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Report on the Consultation for the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006–2008

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Ireland

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FOREWORD FROM THE MINISTER

I am strongly of the view that the real experts on the nature, causes and reality of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland are the people actually experiencing poverty and those who work with and support them. That is why this report of the comprehensive consultation process, organised by the Office for Social Inclusion, aimed at informing the development of Ireland's next National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/inclusion), is so timely and important.

EU Member States are due to submit the next round of NAPs/inclusion, covering the two year period from 2006 to 2008, to the EU in September 2006. In September last year, the Office for Social Inclusion embarked on an extensive consultation process with stakeholders, including people who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion and those who work to support them either directly or indirectly, in an effort to capture first hand their knowledge, experience and expertise on the unacceptable reality of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland at the start of the 21st century.

The consultation process commenced with a request for written comments, followed by a series of seven regional consultation seminars. In total, 81 written submissions were received from individuals and a broad range of groups. The regional seminars, attended by over 500 people, sought to gather participants views on the implementation and success of the NAP/inclusion to date in facilitating access to state services and income supports and, in particular, to obtain views and feedback on issues and priorities for different regions.

My thanks to Sinead Riordan of the Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin who prepared this report for the Office for Social Inclusion. This Office merits a special thank you for organising the consultation process. Most of all, I would like to thank those who attended the seminars and who gave of their time, experience and expertise to contribute to the process.

This report will be an important input into the 2006 Social Inclusion Forum which is, itself, a key element of the continuing NAP/inclusion consultation process. It will also be a valuable resource for policy makers and social partners in considering social inclusion issues in the next social partnership agreement, in developing the next NAP/ inclusion and also informing the social inclusion aspects of the next National Development Plan.

Most of all I want the next National Action Plan to be focused and to sharply reflect the experience, views and priorities of Irish society in meeting one of our greatest challenges-that of building not just a prosperous, but a fair society, which values and supports all of its people, and particularly its most vulnerable.

Séamus Brennan T.D.
Minister for Social Affairs
February 2006

PART ONE

Synthesis Report of Written Submissions to the NAP/inclusion Consultation Process

Prepared by:
Sinead Riordan
The Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the consultation process for the development of the Irish National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006–2008 (NAP/inclusion), the Office for Social Inclusion (Department of Social and Family Affairs) invited organisations and individuals to make submissions on the broad objectives and policy measures of the plan. In total, 81 submissions were received and this report summarises the key issues raised in the submissions.

The majority of submissions were made by national networks or national voluntary groups (31), and local, community or regional groups (15). The second largest area of submissions came from public bodies (11), local authorities (6) and from within third-level institutions (5). Nine submissions were from individuals, two from religious bodies and two from trade unions. In terms of the policy areas represented by those making submissions, the largest were as follows:

- General anti-poverty/social inclusion work (20)
- Community development/local partnership/regional development (13)
- Gender (5)
- Disability issues (5)
- Traveller issues (4)
- Lone parents issues (4)
- Housing/homelessness (3).

Key themes and messages

A range of messages and broad themes are visible across submissions and these are presented for consideration below.

General comments

- The process of economic and social exclusion occurs at the intersection of a diverse range of policy areas including public health, social protection, education, employment, the environment, equality and social inclusion
- Poverty and social exclusion are dynamic issues that are constantly shaped by developments in the broader economy and society. Despite Ireland's sustained economic growth since the previous NAP/inclusion, not all social groups or areas have benefited equally from this economic growth

- NAP/inclusion must continue to focus on the redistribution of resources and opportunities towards low-income, vulnerable groups in Irish society

- Groups identified as being 'at risk of' poverty or social exclusion include: children; lone parent households; older people; women; carers; unemployed and older men; people with disabilities; people with mental health illnesses; migrant workers; Travellers; asylum seekers and refugees; the 'working poor' (i.e. minimum wage households); and those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

- Employment and poverty traps remain a feature of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland – reform of the tax and welfare systems and greater investment in social transfers is required to enhance the effectiveness of these policy measures in tackling poverty

- Greater efforts to integrate groups excluded from the labour market are required. Employment targets and initiatives and broad active labour market policies must recognise and respond to the specific needs of vulnerable groups

- Explanatory factors identified for the continued existence of poverty and social exclusion include the pace of economic growth, shortfalls in services and provisions from previous decades, the continuation of structural barriers and factors, and institutional weaknesses, particularly the lack of sanctions for non-implementation of agreed plans and targets.

Strategic approach, implementation and monitoring, and mobilising all actors

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should contain clear objectives and priorities, set specific targets which are possible to monitor, be integrated in playing a central role in national decision making and commit Government to providing the necessary resources to make a substantial impact on eliminating poverty and social exclusion

- Tackling poverty and social exclusion necessarily requires inputs from a wide range of actors. All relevant actors and stakeholders must work together to ensure that the actions and policies of one department or agency do not impact negatively on the actions of another

- Progressing solutions to problems associated with delivering targets and commitments is predicated on achieving more effective levels of co-ordination and interaction between Government Departments and between the relevant local government and community and voluntary actors

- The multiple needs of those experiencing poverty and social exclusion should be responded to through the development of joined-up policy making, inter-agency working, multi-disciplinary responses and joint commissioning of services at both national and community level

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should ensure that its activities are embedded more concretely within local communities to build awareness of the overall process and build a local-national parallel process of learning and stronger co-ordination of local and national policies

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should clearly articulate the contribution of the local and national dimensions, strengthen the contribution of the local and community sectors to the promotion of social inclusion and address regional imbalances

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should strengthen the contribution of community and voluntary sectors to NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 and adequately support and resource their work

- The development of a rights based approach to the delivery of public services was seen as critical. The approach adopted by the Government in the *Disabilities Act 2005*, which proposes a balance between a rights based approach and investment to secure improvements of Standards of Service, was identified as a possible blue-print for future policy response in respect of this broad debate

- A large number of submissions argued for a variety of extended proofing processes to be supported within NAP/inclusion including poverty, rural, equality, mental health, disability, literacy, child, lone parents and gender proofing

- Improved, targeted data collection mechanisms are essential to enable NAP/inclusion to identify and address the needs of specific disadvantaged groups. There is an absence of data in relation to specific groups and policy areas, making measurement of progress in meeting the objectives and targets set under NAP/inclusion very difficult

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should support the development of enhanced monitoring and evaluation processes and ensure the involvement of NAP/inclusion target groups and communities in their formation, implementation and monitoring

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should prioritise the participation of civil society in policymaking – effective and better consultation was a continual theme

- A striking aspect of many of the submissions was the extent to which they identified ways in which the achievement of NAP/inclusion objectives could be accomplished through the full implementation of existing legislation or the implementation of recommendations and findings by previous government task forces/committees in relation to specific policy areas and target groups.

Facilitating access to employment

- Employment-led initiatives are important but are only one element in the range of initiatives necessary to effectively tackle poverty and social exclusion

- A mixture of active and preventive measures must be supported in order to break down barriers to entry; facilitate access to guidance, training and other active labour market measures; ensure that work pays; and, remove unemployment, poverty and inactivity traps

- A wide range of barriers to participation in employment was identified for lone parents, people with disabilities, carers, Travellers, minority ethnic groups and people with mental health illnesses. The exclusion of these groups was seen in part as a reflection of their incapacity to participate in full-time employment – many of these groups engage in 'atypical' employment options (e.g., part-time, flexi, seasonal work) due to caring responsibilities – and a reflection of institutional and structural weaknesses e.g., employment traps

- Tailored intervention programmes are necessary to support the participation of the most disadvantaged groups in active labour market programmes. NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should develop active labour market policies to encourage and facilitate the participation of vulnerable groups in active labour market programmes

- Review the operation of the Work Permit System as it applies to migrant workers and provide additional resources for the state agencies charged with monitoring the implementation and regulation of the scheme

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should prioritise the development of public and private transport options to enable people to access education and training and employment opportunities

- Eligibility for secondary benefits remains a major factor in people's decision-making with regard to participation in employment and active labour market programmes

- Provide incentives for employers to enable workers with low-level qualifications to participate in basic education and further education schemes.

Facilitating access to resources, rights and services

- While acknowledging progress made in achieving NAP/inclusion targets for increases in adult social welfare payments, child benefit and the state contributory pension, a large number of submissions argued that these increases were insufficient to meet needs due to increases in the cost of living and increasing wages and should be further increased

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should establish a guaranteed adequate income standard for all dependent on social welfare payments or in minimum wage employment, which is linked to gross average industrial earnings

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should review the operation of the Carers Allowance scheme including adequacy of payment, eligibility criteria and its interaction with active labour market programmes

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should support public and private service providers to provide improved information on rights and entitlements

- Three key themes emerged regarding access to housing: the provision of appropriate social and affordable housing; the provision of accommodation for Travellers and the homeless; and building sustainable communities

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should have a strong focus on the provision of appropriate social and affordable housing options with particular reference to the need to ensure that housing is accessible, that housing outputs reflect the needs of different types of families and individuals living in rural and urban areas

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should support measures to regulate the inspection of private rented accommodation and enact legislation protecting tenants rights

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should support measures to improve the affordability and accessibility of childcare. The provision of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is viewed as essential to supporting the participation of vulnerable groups in education, training or employment opportunities

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should call for more resources for population, primary health and community health services

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should review the eligibility criteria for retention of the medical card for low-income households

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should support calls for additional resources such as specialist education services, support with the costs of schooling etc, to enable the participation of children from disadvantaged and low-income families, or those with special needs, in primary and secondary level schooling

- Increase Back to Education Initiatives within the community education sector and review operation of the initiative with a view to facilitating greater participation by adults, including workers with low levels of qualifications, low-income workers and adults with limited literacy and numeracy skills, to participate in lifelong learning.

Helping the most vulnerable groups

- The provision of a continuum of supports is essential to support vulnerable groups participation in education/training and employment opportunities and to facilitate access to resources, rights, goods and services. Additional provision of education, health and social services is essential to the achievement of overall NAP/inclusion goals

- The categorisations currently used within the NAP/inclusion process in respect of vulnerable groups must recognise the crosscutting nature of disadvantage and address the multiple disadvantages that any one individual may face

- NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should recognise the following groups as 'vulnerable' – teen parents, drug users, carers, marginalised men, disadvantaged lesbians, gays and bisexuals and immigrants.

