting to approximately 3,000, comprising nursing, therapy and support staff.

The **Community Healthcare Organisations Report** launched by the HSE on 8th October 2014, sets out plans for a comprehensive reorganisation of health services outside the acute hospital system. The primary focus is to provide the maximum proportion of care to people in the communities where they live

and to achieve joined-up, integrated services. The present 17 Integrated Service Areas will be replaced by nine Community Healthcare Organisations, which will be part of the HSE. Existing resources will be reorganised into 90 Primary Care Networks, each serving about 50,000 of the population. Each network will be headed by an identified, accountable person responsible for care delivery by professionals such as nurses, therapists and social workers so as to meet a wide range of people's needs in a joined-up way. The new structures will have a strong focus on building good linkages with the acute hospital system so that people's care pathways are appropriately planned and their needs met in the right setting.

The development of Primary Care Centres (PCC) to accommodate the HSE's Primary Care Teams and GPs in the one location is a key enabler for the delivery of primary care services. To-date, there are 85 PCCs in operation across the country. There are currently 37 locations where PCCs are under construction or at an advanced planning stage. These are expected to be completed by 2017.

HSE National Traveller Health Advisory Forum

The HSE National Traveller Health Advisory Forum (NTHAF) works in partnership with the Traveller Health Advisory Committee to advance efforts around improving Traveller health. This committee comprises representation by HSE staff, Traveller Health Units and Travellers. Two Working groups – Primary Care and Chronic Conditions – have been established under the ambit of the NTHAF, with agreed terms of reference and associated identified actions.

Examples of initiatives progressed during 2013 – 2014 include:

- Expansion of **Tallaght Roma Integration Project**: Increasing demand for this mobile GP clinic has resulted in expansion of the service from one to two afternoons each week. Planning is presently underway to move the clinic from a mobile bus to a clinic room close to acute hospital services.
 - Individuals using the Roma GP bus are in contact with the cultural mediators and support workers when arriving to use the service as well as when they are leaving the service.
 - The role of the workers is to create a welcoming and warm atmosphere and also to help individuals to understand health related issues where there may be differing cultural understandings.
 - The workers can also provide interpreting to Roma and to Romanian service users.
 - This model of service provision has proved very successful, both in terms of quality service delivery as well as in signposting Roma to other services, such as education, birth registration and social welfare offices.
- Establishment of other clinics: Low threshold clinics for Roma (and other vulnerable service users) are in place in central Dublin and in Limerick. These clinics offer access to GP services to marginalised service users who are not generally able to use mainstream services.

- Support for Roma Outreach work: The HSE has provided funding to a range of projects aimed at supporting Roma to engage with health services, identify general health needs and support access to information and services. Interagency work has also been undertaken. This includes work undertaken with Tusla to prioritise community needs, particularly in respect of Roma children.
- Additionally, a new metric has been introduced from 2015: Number of people who received awareness raising and information on type 2 Diabetes and cardiovascular health, with a target of 20% of the population in each Traveller Health Unit.

Healthy Ireland

[Healthy Ireland - A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025](#) was approved by Government in February 2013. During 2014, implementation of the Framework focused on cross governmental work in order to address the determinants of health across a range of issues relevant to the Healthy Ireland agenda, to identify potential barriers and find solutions, and to exploit opportunities to progress a 'Health in All Policies' approach. Examples in 2014 include working with other departments to implement the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, to embed and integrate health and wellbeing into education and to promote the 'healthy workplaces' agenda.

The National Drugs Strategy 2009-2016

This is a cross cutting area of public policy and service delivery. It is based on a co-ordinated approach across many Government Departments and Agencies in conjunction with the Community and Voluntary sectors. The Department of Health will shortly be commencing work on the development of a new National Drugs Strategy for the period after 2016.

The process will involve a comprehensive consultation with key stakeholders and the public on the current national drugs policy and future priorities. It will also take account of evidence-based research, information and data sources on the extent and nature of problem drug use in Ireland, including drug-related deaths.

Details of the expenditure incurred by Departments and Agencies on the drugs initiative are collated by the Drugs Policy Unit on an annual basis. Cross Departmental expenditure attributed to Drugs Programmes amounted to approximately €240m in 2014.

Integration of Migrants

In March 2014, a Cross Departmental Group on Integration, chaired by the Department of Justice & Equality, was established with a view to producing a new updated overall integration strategy. The mandate of the Cross Departmental Group includes reviewing the activities being undertaken by Government Departments and Agencies directed to promoting the integration of migrants; preparing a Draft Integration

Strategy taking account of the policies and actions already being implemented; and undertaking consultation with key stakeholders. The Cross Departmental Group will also act as a forum for the identification and discussion of any emerging issues in the area of integration.

An inter-departmental Working Group to report to Government on improvements to the protection process, including Direct Provision and supports to asylum seekers was established in October 2014. This arises from the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016 and follows on from a roundtable consultation on the protection process with non-governmental organisations. The terms of reference of the Working Group are essentially concerned with respecting the dignity and improving the quality of life of applicants for international protection while their applications for international protection in the State are under investigation. The Group has reported and its recommendations will receive serious study and consideration by the Government. The Minister for Justice and Equality will be immediately initiating a dialogue with the Departments and Agencies impacted by the 170 recommendations contained in the report.