Preventing exclusion

- Regional disparities are clearly observable in relation to access to public and private services, particularly for those living outside of major urban centres and in sparsely inhabited areas, and must be addressed

- Groups identified as experiencing ongoing poverty and social exclusion include lone parents, teen parents, drug users, homeless persons, victims of domestic violence, Travellers and refugees and asylum seekers. Migrant workers were considered to be 'at risk' of poverty and social exclusion

- 'New' policy areas identified in which vulnerable groups are at risk of exclusion include access to financial and legal services, food and fuel poverty

- The development of an integrated immigration strategy was seen as necessary to facilitate the integration of new Irish communities.

Structure of report

Section 1 provides an Introduction to the report and **Section 2** overviews the organisations and individuals who responded to the call for submissions in respect of the types of organisations, the policy areas and communities represented. **Section 3** provides a discussion on the general comments and themes emerging from submissions in relation to the overall NAP/inclusion process including its institutional and structural mechanisms. Comments on progress in relation to tackling poverty and social exclusion were implicit in a large number of submissions and **Section 4** discusses these, while **Section 5** discusses comments in relation to the broad strategic approach guiding NAP/inclusion. Most submissions identified specific policy issues, which they believed required additional attention within NAP/inclusion 2006–2008, as well as a range of suggested policy measures – including suggestions for new policies and programmes and modifications to existing policies/programmes – relevant to the Plan's five broad objectives and these are outlined in detail in **Section 6**.

SECTION ONE
Introduction

INTRODUCTION

As part of the consultation process for the development of the Irish National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006–2008 (NAP/inclusion), organisations and individuals were invited by the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) to make written submissions on the contents of the plan. In total, 81 submissions (see Appendix 1 for full listing) were received and this report summarises the key issues raised in those submissions. A number of submissions followed the OSI's suggested format (as per Appendix 2) while others did not. Submissions ranged from brief one or two page submissions to comprehensive 16-30 page submissions from a number of voluntary and statutory agencies. Some organisations submitted their organisation's Pre-Budget 2006 Submission while others submitted reports made for other processes but which were felt to be of relevance to the overall NAP/inclusion process.

SECTION TWO

Status of people making submissions

A total of **81** written submissions were received in response to the Office for Social Inclusion's call for submissions on the preparation of Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2006–2008. Submissions were broken down by the type of organisation making the submission and by the organisation's main policy interest. The majority of submissions from individuals dealt with a specific aspect of policy or policy area.

With regard to the type of organisations making submissions, the majority of submissions were made by national networks or national voluntary groups (31), and local, community or regional groups (15). The second largest area of submissions came from public bodies (11), local authorities (6) and from within third-level institutions (5). Nine submissions were from individuals, two from religious bodies and two from trade unions. Thus, the submissions came overwhelmingly from the community and voluntary sector and the public sector.

In terms of the broad policy areas represented, the largest were as follows:

- General anti-poverty/social inclusion work (20)
- Community development/local partnership/regional development (13)
- Gender (5)
- Disability (5)
- Travellers (4)
- Lone parents (4)
- Housing/Homelessness (3).

Specific submissions were received from groups or individuals concerned with policy issues relevant to particular groups such as older people, carers, adult education, returned emigrants, lesbians, gays and bisexuals, rural poverty and social exclusion, children and young people and financial exclusion. While a large number of submissions touched upon the area of immigration, minority ethnic groups and racism, many did so as part of their wider discussion on anti-poverty/social inclusion work.

Nearly two-thirds of submissions came from Dublin-based organisations but the majority of these were national representative organisations with a national remit or focus in their policy work. Just less than one-fifth of submissions were received from groups and/or individuals from Leinster (outside of Dublin) and Munster but only three were received from groups based in Connaught. No submissions were received from outside of Ireland.

In summary, the received submissions reflect for the most part the views of the broad range of stakeholders, practitioners, policymakers and communities across Ireland who work with and/or have first hand experience of poverty and social exclusion and the submissions are informed by this experience and knowledge.

SECTION THREE

General comments

Those who responded welcomed the invitation to contribute to the development of NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 viewing it as an opportunity to discuss progress to-date, identify specific policy issues requiring further attention including gaps in the policy framework, explore different approaches and identify and set down the detail necessary to ensure the delivery of established targets or to indicate where such detail should be considered and acted upon.

The general tone of the submissions was constructive and supportive of the overall NAP/inclusion process. Submissions welcomed the continued focus on social exclusion and strongly favoured its continued centrality to Irish anti-poverty policy. The importance of tackling the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and the need to ensure a continued focus on specific groups suffering from multiple disadvantages was also stressed. A number of submissions noted that debates on social inclusion are increasingly converging with debates on integration and the participation of minority groups in society.

While submissions generally did not provide an in-depth examination or critique of the overall NAP/inclusion process, comments on progress in relation to tackling poverty and social exclusion were implicit in a large number of submissions. There was a broad consensus within submissions regarding the key strategic approach underpinning the plan. It was argued that NAP/inclusion should:

- Contain clear objectives and priorities
- Set specific targets which are possible to monitor
- Play a central role in national decision making
- Commit Government to providing the necessary resources to make a substantial impact on eliminating poverty and social exclusion.

Some submissions were critical of the institutional arrangements supporting NAP/inclusion, particularly the monitoring and evaluation processes and the slow development of complementary actions and inputs at national and local levels to enable the delivery and implementation of NAP/inclusion objectives. Nevertheless, submissions acknowledged the significant recent investment in analysis and institutional approaches to tackling specific problems, namely the increased emphasis on analysis of factors and trends in poverty and exclusion, the establishment of systematic approaches to develop and implement responses through Government commitments and strategies, and the building of institutional support mechanisms at national and local level. However, a number of submissions argued that the linkages between the national, regional and local levels required additional focus, referring to and concurring with the findings of the EU Commission's *Joint Report on Social Inclusion* (2004) in relation to the need to:

- Embed NAP/inclusion activities more concretely within local communities to build awareness of the overall process
- More clearly articulate the contribution of the local and national dimensions

- Strengthen the contribution of the local and community sectors to the promotion of social inclusion
- Address regional imbalances.

Submissions frequently commented on the need to commit adequate resources to implement targets and commitments and to support the work of local and community anti-poverty organisations.

A range of critical comments were made about particular aspects of policy. Most submissions identified specific policy issues, which they believed required additional attention within NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 and these are addressed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

SECTION FOUR

Progress

Comments on progress in relation to tackling poverty and social exclusion were implicit in a large number of submissions. It was widely agreed that the implementation of the NAP/inclusion 2003–2005 led to some progress in relation to internal co-ordination across national Government in terms of reporting and the development of a more consistent system of reporting on actions and progress in meeting targets. However, one submission questioned the extent to which NAP/inclusion is effectively influencing major government spending priorities or policy planning (Barnardos).

It was acknowledged that substantial achievements have been made in establishing the relevant institutional structures to support the NAP/inclusion including a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development, a Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, and the establishment of the Office for Social Inclusion, within the Department of Social and Family Affairs, with responsibility for the overall co-ordination and implementation of NAP/inclusion. However, one submission argued that the progress made towards facilitating *analysis* and establishing developmental and monitoring systems has not been reflected in the commitment of adequate resources or in a mobilisation of the system to design innovative systems or approaches to implement targets or commitments (ICTU).

A number of submissions provided discussion and comment on the general economic and social context within which NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 is being designed. A frequent comment related to the perceived juxtaposition between the levels of high economic growth enjoyed by Ireland in recent years and evidence suggesting the continued existence of inequality and relative poverty in society. Regional disparities were identified in a number of submissions (3) with for example, large income inequalities noted between various socio-economic groups and spatially across the country. Such disparities were observed in relation to access to public and private services, with those living outside of major urban centres and particularly in sparsely inhabited areas, frequently lacking access to a full range of services (Irish Rural Link; Border, Midland & Western Regional Assembly; Roscommon County Council). A number of submissions identified specific factors, which they argued contributed to the continued existence of poverty in Ireland, such as:

- The pace of economic growth
- Shortfalls in services and provisions from previous decades
- Continuation of structural barriers and factors
- Institutional weaknesses, particularly the lack of sanctions for non-implementation for agreed plans and targets.

Submissions generally acknowledged the real progress made in tackling long-term unemployment, but noted that those who now experienced unemployment or exclusion from the labour force are amongst the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups. While current policy is based on the premise that the best route out of poverty is through employment, submissions referenced the growth in the 'working poor', continued existence of employment traps and exclusion of some groups from the labour

force, as evidence that this approach alone could not successfully tackle social exclusion and poverty. In general, it was felt that renewed attention must be made to reducing the number of jobless households and many submissions called for further reform of State supports to ensure the elimination of welfare to work disincentives. Exclusion from the labour force was seen as a particular issue for lone parents, older people, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and Travellers – submissions continually stressed the need to develop specific and targeted strategies to increase the engagement of these groups.

Submissions welcomed the increased expenditure on social benefits while arguing that Ireland's social expenditure remains low by European Union averages. Some submissions drew on the findings of the 2005 EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions to argue that the impact of the State's investment in analysis and institutional approaches to tackling poverty and social exclusion was inadequate. There were continual calls for a greater commitment and dedication of resources to meeting existing targets in the delivery of public services, particularly housing and educational services. Greater provision of affordable, accessible and high quality childcare and eldercare, as well as education and health services, were seen as essential to the achievement of the NAP/inclusion's overall goals.

4.1. Strategic approach

A significant number of submissions commented on elements of the strategic approach followed in NAP/inclusion. It was widely agreed that the Plan's actions and strategic approach must incorporate a number of different but interconnected levels including:

- Partnerships between statutory, non-governmental and representative organisations – the promotion of social inclusion necessarily requires inputs from a wide range of actors and the development and promotion of integrated policies
- The mobilisation of all relevant bodies in fighting poverty and social exclusion to ensure that the actions and policies of one department or agency do not impact negatively on the actions of another and to create synergies between existing local level initiatives
- Policies, which seek to counter social exclusion, must be participative, promote active citizenship and enhance democracy and community participation
- A one-size fits all approach to policymaking fails to meet the needs of certain groups in society
- The need to strengthen the national-local/community dimension of NAP/inclusion. NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 should seek to build a local-national parallel process of learning and stronger co-ordination of local and national policies, building upon the developments and successes of initiatives such as

the Local Government Anti-Poverty Networks and the pilot Local Authority Social Inclusion Units, and the wide range of actors at local level.

A substantial number of submissions (12) commented on the lack of progress in relation to the development of a rights-based approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion. A small number of submissions (5) argued that all policy and practice should have a social inclusion dimension and that penalties should be introduced for state agencies and departments whose practice fail to implement social inclusion and equality policies. One submission called for guarantees within NAP/inclusion regarding the continued and autonomous existence of statutory equality-focused institutions and for increased representation of voluntary and equality-focused organisations within these. It also called for an expansion in the range of groups covered by equality legislation to include social class, trade union membership and ex-prisoners in line with previous recommendations by The Equality Authority (Irish Traveller Movement).

Submissions frequently commented on the importance of NAP/inclusion national processes and frameworks linking more closely with the relevant community and local aspects of its measures. ADM's submission cited the EU's *Joint Report on Social Inclusion* (2004) and argued for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 to respond to its findings in respect of:

- The difficulties in progressing integrated locally based strategies, arising from the national centralised model of policy formulation and implementation
- The need to strengthen areas of regional imbalance
- The need to strengthen social inclusion co-ordination mechanisms at local and regional level in order to ensure an integrated approach that will enable the successful delivery and implementation of the NAP/inclusion objectives.

The submission from REHAB argued that the current approach to combating social exclusion must change in respect of:

- The current policy approaches of relevant Government departments
- The way in which people who differ from societal norms are responded to by current systems of service provision
- The attitudes and ethos of local communities
- The physical and procedural environments
- The quality of services
- The degree of accessible advice, guidance and advocacy available.

4.2 Data

Enhanced, targeted data collection was viewed as essential to enabling NAP/inclusion to identify and address the needs of specific disadvantaged groups. A number of submissions (21) noted that the absence of data on specific groups and policy areas rendered measurement of progress in meeting the objectives and targets set under NAP/inclusion 2003–2005 particularly difficult. It was clear that target setting, monitoring and data collection mechanisms must continue to form an essential element of future NAP/inclusion strategies.

A number of submissions (19) identified specific research and data deficits, which they argued must be addressed if anti-poverty and social exclusion policy and practice was to be adequately informed (see Section 6.5.1).

4.3 Strengths and weaknesses of current provision and approach

Progress in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups was generally felt to be uneven. Particular groups were continually identified as being 'at risk of' poverty or continuing to experience consistent poverty, including:

- Children
- Lone parent households
- Older people
- Women especially migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees, Traveller women, women in the home
- Carers
- Unemployed and older men
- People with disabilities
- Migrant workers
- Asylum seekers and refugees
- Working poor/minimum wage households
- Travellers
- People with mental health illnesses
- Homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Employment

Facilitating access to employment for jobseekers, preventing unemployment and ensuring that those who become unemployed remain closely attached to the labour market and increase their employability are essential to tackling poverty and social exclusion. Submissions argued that to achieve this objective a mixture of active and preventive measures must be supported in order to: break down barriers to entry; facilitate access to guidance, training and other active labour market measures; ensure that work pays; and, remove unemployment, poverty and inactivity traps. While employment opportunities and labour force participation in Ireland was agreed to have dramatically improved in recent years (as evidenced by the decline in long-term unemployment), the continued exclusion of particular groups from the labour force was of concern. Submissions argued for special attention to promoting the inclusion of disadvantaged people in the labour market particularly lone parents, people with disabilities, Travellers, minority ethnic groups and young people. Some submissions noted that the exclusion of these groups was in part a reflection of their incapacity to participate in full-time employment – many of these groups were engaged in 'atypical' employment options (e.g., part-time, flexi, seasonal work) due to caring responsibilities – but it also reflected the failure to fully resolve 'welfare to work' and employment traps. Access to childcare and other such support services (including adequate financial supports) were seen as essential to facilitate and encourage participation in active labour market programmes.

Housing

Three key themes emerged from the submissions:

- The provision of appropriate social and affordable housing
- The provision of accommodation for Travellers and the homeless
- Building sustainable communities.

A particular focus of attention was social housing, the lack of progress in achieving the agreed building targets for social and affordable housing units and the implementation of Part V of the *Social Housing Act*. A number of submissions (13) commented on the low volume of output and lack of success in achieving social housing outputs and called for social housing programmes to be accelerated. A number of submissions (17) called for the provision of accessible and adaptable social and affordable and housing outputs to be prioritised.

Three submissions provided a detailed assessment of progress to-date in tackling homelessness (the individual submissions of Simon Communities of Ireland and the Society of St Vincent de Paul and a Joint Submission by Focus Ireland, Irish Traveller Movement, Simon Communities of Ireland, Society of St Vincent de Paul and Threshold) highlighting both the positive – the substantial drop in levels of rough sleeping in major urban areas, improvements in the planning and delivery of homeless services (partly driven by the 2000 introduction of the Homeless Strategy) – and the negative – differing interpretations followed by local authorities in defining homelessness, low levels of

housing allocations for single homeless persons, the dearth of accommodation progression opportunities for those seeking to move from emergency accommodation into more long-term provision, barriers to accessing private rented accommodation, and the particular barriers faced by the Traveller community in accessing appropriate accommodation. The aforementioned Joint Submission focused specifically on housing, homelessness and accommodation arguing that for some, access to quality housing is denied, while for others provision is highly compromised. To address these difficulties, the right to housing should be clearly stated as part of the over-arching NAP/inclusion objective to 'facilitate access to resources, rights, goods and services' and that the legally binding housing right stated in EU and other international law instruments must become central to Irish policy commitments to end homelessness and to meet the needs housing and accommodation needs of low-income and socially excluded groups.

Travellers' issues

Three submissions provided a detailed assessment of progress in relation to Traveller's issues (Pavee Point, Irish Traveller Movement, Exchange House) with a particular focus on implementation failures in relation to agreed national strategies for Traveller accommodation, health and education, and the development of employment options for Travellers. Concern was expressed with regard to 'the piecemeal nature' of developments in poverty and social exclusion amongst Travellers and the perceived lack of commitment to implementing the recommendations generated by various Taskforces and Committees on Travellers issues. A number (4) of local authority submissions discussed progress in relation to the implementation of Traveller Accommodation Plans, acknowledging the importance of prioritising their implementation. Some positive measures were identified and welcomed, particularly progress in relation to the age appropriate placement of Traveller children in primary schools and the Traveller Primary Health programmes (Community Development Department, HSE Wexford Area).

Education

The provision of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) was a strong theme across submissions. The lack of accessible, affordable, high quality childcare, including sessional care, was frequently identified, as was the need for NAP/inclusion to support measures to improve the affordability and accessibility of childcare. ECCE was seen as an essential support to enable the participation of disadvantaged groups in education, training or employment opportunities.

While some progress in achieving early school leaving targets was noted, it was also observed that early school leaving remains particularly high amongst certain disadvantaged groups (especially young males). Additional supports such as specialist education services, support with the costs of schooling etc, were identified as vital to enabling the participation of children from disadvantaged and low-income families, or those with special needs, in primary and secondary level schooling. A number of submissions welcomed the Department of Education and Science's *Delivering Quality of Opportunity in Schools* Action Plan (Barnardos, South Dublin County Council Social Inclusion Unit, SvDP, Ringsend Action Project Ltd) and called for its actions to be linked with the Special Initiative to assist vulnerable children and their families. Other submissions (People with Disabilities in Ireland; Irish Wheelchair Association; REHAB)

strongly stressed the need for additional resources and expansion of existing specialist measures to support the participation of people with disabilities undertaking education and training courses in mainstream settings. Participation in further training and education whether second chance education, literacy skills training for low skilled workers or third level education for lone parents emerged as a strong theme.

Progress in achieving income support policy and related targets

Many submissions commented on progress towards the achievement of income support targets as identified in NAP/inclusion 2003–2005, acknowledging the increases in social welfare payments and progress in reconciling the social welfare and tax systems to support participation in work and the reconciliation of work and family life. While acknowledging progress made in achieving NAP/inclusion targets for increases in adult social welfare payments, child benefit and the state contributory pension, a large number of submissions (25) argued that these increases were insufficient to meet needs due to increases in the cost of living and increasing wages and should be further increased. A number of submissions (14) called for the indexation of welfare payments to a percentage of the gross average industrial earnings. Specific comments on progress (24) towards facilitating employment focused on the need to eliminate 'welfare to work' traps which were felt to hinder access to employment for particular vulnerable groups. Submissions called for the reform of the tax and welfare systems to make work pay and to enable a review of the eligibility criteria and thresholds for secondary benefits.

Gender

One submission (Women's Education and Research Centre) argued that the emphasis within the present National Action Plan on employment as the principal route out of poverty lacked an underlying gender analysis. This it argued led to the needs of marginalised women becoming 'hidden' within NAP/inclusion policy debates. It acknowledged however, that certain initiatives have had significant benefits for women e.g., increased levels of child income support, additional maternity and adoptive leave entitlements and legislation to provide for carer's leave entitlement.

SECTION FIVE

Strategic approach, objectives and targets

The majority of submissions broadly accepted the existing multi-dimensional, **strategic approach** set out in NAP/inclusion 2003–2005. This strategic approach is centred on:

- Sustaining growth and employment
- Providing levels of income support sufficient to sustain dignity and avoid poverty
- Facilitating participation in employment
- Addressing the needs of groups at high risk of poverty
- Providing high quality public services to all
- Tackling the causes of inter-generational poverty
- Supporting disadvantaged communities.