The Department of Justice & Equality reported that the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration (OPMI) continues to implement the Government commitment in relation to migrant integration, partly through financial assistance to projects promoting integration of immigrants and combating racism. In 2013-2014, funding of €2,510,308 was provided to organisations to promote integration and tolerance. The Office continued to keep migrants and representative groups aware of new resources of interest developed, changing conditions attached to various schemes and material developed specifically for migrants in a range of languages through its website and mailing lists.

Examples of initiatives supported by OPMI include:

- The EPIC Programme (Employment of People from Immigrant Communities) managed by Business in the Community on behalf of OPMI, received funding of €925,372 in 2013-2014 to help vulnerable immigrants access employment or further training. The programme includes training in English for work, interview skills, living and working in Ireland and IT. This expenditure is co-funded at 50% by the European Social Fund.
- Fáilte Isteach is a community project staffed by older volunteers welcoming new migrants through conversational English classes. Every week more than 600 volunteers teach over 2,000 students from 75 countries, collectively offering over a thousand hours of tuition each week. At 60 locations throughout the country Fáilte Isteach works at breaking down the barriers that migrants and communities face by extending the hand of friendship through the practical, welcoming and inclusive manner in which the programme is delivered. In 2013-2014, funding of €226,420 was granted to this project.
- New Communities Partnership received funding of €191,000 to provide an advice and support service to migrants applying for citizenship.
- In 2014, OPMI provided funding of €69,000 to Yellow Flag, an Intercultural Programme for Schools.
- The OPMI also provided financial support to local authorities for local migrant forums. These forums present an opportunity for migrants from different cultures and backgrounds to come together to raise issues that affect migrants on a daily basis. Migrant forums aim to ensure the development of coherent local/regional plans and policies that reflect the social, cultural and economic needs of ethnic minority

groups in the area.

- OPMI continued to administer the European Integration Fund (EIF) and the European Refugee Fund (ERF) and prepared the programme for the newly established Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) which will replace the EIF and ERF.
- In 2013-2014, OPMI resettled 182 refugees, the majority Afghans, Somali and Syrian, in Ireland and co-ordinated their integration into local communities.

Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015

The Department of Education and Skills reported that the strategy continues to be implemented within the constraints imposed by the current economic climate providing resources to students, including migrants, who have an identified educational need.

A comprehensive 'Guide to the Irish Education System' has been developed and uploaded to the Department of Education and Skills website. This is a valuable resource to all parents. Work is ongoing within the department in relation to the collection of relevant data. This data will inform when drafting policy and with issues such as resourcing.

Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government announced that the new programme will be rolled out across the country from 1 April 2015 and a budget of €28 million has been made available for SICAP for the remaining nine months of 2015.

The SICAP underpins this Government's commitment to social inclusion and community development through its aim which is to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, public sector agencies and other stakeholders.

The programme will engage with the most difficult to reach in the most disadvantaged areas, there will be a focus on youth and on interventions to address youth unemployment, for the harder to reach youth. SICAP will also effectively contribute to citizen engagement in line with national policy and it will add value to public services by ensuring it fills important local gaps in provision and by preparing disadvantaged people to take up mainstream services.

In accordance with the Public Spending Code, legal advice, good practice internationally and in order to ensure the optimum delivery of services to clients, SICAP is subject to a public procurement process, which is currently underway. The public procurement process was a competitive process that was open to Local Development Companies, other not-for-profit community groups, commercial firms and national organisations that could provide the services to deliver the new programme.

The SICAP target groups are:

- Children and Families from Disadvantaged Areas
- Lone Parents
- New Communities (including Refugees/Asylum Seekers)
- People living in Disadvantaged Communities
- People with Disabilities
- Roma
- The Unemployed (including those not on the Live Register)
- Travellers
- Young Unemployed People from Disadvantaged areas

Participation and Access to Arts and Culture

The Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht reported that following publication of Inspiring Prospects - Arts Council Strategic Review in June 2014, the Arts Council is now embarking on a process to develop a new strategy for the arts in 2015 which includes approaches around purposeful engagement with members of the public.

In brief the strategic review tasks the Arts Council to:-

- Be the development agency for the arts focussed on the public good.
- Make policies and strategies that are explicit and connected.
- Change its investment strategies and behaviours.
- Be well-informed and evidence-based.
- Strengthen its own capability and that of the arts sector.
- Engage widely and communicate openly.

Under these proposals, the Arts Council will be exploring areas of relevance to the Department of Social Protection as well as the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Library Services

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government strategy 'Opportunities for All' sets out an ambitious five year strategy for the future of the public library service in Ireland and provides a framework for the development of the public library service in Ireland from 2013-2017. In line with national and local government policy, the strategy provides innovative measures to manage existing resources more efficiently in order to continue to develop and deliver a library service which meets the information, learning and cultural needs of individuals and communities and, in so doing, contributes to economic recovery and social and cultural improvement.



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