In their reflections on the underpinning framework and strategic approach for NAP/inclusion a number of submissions referenced the arguments and findings of the NESC report, *The Developmental Welfare State* (2005), arguing that its conceptual approach and framework should be considered in discussions on NAP/inclusion's overall approach and objectives.[1]

There was general support for the current NAP/inclusion strategic approach, which recognises the **multiple**, **cross-cutting needs** of those experiencing poverty or social exclusion. There was a broad consensus that multiple needs can best be responded to through the development of joined-up policy making, inter-agency working, multi-disciplinary responses and joint commissioning of services at both national and community level. There was widespread agreement with the approach to identifying and targeting specific **vulnerable groups** within NAP/inclusion targets and objectives, although some submissions argued that the categorisations currently used fail to recognise the crosscutting nature of disadvantage or address the multiple disadvantages that any one individual may face. A number of submissions (7) proposed additional groups for identification as 'vulnerable groups' within NAP/inclusion. Other submissions (6) emphasised the need for a continued focus on the overlapping dimensions of gender and poverty and the setting of targets for the achievement of specific gender equality objectives within the new plan.

Thirteen submissions argued for the adoption of a **rights-based approach** to social inclusion policy and the delivery of public services, with one (REHAB) argued for the adoption of 'diversity' as the underpinning basis for inclusion. One submission (ICTU) noted the approach adopted by the Government in the *Disabilities Act 2005* (proposing a balance between a rights based approach and investment to secure improvements of

[1] This report identified three central strands to the future of government support and facilitation of individuals and communities: (i) provision of adequate income measures, (ii) accessibility of quality public services, and (iii) the development of innovative ways to support economic and social participation of all.

Standards of Service) offered a possible blueprint for policy response in developing a rights-based approach. A small number of submissions argued for the recognition of social, economic and cultural rights (CORI, Women's Human Rights Alliance) and/or the enumeration of children's rights and a commitment to the protection of family life (Treoir) within the Irish Constitution. Others (5) called for the inclusion of a human rights dimension within NAP/inclusion while CORI's submission outlined a number of principles, which it felt that policy and practice should adhere to.

Many submissions discussed elements of the NAP/inclusion **evaluation and monitoring process**. It was broadly felt that more attention must be given to this to ensure the overall transparency and accountability of NAP/inclusion. Two submissions argued that the preparation of the new National Development Plan must focus on investment in human capital as well as physical infrastructure, must include social inclusion measures and ensure sustainable economic growth (ICTU, Combat Poverty). The need for future National Action Plans to anticipate, identify and respond to emerging challenges arising from globalisation and increased migration was also referenced.

A key theme within submissions was the need to strengthen **the role of the community and voluntary sector** within NAP/inclusion and to strengthen the local-national framework. ICTU called for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 to follow the approach used in the development of the *Disability Act* 2005. There was widespread agreement amongst respondents as to the importance of **public consultation**, particularly the involvement of local communities, in the development of policy. Effective and better consultation was identified as a key priority for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008.

5.1 National Action Plan objectives

In general, submissions agreed with the broad thrust of the principal NAP/inclusion objectives. However, a number of submissions did seek (whether explicitly or implicitly) the inclusion of new objectives or a change in focus within existing objectives.
For example, in their discussion on the objective of 'facilitating employment', many submissions argued that the growth in the 'working poor' demonstrated that employment-led initiatives to tackling poverty and social exclusion are not sufficient in themselves and called for new measures to address the difficulties facing these groups. Others called for NAP/inclusion to recognise and support atypical forms of employment (e.g., the work of carers). An overall message from the submissions was the importance for NAP/inclusion objectives and related targets and actions to respond to the needs of specific vulnerable groups.

5.2 Additional targets

A number of submissions proposed additional targets, the most common of which were a reduction in income poverty and the provision of adequate income supports. A large number (26) of submissions identified specific income adequacy targets. Many submissions identified specific actions to address the situation of vulnerable groups at risk of poverty. Proposals typically suggested revisions to existing targets in the sectoral areas of health, education, housing and employment. A number of submissions (14) argued for greater cross-referencing and linkages between the actions and indicators outlined in NAP/inclusion and other national strategies in order to successfully tackle poverty and social exclusion.

5.3 Overview of general comments regarding NAP/inclusion key objectives

The following section provides a short discussion and overview of the broad content of comments contained with submission in relation to the five key, broad objectives for the National Action Plan, including suggestions for new targets and policy priorities for the period from 2006 to 2008. A more detailed discussion of suggestions in relation to specific modifications to existing policy measures and programmes and proposals for new policies or programmes in respect of each objective is provided in Section 6.

5.3.1 Objective 1 – Facilitating employment

There was broad agreement that facilitating access to employment for job seekers, preventing unemployment and ensuring that those who were unemployed or detached from the labour market were given opportunities to access training and education are essential to increasing participation and combating social exclusion. Nevertheless, a significant number (22) of submissions referenced the growth in the 'working poor' that is, the growth in households in employment who are living in 'consistent' poverty. Furthermore, submissions (3) referred to the importance of ensuring that this strategic approach prioritised the development of sustainable employment opportunities and did not result in pressure to accept unsuitable employment.

For those living in poverty, social transfers account for the vast majority of their total income – enabling vulnerable groups to become active participants in the labour market was strongly linked with the creation of a supportive and flexible social welfare system. A number of submissions (19) prioritised 'making work pay' amid calls for a review of barriers to participation in employment.

Suggestions in relation to **new targets** included:

- A reduction in the percentage of working age population in workless households
- Increase in the percentage of vulnerable groups moving into higher paid jobs
- Increase in the minimum wage
- Increase in the percentage of vulnerable groups progressing from active labour market schemes (such as Community Employment) into skills based training and education and employment.

Policy priorities for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008

- Eliminate employment and poverty traps
- Review the impact of indirect taxes on poverty levels
- Reform of tax and welfare systems to ensure that work pays e.g., increase income threshold for retention of secondary benefits, recognise and allow for atypical forms of employment
- Provision of culturally appropriate, flexible active labour market policies and programmes to facilitate the entry of disadvantaged groups into active labour market schemes
- Develop a continuum of supports to enable vulnerable groups participate in education/employment
- Improved monitoring of participation of vulnerable groups in active labour market programmes
- Review the operation of the Work Permit System as it pertains to migrant workers
- Enhanced family friendly workplace measures
- Youth unemployment and long-term unemployment amongst vulnerable groups
- Progression and up-skilling of low-income with low qualification levels
- Provision of more part-time training and education options.

5.3.2 Objective 2 – Facilitating access to rights, resources, goods and services

Access to public services is accepted as critical to the tackling of poverty and social exclusion. Many (13) submissions commented on the lack of progress in relation to the development of a rights based approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion, including access to services. A significant issue identified was the link between general welfare dependency and income poverty, reflecting a widening gap between those in employment and social welfare dependents. Suggestions in relation to **new targets** included:

Income targets

- Link lowest social welfare rate to a minimum of 30% of average industrial earnings
- Eliminate income poverty for women
- Increase income threshold for retention of secondary benefits by a minimum of 30%
- Reduce consistent poverty levels amongst children and one parent families to 2%
- Increase the Child Dependent Allowance to €35 by 2007
- Extend eligibility for the medical card to all children covered by proposed anti-child poverty targeted supports
- Increase the Living Alone allowance to €11 per week and the Aged 80 Allowance to a minimum of €10 per week for elderly persons
- Increase the qualified adult allowance rates to equal the full non-contributory old age pension by 2007
- Increase the homemakers allowance to the equivalent of the non-contributory old age pension by 2008.

Education targets

- Adjust national target on reduction of early school leaving to less than 10% by 2010; reduction in number of children not transferring to secondary school; lower student teacher ratio to 20:1
- Establish adult literacy targets as part of NAP/inclusion targets.

Housing targets

- Provide 200,000 social and affordable housing units by 2012
- Ensure that 10% of all social and affordable housing units available under Part V, *Planning and Development Act 2000*, and voluntary housing organisations units are wheelchair accessible and allocated to people with disabilities
- Provide 1.7 domestic violence refuge spaces per 100,000 head of population.

Childcare targets

- Provide a 50% subsidy of childcare costs for all parents, 75% subsidy for those on low-incomes and 100% subsidy for those on minimum wage earnings.

E-inclusion/Tackling the Digital Divide

- Increase the broadband penetration rate to the OECD average of 10% by 2007.

Policy priorities for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008

- Establish a rights-based approach to accessing resources, services, rights and goods
- Establish a guaranteed adequate income standard linked to gross average industrial earnings for all dependent on social welfare payments or in minimum wage employment
- Provide a secondary tier of child income support for low income families
- Continued progress towards the individualisation of the tax and welfare systems
- Pension provision for both the employed and unemployed
- Review the implementation of the Habitual Residency Condition.

Housing

- Achieve the social housing build targets set in NAP/inclusion 2003–2005 and consider adopting the NESC-identified social housing output targets within NAP/inclusion and the new National Development Plan
- Improve the quality and increase production of new housing units in terms of lifetime adaptability and accessibility to meet the needs of vulnerable groups
- Local authorities and other relevant agencies/departments to fulfil their obligations in respect of the provision of accommodation for vulnerable groups particularly Travellers, homeless, rural poor, people with disabilities.

Education

- Prioritise improvements in educational attainment levels among disadvantaged groups
- Greater provision of adult education, second-chance education, basic literacy and numeracy skills training
- Continued focus on tackling early school leaving
- Focus on up-skilling workers with low-level qualifications.

Health

- Enhanced primary and community care services
- Review the eligibility criteria for the medical card scheme and increase the number covered by the scheme
- Grant undocumented migrant workers access to basic rights and services in Ireland.

Childcare and eldercare

- Provide affordable, community-based, flexible and high quality childcare and eldercare services to enable participation in employment and educational opportunities
- Provide respite care for carers.

5.3.3 Objective 3 – Preventing exclusion

Poverty and social exclusion are dynamic issues that are constantly shaped by developments in the broader economy and society. The need for a greater focus on the regional dimensions of poverty and social exclusion was referred to in a number of submissions (3). Some submissions identified 'new' policy areas in which vulnerable groups were at risk of exclusion including access to financial and legal services (6) and food and fuel poverty (12). It was widely recognised that racism and discrimination must be addressed in Irish society.

Policy priorities for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008

- Poverty proof government policies and initiatives
- Identify additional 'vulnerable' groups and develop targets and actions to address their needs within the principal NAP/inclusion objectives and actions
- Develop a strategic policy framework to address new poverty concepts including food poverty, fuel poverty and financial exclusion

- Enhanced support for programmes promoting inclusion, participation and peace-building as part of anti-poverty policy.

Income

- Establish targets to reduce regional income differentials and poverty risk.

Immigration and racism

- Develop an integration strategy for new Irish communities
- Develop a transparent immigration policy
- Prioritise the implementation of the National Action Plan Against Racism.

Housing

- Increased provision of accessible and adaptable social and affordable housing.

Legal changes

- Incorporate economic, social and cultural rights within the Irish Constitution.

5.3.4 Objective 4 – Helping the most vulnerable groups

Twelve submissions identified additional groups for identification within the NAP/inclusion as vulnerable groups. Some called for the development of specific targeted interventions within NAP/inclusion to address the needs of Travellers, minority ethnic groups, migrants and people with disabilities. One submission called for children's issues to be mainstreamed within government anti-poverty policies (Combat Poverty). The gender mainstreaming of government policies and initiatives was a key objective in a number of submissions (6).

Policy priorities for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008

- Identify lone parents, teen parents, disadvantaged lesbians, gays and bisexuals, carers, migrants, young and marginalised men, children, drug users and the homeless as 'vulnerable groups'
- Focus on gender, the needs of minority ethnic groups, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, lone parents, teen parents, homeless, marginalised men, victims of domestic violence, drug users, carers, lesbians, gays and bisexuals, elderly people, people with mental health illnesses, adults with low literacy and numeracy skills, prisoners and ex-prisoners, and children.

5.3.5 Objective 5 – Mobilising all actors

Tackling poverty is a societal issue and the contribution of all social actors is required. Submissions emphasised the importance of the involvement of a range of stakeholders – central government departments and agencies, local government, non-governmental organisations and the community and voluntary sector – in anti-poverty and social exclusion policymaking and implementation. There was widespread agreement (18) that

the design, implementation and monitoring of anti-poverty policies must be participative and have a strong local/community dimension. Many submissions (17) called for further action to address data deficits and enhanced poverty proofing of policies and actions.

Suggestions in relation to **new targets** included:

- Ring-fence €1.5 million in 2006 and €2 million in 2007 for the establishment of strategies and mechanisms to promote women's access to political decision-making including the establishment and maintenance of a women's political caucus
- Ring fence €2 million in 2006 and €2.5 million in 2007 for the establishment of supports for community-based women's organisations.

Policy priorities for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008

- Continued focus on developing internal co-ordination across government departments and other relevant state agencies and bodies in relation to the design, implementation and monitoring of cross-cutting policies and measures
- Strengthen links between the local, regional and national structures supporting NAP/inclusion
- Clarification regarding the local and community dimension of NAP/inclusion
- Effective and better consultation with relevant stakeholders
- Mobilisation of resources to support and enhance the effective participation of civil society in anti-poverty processes
- Enhanced data strategy and data collection mechanism: collection of systematic data on vulnerable groups to enable the development, implementation and monitoring of social inclusion policies to meet their needs
- Enhanced links between NAP/inclusion and relevant national policies and strategies
- Mainstream the Local Authority Social Inclusion Unit pilot project.

SECTION SIX

Policy measures

The bulk of submissions dealt with poverty measures and provided suggestions for modifications and improvements to existing policy measures and proposals for new or additional policies and programmes to better achieve the overall NAP/inclusion objectives. Given the quantity of submissions in this area, it is only possible to highlight the main areas raised and examples of the policy measures proposed.

6.1 Objective 1 – Facilitating participation in employment

Proposed amendments to policy measures generally centred on proposals to (a) address disincentives arising from the operation of the social welfare and taxation systems and (b) the removal of barriers to participation in education and employment.

Proposals included modifications to existing measures and schemes as well as new proposals to support those *not in* employment and those *in* employment. The discussion is structured to reflect these different approaches. Proposals included the expansion or modification of existing initiatives, creation of entirely new initiatives, calls for further legislation or regulation and the implementation of existing legislative provisions.

6.1.1 Improvements and modifications to existing policy measures

The bulk of the proposals related to the removal of barriers seen to inhibit participation of vulnerable groups in active labour market programmes. Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to those **not in employment** were:

- Address the lack of affordable, high quality, accessible childcare and eldercare provision (23)
- Address disincentives arising from the operation of social welfare and taxation systems in order to support participation in employment, particularly in relation to the retention of secondary benefits (19)
- Greater public and private transport e.g., expansion of rural transport schemes, provide a voucher system for people with disabilities to enable them to avail of private transport use (16)
- Enable social welfare, training and employment schemes to accommodate part-time and atypical work-life patterns (11)
- Allow recipients of the Carers Allowance to participate in active labour market schemes and extend the period of eligibility for the Carers Benefit to support the return to employment of family carers (10)
- Expand the number of interventions to improve access to employment and education for people with disabilities. Suggestions included: a review of the flexibility of the *National Supported Employment Programme*; expansion of assisted employment programmes; full implementation of the *Public*

Procurement Directive as it applies to sheltered workshops; enforcement of the 3% public sector recruitment quota for people with disabilities (10)

- Review the accessibility and relevance of enterprise supports for minority ethnic groups and develop self-employment as an employment option (6)
- Enable pensioners/the elderly to participate in employment by removing restriction on earnings as it relates to the Old Age Contributory Pension; abolish the requirement of retirement as a condition of receiving a state pension at age 65 year; and count additional PRSI contributions after age of 65 years for pension purposes (5)
- Expand the number of Community Employment (CE) scheme places and develop structured progression mechanisms between CE and the broader labour market (4)
- Reform the social insurance system to allow a re-entry credit for homemakers entering the labour market (4)
- More initiatives to address youth unemployment (3)
- Full implementation of the *National Spatial Strategy*. Link its objectives with those of the National Development Plan to support rural economic development and continued investment in rural infrastructure (3)
- Provide a public sector employment programme of training and work experience for members of the Traveller community (2)
- Greater flexibility of funding for services for people with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) to maintain a streamlined service between rehabilitation and re-entry to employment (2)
- Implement the recommendations of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (2)
- Reintroduce a full-time labour market scheme targeted at the long-term unemployed (1)
- Support migrant workers in accessing rights and entitlements in the workplace through the provision of accessible and language appropriate information (1).

Additional modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to those **in employment** included:

- Review the Work Permit System, increase the flexibility of the current system and adopt the definition of 'worker' used in Art. 2 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families* (10)

- Resource State agencies (e.g., Labour Inspectorate Unit) to monitor and enforce the employment rights of vulnerable groups and protect workers employment rights (8)
- Increase the One Parent Family Payment earnings disregard to a level equivalent to 80% of gross average industrial earnings (6)
- Expand the legislative framework to support family friendly workplaces e.g., extend the duration period of maternity leave, provide more paid paternity and parental leave (5)
- Index link the minimum wage to increases in average industrial earnings and remove all persons on the minimum wage from the tax net (4)
- Increase the Family Income Supplement threshold, reduce the qualifying working hours to meet the needs of those in atypical employment, actively track people who are eligible for supports and review its operation to ensure that its take-up is maximised (4)
- Extend eligibility for the Back to Work Allowance to include those who are unemployed for more than 12 months and those with mental health illnesses (2)
- Extend the Wage Subsidy Scheme to people with disabilities who wish/or are only able to work less than 20 hours per week and promote greater understanding of the scheme and its operation among employers (1)
- Extend employment protection and equality legislation to cover persons aged 65 years or greater who are in employment (1).

6.1.2 Proposals for new or additional policies and/or programmes to better achieve objectives

Suggestions for new and additional policies or programmes to better achieve Objective 1 in relation to those **not in employment** largely consider the role of targeted active labour market policies in encouraging and facilitating the participation of vulnerable groups in work and training opportunities. Suggestions include:

- A continuum of supports to support participation in active labour market programmes, such as health services, placement and employment support systems, individual learning budgets (14)
- Provide people with disabilities with an increased range of meaningful occupation options and enforce equality legislation (12)
- Explore the provision of a Work Permit system that would allow asylum seekers awaiting processing of their claim for more than six months the right to work (8)

- Create bridging active labour market programmes to support people with mental health illnesses transition from sheltered work programmes to mainstream programmes (6)
- Identify and encourage appropriate Positive Action Measures to address the marginalisation of unemployed persons (as per NAP/inclusion categorisations) from the labour force (6) and provide culturally specific active labour market programmes for disadvantaged groups
- Continued support for, and development of, area-based partnership measures to reduce long-term employment and generate economic growth (4)
- Develop specific initiatives to tackle rural unemployment (4)
- Develop new actions to incentivise employers to provide placement and job opportunities for drug users, offer drug awareness training programmes for employees and review the appropriateness of policies and procedures regarding the use of drugs in the workplace (3)
- Provide accreditation for all community training and employment initiatives through the National Framework for Qualifications (2).

Suggestions for new and additional policies or programmes to better achieve Objective 1 in relation to those **in employment** were:

- More incentives for employers to promote the participation of their workforce in basic and further education schemes (9)
- Provide a Back to Education Allowance for low paid workers who wish to return to full or part-time education (6)
- Develop competency based recruitment strategies and target minority ethnic and vulnerable groups for specific opportunities in the public and private sector (3)
- Examine the long-term impact of low-paid, part-time employment on women's general income and pension levels (2)
- Create more affordable rental housing for low-paid workers in high cost areas (2)
- Require all employees to contribute to a Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (1).

6.2 Objective 2 – Facilitating access by all to rights, resources, goods and services

Rights

A key point made emerging from submissions was the need for a **rights based approach** to the delivery of public services. It was generally felt that there had been little progression in the development of such an approach. One submission called for the inclusion of social and economic rights within the Irish Constitution while another called for the enumeration of children's rights within it. A submission called for the removal of the definition of the family as based on marriage from the Constitution, to be replaced by an emphasis on the protection of family life in all its forms. It also called for the recognition of parental rights to apply equally to all parents regardless of gender or marital status and legal recognition of cohabiting parents.

A general issue noted was the importance of ensuring employers and employees undertook **equality and inclusiveness training** to support a high quality, inclusive and equality based delivery of services, supports and information (6).

Income adequacy

A considerable number of submissions referred to the income adequacy target. It was acknowledged that the adequacy of **social welfare payments levels** is critical. Frequent reference (16) was made to achieving the existing NAP/inclusion target of €150 for the lowest social welfare payment by 2007. Some submissions sought implementation of this existing commitment while others argued strongly that the basic rate of social welfare payments should be linked to gross average industrial earnings (GAIE). Key factors driving calls for such increases and/or adjustments to the way in which the rate of social welfare payments is established were increases in average industrial earnings and rising costs of living. A substantial number of submissions referred to the issue of income adequacy for the **'working poor'**. A number of submissions (8) noted that participation in employment did not necessarily ensure a poverty free household while others (16) called for the introduction of a longer period of transition from unemployment to employment during which one's eligibility for secondary benefits such as a medical card would be gradually reduced.

Some submissions (7) referred to the issue of **income poverty amongst older people**, noting significant increases in income poverty amongst this group since the mid-1990s. The agreed NAP/inclusion target of €200 for the lowest old age pensions to be reached by 2007 was generally welcomed although a number of submissions (4) argued for state pensions to be linked to gross average industrial earnings. The need to increase the qualified adult payment was addressed in a number of submissions (5).

Many submissions (15) outlined proposals in respect of **child income supports**. A number of submissions argued in favour of additional, targeted child income supports for vulnerable families, with some welcoming the NESF (2005) recommendation for the introduction of a targeted Child Income Support (4). A number of submissions (9) referred to the lack of increase in Child Dependent Allowances since the mid-1990s and

called for it to be increased in line with current day costs of living. The negative impact of the **Habitual Residence Condition** on the income levels of welfare dependent asylum seekers with children was adversely commented on and 14 submissions called for a review of this and the system of direct provision.

6.2.1 Social welfare payments and income supports

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to resources* were: a guaranteed income for all dependent on social welfare, measures to address child poverty and the retention of secondary benefits for those transitioning to employment.

Welfare payments

- Establish a guaranteed adequate income standard for all dependent on social welfare payments or in minimum wage employment, which is linked to gross average industrial earnings (16)
- Review the eligibility criteria for the Carer's Allowance (in particular, remove the requirement for means testing of this allowance) to enable more full-time carers to qualify for it, increase the Carers Allowance to a rate approximating the minimum wage and link to gross average industrial earnings and introduce a part-time unemployment assistance for carers who are only able to work part-time (12)
- Increase child income supports in line with inflation and costs of living (11)
- Increase Qualified Adult Allowances and pay directly to the qualified adult (5)
- Increase the Back to School Allowance and lower the income level for eligibility for this scheme (4)
- Increase the state Old Age Contributory Pension rates and link to gross average industrial earnings (4)
- Provide additional financial supports for families providing long-term home care for persons with a disability (2)
- Enable persons without full PRSI contributions to retrospectively buy PRSI contributions (2)
- Examine the current operation of interim payments (for those processing a claim for Unemployment Assistance) with a view to setting a maximum guaranteed time to process a claim and implement measures to support applicants while claims are being processed (1).

Fuel poverty

- Increase fuel allowance rates and the time period for payment of this allowance, review income levels for eligibility in line with rising fuel costs (7)

- Upgrade energy efficiency of older housing stock accommodation (2).

Other

- Provide improved information on rights and entitlements and target vulnerable groups including older people, minority ethnic groups. Literacy and disability proof all information provided and reduce the paperwork burden on applicants claiming social welfare benefits (16)

- Abolish the Habitual Residence Condition and re-instate the right to entitlement to non-contributory benefits for immigrant workers and their families (13)

- The revised NAP/inclusion targets for social welfare payments should be reviewed to ensure that they adequately incorporate the cost of a healthy diet (3).

Proposals for new or additional policies and/or programmes to better achieve objectives

Suggestions for new and additional policies or programmes to better achieve Objective 2 in relation to facilitating access to resources (social welfare) included:

- Introduce a national waiver system for waste charges for low-income households (7)

- Introduce a targeted Child Income Support by merging the Child Dependent Allowance and Family Income Supplement, and regularly review income eligibility thresholds to ensure they are in line with costs of living (6)

- Consolidate Carers Benefit and Carers Allowance into a 'wage' to allow carers to build up an independent social insurance record (6)

- Introduce a weekly Cost of Living payment for people with disabilities (4)

- Provide social insurance credits rather than disregards for those who have had breaks in their working lives especially home-makers and carers and introduce homemaker 'credits' to enable women who work full-time in home to qualify for Old Age Contributory Pensions and Paid Parental Leave (retrospective to 1973) (4)

- Individualise the social welfare system to address the current financial disincentives to the formation of two-parent households (3)

- Implement a partial incapacity benefit as recommended by the *Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Illness and Disability Payment Scheme* (2003) (2)

- Introduce a full-time means-tested parental allowance payment available to parents with a child aged less than 5 years and a part-time means tested parental allowance for parents of children aged 5 to 14 years (1)

- Introduce a benefits audit for older people to automatically assess and inform them of their entitlements (1).

6.2.2 Education

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to education* were: overcoming barriers to participation in education and training including financial barriers, childcare and addressing educational disadvantage. A strong message emerging from the discussions was the need to prioritise improvements in educational attainment levels among disadvantaged groups.

Educational disadvantage

- Increase funding at pre-school and primary levels to enable children access early childhood education and care services (21)

- Provide additional supports for children with special needs in mainstream schools e.g., more trained children's assistants, psychological services in all RAPID area schools (9)

- Mainstream early intervention programmes to assist children in designated areas of disadvantage, provide additional supports for children with special needs in mainstream schools and expand the School Completion Programme (8)

- Adequately resource the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) and introduce a system for tracking students' progress between primary and secondary school in designated disadvantaged schools, co-ordinated through the regional Educational Welfare Offices (4)

- Reduce class sizes and improve student-teacher ratios (3)

- Link implementation of the Department of Education and Science's *Action Plan on Educational Disadvantage* with the Special Initiative to assist vulnerable children and families and address educational provision in disadvantaged communities (3)

- Implement the recommendations of the Educational Disadvantage Committee (1).

Access to second-chance education and community based adult education

- Increase Back to Education Initiatives within the community education sector and provide multi-annual funding for community based education organisations including women's organisations, community based literacy teaching and second chance adult education (13)

- Provide more accessible, affordable and flexible childcare provision to enable the participation of vulnerable groups in education (11)
- Streamline and harmonise the qualifying criteria and income support arrangements for existing education and training schemes aimed at vulnerable groups (10)
- Develop specific adult and family community based literacy programmes and community literacy co-ordinators groups (6)
- Assess eligibility of lone parents for the Back to Education Allowance and the Higher Education Grant Scheme using the same criteria as for the One Parent Family Payment (5)
- Review the eligibility criteria for the Back to Education Allowance to facilitate those who can only engage in part-time education (3)
- Resource the National Adult Learning Council and establish Local Adult Learning Boards to ensure effective co-ordination of adult education provision amongst providers (3)
- Rescind the cutbacks in childcare allowances for those availing of vocational training opportunities (1)
- Implement the recommendations of the *White Paper on Lifelong Learning* including the abolition of fees for part-time and distance learning; resource childcare, transport etc. (1)
- Implement the *Mapping the Learning Journey* assessment framework across all further education and training settings delivering adult literacy tuition and education as well as implementing the *National Adult Literacy and Numeracy Implementation Plan* (1).

Participation of people with disabilities

- Return to training/continuing training programmes should specifically target people with disabilities and provide the necessary resources (e.g., access to transport, holding of programmes in accessible buildings) to support their engagement (10)
- Enhanced resources to support the Grant Scheme for Resource Teachers and Special Needs Assistants to support the participation of children with disabilities in primary and second level education (2)
- Greater provision of educational supports in third-level education e.g., greater availability of assistive technology, personal assistants and suitable accommodation options (2)

- Increase the number of specific training and vocational services for people with acquired brain injuries (2).

Access to education for those in employment

- Review the Back to Education Initiative to enable low-income workers and those with low levels of qualifications access part-time, second-chance, literacy and numeracy education (11)

- Promote greater awareness among employers of the education needs of workers with low level qualifications and provide employers with incentives to facilitate employees participation in basic education schemes (5).

Facilitating the participation of minority ethnic groups

- Remove barriers to higher education encountered by immigrants and other ethnic groups, including examination of the three-year residency rule. Ensure free access to third level education for those awaiting the outcome of their asylum application process (3)

- Abolish segregated schooling for Travellers and develop targeted education strategies for Travellers within mainstream schooling (2)

- Implement the *Traveller Education Strategy* and resource local Traveller organisations to monitor its implementation (2)

- Locate Travellers education in an intercultural educational framework and resource local Traveller organisations to employ staff to engage with the Department of Education and Science and other relevant bodies on issues relevant to Travellers participation in education (2).

Other

- Enhanced funding to support the use of IT technologies in education and training programmes (4)

- Re-establish the Department of Education and Science's Intra-Departmental Committee on Sexual Orientation Issues to address homophobic bullying in schools and to support the development of a safe and supportive learning environment for gay, lesbian and bisexual young people (1).

Proposals for new or additional policies and/or programmes to better achieve objectives

Suggestions for new and additional policies or programmes to better achieve Objective 2 in relation to facilitating access to services (education) included:

Income supports

- Establish a fund to provide financial support, including a childcare allowance, to those dependent on social welfare to access a variety of education and skills training programmes (10)

- Establish a new budget line (similar to the Back to Educational Allowance) to promote access to third level education and provide a 'stay-in-school' payment for young parents (5).

Lifelong learning

- Provide financial supports to enable low-income workers and those dependent on social welfare participate in life-long learning activities (11)
- Fund a national adult literacy strategy targeted at the Traveller community e.g., establish a national budget line (4)
- Establish a direct budget line to the community education sector from the Further and Higher Education Section to support their work in developing accreditation options and progression pathways (2).

Educational disadvantage

- Develop community based life-skills training and educational development (as opposed to centre based training) for people with mental health illnesses (2).

Minority ethnic groups

- Develop educational initiatives targeted at those for whom English is not their first language to enable their participation in educational programmes and courses (2).

6.2.3 Health

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to health services* were: extend eligibility for the medical card, adequately resource primary, secondary and community health services and fully implement existing strategies in relation to specific health issues and target groups.

Provision of services

- More resources for population, primary health and community health services including basic medical, therapeutic and rehabilitative services (10)
- Prioritise mental health within the national health agenda and adequately resource community-based mental health services and the provision of alternative or sheltered, community-based accommodation (8)
- Expand the availability of drug treatment and rehabilitation services (7)
- Additional investment in child health services and community based family support services (6)
- Full implementation of the Traveller Primary Health Care Programme and National Traveller Health Strategy (5)

- Enhanced provision of community-based medical, therapeutic and rehabilitative services for people with disabilities (5)
- Ensure the accessibility of all public buildings and services for people with disabilities and include feedback from the current consultation on the *Draft Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services Information* into NAP/inclusion (3)
- Implement the recommendations of the *Report on the Expansion of the Cervical Screening Programme*, continue the expansion of *Breast Check* and resource the development of specialist breast clinics and prosthesis services (2)
- Expand the Pilot Primary Care Initiatives scheme to rural areas to address the need for outreach and primary care services in geographically remote areas (2).

Access to medical card services

- Review the eligibility criteria for retention of the medical card for low-income households, and explore the extension of the medical card scheme to cover all children under 18 years (18)
- Automatically renew medical cards held by the long-term disabled and introduce a scheme to cover the intermediary costs arising from changes in medication (3).

Proposals for new or additional policies and/or programmes to better achieve objectives

Suggestions for new and additional policies or programmes to better achieve Objective 2 in relation to facilitating access to services (health) included:

- Gender mainstream health policy (1)
- Prioritise specific issues in relation to women's health e.g., heart disease, obesity, smoking (1)
- Develop cultural mediation and medical interpreting services for those for whom English is not their first language and for the deaf community (1)
- Develop Traveller men's health programmes (1).

6.2.4. Housing and accommodation

The modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to housing* primarily focused on access to social and affordable housing, private rental accommodation and the needs of specific groups.

Homeless services or services for those at risk of homelessness

- Establish a definitive interpretation of the definition of homelessness to be followed by all service providers, including agreement on service entitlements (10)
- Set targets for objectives for tackling homelessness (10)
- Develop local area based responses to homelessness including provision for homeless persons and families in social and affordable housing schemes and emergency and temporary accommodation (8)
- Place Local Authorities Homeless Action Plans on a statutory basis and incorporate within these specific targets for housing and service provision based on the 2005 Assessment of Housing Needs, and implement Quality Housing Needs Assessment for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness (5)
- Develop clear links between the Homeless Integrated Strategy and the Special Initiative for Housing and Accommodation in all future social partnership agreements and embed the Homeless Integrated Strategy within the work of local and national statutory agencies (5)
- Implement Quality Housing Needs Assessment for people who are homeless and those at risk of homelessness (5)
- Prioritise implementation of the Homeless Agency's Tenancy Sustainment Initiative (5)
- Prioritise the implementation of the *Youth Homelessness Strategy* (1).

Social and affordable housing

- Increased production of housing units that are lifetime adaptable and accessible to meet the needs of specific groups e.g., families, people with disabilities and older people (17)
- Commit to the achievement of social housing building targets as per the current National Development Plan and renewed commitment by local authorities to specific reductions in local authority housing waiting lists (13)
- Prioritise the creation of sustainable communities through commitments to locating new housing units within existing well serviced areas, ensuring a social mix in the allocation of local authority tenancies and enabling the children of tenants living in local authority provision to access local housing to maintain family networks and supports (8)
- Provide adequate supports for elderly persons living in their own homes e.g., assistance with housing maintenance (7)

- Review housing incomes supports for low-income families (6)
- Increase grant aid to local authorities for renovation and maintenance of housing stock and remove the requirement for local authorities to provide matching funding before drawing down Housing Improvement Grants (5)
- Modify the housing needs assessment system to allow it to act as a route for homeless persons into social and affordable housing supported by supplementary welfare allowances and as a route into voluntary housing. Require local authorities to publish annualised figures from the housing needs assessment system (4)
- Establish and enforce monitoring measures to ensure the achievement of targets under Part V of the *Planning and Development Act* (3)
- Create a continuum of community and sheltered housing options to support the independent living of those who need additional supports (3)
- Increase the income threshold for eligibility for the Affordable Housing Scheme (1)
- Audit Social and Affordable Housing Plans to assess the targets for housing and support for homeless persons (1)
- Increase the caps on the Capital Assistance Scheme Accommodation to allow voluntary providers to build housing units for single people and introduce a funding scheme to provide support to people living in independent accommodation (1).

Housing for people with disabilities

- Increase the Disabled Persons Housing Grant to 100% of the building cost and review the structures for the processing of Adaptation Grants (6)
- Ensure the accessibility of private and public buildings (6)
- Review, and monitor, the implementation of Part M of the Building Regulations (2).

Private rented accommodation

- Regulate the inspection of private rented accommodation and enact legislation protecting tenants rights (9)
- The Rental Accommodation Scheme should consider the needs of various low-income groups, including single person households, and ensure that its allowances are sufficient to meet the cost of private rental accommodation (7).

Housing and accommodation for Travellers

- Prioritise the implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes (13)
- Monitor and ensure the provision of basic services (e.g., water, toilets, electricity and refuse collection) to Traveller families living in temporary halting sites and accommodation (3)
- Implement the recommendations of the Report of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and grant increased powers to the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee to improve the rate of Local Authority accommodation provision for Travellers (2)
- Review aspects of the planning legislation to address impediments therewith to the implementation of Traveller accommodation e.g., repeal Section 24 of *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2002* (2)
- Enhanced provision of appropriate accommodation with outreach support for young, homeless Travellers (1)
- Review the Caravan Loans Scheme and include caravans within the Rental Allowance Scheme (1).

Other

- Support the retention of the Retail Planning Guidelines (2001) (1).

Proposals for new or additional policies and/or programmes to better achieve objectives

Suggestions for new and additional policies or programmes to better achieve Objective 2 in relation to facilitating access to services (housing and accommodation) included:

Legal changes

- Develop a rights-based approach to access to appropriate housing and accommodation (5).

Social and affordable housing

- Develop estate management initiatives and tenant training programmes and facilitate local community participation in planning and development processes for estate regeneration schemes (11)
- Develop a fair, equitable and transparent system of housing allocation for local authority housing e.g., introduce an Appeals Mechanism (3).

Private rented accommodation

- Establish a national tenant information and advocacy network (3).

Housing and accommodation for minority ethnic groups

- Invest in Traveller tenant participation strategies to enable Travellers participation in housing decision-making and implementation processes (2)

- Establish a Statutory Traveller Accommodation Agency to monitor the adequacy and delivery of local Traveller Accommodation programmes (1).

Housing in rural areas

- Establish a Rural Housing Commission to deal with issues of housing and village design in rural areas and to ensure sustainable housing developments (2).

Homelessness or at risk of homelessness

- Establish a National Monitoring Committee for Homelessness at state level (5)

- Develop minimum standards for homeless accommodation and require all statutory and private providers of such accommodation to meet these standards (1).

Housing for vulnerable groups

- Provide financial supports for the maintenance and upkeep of accommodation for those living in sub-standard housing (4)

- Establish a dedicated Housing Advice Service for older people to assist with the identification of suitable accommodation options in terms of home improvements, adaptations or moving to alternative accommodation (3).

6.2.5 Transport

The key modification and improvement to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to transport services* was the expansion of existing public and private transport schemes to combat the social isolation of vulnerable groups and facilitate participation in employment, education and training.

- Expansion of Rural Transport Initiative to rural areas not covered under existing scheme (10)

- Improved public transport provision in urban and rural areas (7)

- Increase the accessibility of public and private transport for those with disabilities, etc (6)

- Regular renewal of free transport passes and companion passes and extension of scheme to allow unlimited travel (3)

- Adequately resource the Department of Transport's Sectoral Plan under the Disability Bill 2005 (1)

- Expansion of national bus network and introduction of integrated ticketing and improved pricing and timing to encourage higher use of rail services (1)

- Re-open rail link connections between regional centres and explore the use of commuter rail services to serve regional gateways and hubs located on the existing rail network (1).

Proposals for new or additional policies and/or programmes to better achieve objectives

Suggestions for new and additional policies or programmes to better achieve Objective 2 in relation to facilitating access to services (transport) included:

- A voucher system to enable older people to avail of private transport where no public transport is available (3)

- Establish a National Rural Transport Office to link and support the development of rural transport. Support this through the establishment of local structures to link and co-ordinate the actions of relevant stakeholders (1).

6.2.6 Care services

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to care services* were: a greater provision of appropriate, flexible, high quality and affordable childcare and eldercare and services and supports for carers in the home.

Eldercare

- Provide more home help, respite care and long-term residential care services for older people (8).

Carers

- Increase the quality and variety of respite options and increase the basic rate for respite grants (3)

- Increased funding for local Carers Associations (3)

- Full implementation of the recommendations of the report by the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs on the Position of Carers (2003) (1)

- Provide family carers with a statutory right to an assessment of their own needs, integrated with an assessment of the needs of the person they are caring for (1).

Childcare

- Provision of accessible, sustainable, high quality and affordable childcare in disadvantaged urban and rural areas, including tiered childcare (for different age groups) and after-school care (21)

- Provide financial assistance to all families to meet childcare costs or to stay at home to look after their children (21)
- Expand funding for the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, particularly for community-based childcare services located in disadvantaged areas, and re-evaluate the Programme with a view to increasing the maximum staff grant available to community childcare facilities (4)
- Develop a publicly funded childcare model (1).

Proposals for new or additional policies and/or programmes to better achieve objectives

Suggestions for new and additional policies or programmes to better achieve Objective 2 in relation to facilitating access to services (care services) included:

- Include provision of adequate eldercare within the National Action Plan and allocate appropriate resources and supports to support the implementation of such a programme (3)
- Establish a statutory independent complaints and appeals procedure within the health and social services (This should also cover residential care accommodation for older people) (2)
- Establish a registration and inspection process for private home care providers (2)
- Create a National Carers Strategy and a National Respite Care Plan taking into account the needs of people with disabilities and their families (1).

6.2.7 Financial exclusion, indebtedness

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to financial services* were the need to enhance access to financial services for vulnerable groups and new measures to tackle indebtedness.

- Develop a universal bank account model to support the financial inclusion of vulnerable groups e.g., facilitate greater access to credit (5)
- Address the lack of physical access to financial services for people with a disability or for those living in an area with no banking facilities (4)
- Additional resources to support the current work and expansion of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (2)
- Require all documents initiating a legal claim for debt to be accompanied by information on the relevant debt collection process and information on accessing legal aid and the Money, Advice and Budgeting Service (1).

6.2.8 Access to legal services

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to legal services* were: more resources to support the Civil Legal Aid System, review of the eligibility criteria governing access to free legal aid and financial support for community legal services.

Civil Legal Aid System and the Courts Service

- Introduce legislation to guarantee a constitutional right of access to legal aid or to the courts, together with more resources to support the expansion of the Civil Legal Aid System (5)
- Review the means test determining eligibility for free legal aid and adjust the disposable income and capital limits which decide the subscription which legal aid clients have to pay (4)
- Resource the Legal Aid Board to offer the full range of legal advice and representation services permitted by law including employment and social welfare appeals (3)
- Provide additional resources to the Courts Service to allow timely access to the legal system (3)
- Full representation on the Legal Aid Board of communities who are heavily dependent on legal aid (2)
- Extend the protection offered by Equality legislation to ex-prisoners (2)
- Extend the scope of actions which quality for legal aid under the *Civil Legal Aid Act*, 1995, permit class actions in the Irish courts and repeal the exclusion of class actions from the legal aid scheme (1).

Community-based legal services

- Increase in funding for community law centres and initiatives delivering community based legal services (2).

Indebtedness

- Review debt enforcement procedures with a particular focus on protecting the human rights of participants in such proceedings and the elimination of imprisonment as a result of non-payment of civil debt (1).

6.2.9 Play and recreation

Amongst the modifications and improvements to existing policy measures proposed in relation to *facilitating access to play and recreational facilities* were the prioritisation of the provision of local play and recreation facilities and implementation of the *National Play Policy*.

- Fully implement the *National Play Policy* (7)
- Prioritise the role of local authorities in providing appropriate leisure and recreational facilities e.g., require local authorities to child-proof local authority housing to ensure access to play and recreational facilities (5)
- Increased provision of community sport and recreational facilities and increased funding for community based organisations providing such facilities (5)
- Further investment in library infrastructure and services and implementation of the recommendations outlined in the reports 'Branching Out' and the 2004 CPA report 'Access to Public Libraries for Marginalised Groups' (2).

6.3 Objective 3 – Preventing the risks of exclusion

A key issue repeatedly raised in submissions was the provision of appropriate information. Pro-active **provision of information** on public services, rights and entitlements in a range of accessible formats was deemed essential to address information deficits amongst groups at risk of social exclusion.

The need for a greater focus on the regional **dimensions of poverty and social exclusion** was referred to in a number of submissions (3). Suggestions in this regard included:

- Full implementation of the *National Spatial Strategy* and integration of its measures with NAP/inclusion to ensure a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to reducing regional disparities (Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly)
- Increased financial incentives for operators of private services in rural areas and small urban areas e.g., to support the provision of the necessary enabling infrastructure (Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly)
- Prioritise infrastructure, training and enterprise supports for rural counties that are negatively affected by (a) EU CAP Reforms e.g., enhanced support for small farmers (M&M Hallissey) and (b) their geographic location outside of designated social and economic hubs and gateways (Roscommon County Council)
- Develop a set of criteria and measurements to enable policymakers to examine and identify the rural dimensions of poverty and social exclusion (Irish Rural Link).

A small number of submissions (3) called for the continuation of measures such as **'E-Inclusion'** to address gaps in computer literacy and enhanced access to IT training and computer access for vulnerable groups. A number of submissions (2) from local authorities called for the role of existing public services, in promoting e-inclusion, particularly libraries, to be recognised in NAP/inclusion and for the national rollout of the 'Making Access Happen' scheme.

Few submissions raised issues directly relevant to **family policy** – nevertheless, a small number (2) referred to the need to ensure that government policies do not work against family formation and for the establishment of initiatives to develop a greater understanding and respect for family diversity. One submission referenced the needs of families of migrant workers and called for a strengthening of family reunification rights for all categories of non-EEA migrant workers.

A number of submissions (5) addressed issues related to financial exclusion. Specific comments referred to the need for a greater focus on the relationship between **financial exclusion** and social exclusion, a commitment to identifying and addressing barriers to financial services, a review of the capacity of the current Financial Services Regulator Code of Practice to protect against predatory lending practices and the introduction of preventative measures to reduce the problem of over indebtedness. Groups deemed to be particularly at risk of indebtedness included households headed by a single female parent and submissions (3) called for national agencies – specifically, the Money, Advice and Budget Service – to review strategies to ensure that the needs of these groups were addressed in policy and practice.

Food poverty was identified as a policy issue by five submissions. Submissions by the Combat Poverty Agency, Crosscare and Society of St Vincent de Paul called for the development of a strategic policy framework, which addresses food poverty as a policy issue and for the issue of food poverty to be endorsed as a priority action within NAP/inclusion as a means of addressing social exclusion. It was envisioned that such a framework would be underpinned by minimum income standards, establish minimum nutritional standards, endorse community development and partnership approaches, identify each stakeholders role and responsibility in implementing such action and would not be direct provision focused. Specific proposals advanced in respect of addressing food poverty include:

- Allocation of sustainable dedicated funding by way of a NAP/inclusion Special Initiative to address food poverty and support the development of a collaborative partnership approach at the national and local level for the delivery of the proposed strategic framework

- Establishment of a Healthy Food for All Initiative (HFFAI) to provide a national framework to support, develop and network local initiatives to address food poverty and link these with national policies and actors. Support and adequately resource community development and locally based initiatives for increasing access to food

- A review of the interrelationship between food supply, food quality, physical access to food and the role of retailers as part of the wider strategy of addressing social inequality in food habits
- Provision of adequate financial resources (with particular reference to the role of social welfare payments and support for those on low-incomes with special dietary requirements) for a healthy diet, supplemented with direct food provision where appropriate
- Provision of appropriate incentives to improve the accessibility and affordability of good-quality nutritious food
- Improvements in the quality and extent of direct food provision where this is undertaken in an appropriate social and cultural setting (e.g. schools, hostels, nursing homes, food centres)
- Addressing gaps in dietary knowledge through culturally appropriate information and awareness campaigns.

A number of submissions (7) referenced the need to tackle **fuel poverty**. Suggestions in relation to this latter issue included:

- A review of the effectiveness of the fuel allowance, an increase in fuel allowance rates and an extension in the period for these allowances
- The introduction of a carbon tax – the monies raised from this could then be used to support energy-efficiency programmes among low-income households and to compensate vulnerable households from the inflationary price effects of a carbon tax
- An increase in funding for state-backed programmes of capital investment in the housing stock to improve the thermal efficiency of Irish low-income housing.

One submission called for the **inclusion of peace-building**, **inclusion and participation programmes** within national anti-poverty programmes (for example, through the inclusion of an indicator on conflict reduction/peace-building within anti-poverty strategies) and the development of North-South collaborative work to promote inclusion and peace-building on an all-Ireland basis.

6.4 Objective 4 – Helping the most vulnerable groups

Many of the issues raised in the submissions in relation to specific groups have already been set out under earlier objectives but key points frequently made in submissions in reference to specific groups are grouped together in the following section.

6.4.1 Lone parents and teenage parents

A range of issues were identified in relation to lone and teenage parents. Submissions called for:

- Enhanced supports to facilitate lone parents access to employment, education and training e.g., the development of locally based tailored models of support to give advice on education, training and work options
- Establishment of a national funding scheme to fund childcare and the development of individual Education Support Programmes to support young mothers in education
- NAP/inclusion to resource Family Resource Centres to engage in intensive outreach work and provide self-help groups for lone parents
- Awareness and information training to be undertaken by all service providers on issues relevant to lone parenthood
- National expansion of the Teen Parents Support Programme and mainstreaming of the Waterford Student Mother's project; provide a 'stay in school' allowance for young parents in education
- Increase adequacy of social welfare payments for lone parents.

6.4.2 Women

A range of issues were identified in relation to responding to the diversity of needs of women experiencing poverty and social exclusion. These included the need for NAP/inclusion to:

- Address the high risk of poverty faced by women-headed households especially lone parents and older women
- Incorporate gender proofing across all relevant policies and measures to address the causes and effects of women's poverty and the development and monitoring of specific indicators on women and poverty
- Address barriers to women's participation in active labour market programmes
- Introduce Homemakers Credits to enable women who work in the home to qualify for Old Age Contributory Pensions and paid Parental Leave
- Mainstream projects funded under EEI and EQUAL initiatives and the Equality for Women Measure
- Provide a full-time means-tested parental allowance for parents of children aged less than 5 years and a part-time means tested parental allowance for parents of children aged between 5 – 14 years

- Local Authorities Scheme of Lettings to provide for women made homeless through domestic violence and discontinue the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for women and children out of home due to domestic violence

- Provide accessible pregnancy and maternity support services for migrant women.

6.4.3 Homeless or at risk of homelessness

A range of issues were identified in relation to individuals and families who were homeless or at risk of homelessness including:

- The need to develop a clear and unambiguous definition of homelessness to be agreed and followed by all relevant state agencies, bodies and non-governmental service providers working with the homeless

- Place Homeless Action Plans on a statutory basis and provide improved support and resources for organisations working with the homeless

- Implementation of policies to prevent homelessness amongst those evicted from local authority housing under anti-social behaviour legislation

- Improved access to training and employment opportunities for young, homeless persons

- Provision of group living with guidance counselling, skill building and coping skills to aid those making the transition from emergency accommodation to long-term housing provision

- The development of proactive policies by government departments and state agencies for the prevention of homelessness within programmes that fall under their remit

- Include accurate and ongoing measurements of those at immediate risk of homelessness within the NAP/inclusion data strategy in order to inform housing and support service planning.

6.4.4 Drug misuse

A range of issues were identified in relation to drug misuse including:

- The need for greater provision of rehabilitation and addiction treatment facilities

- Long-term funding strategies to support community-based services addressing drug misuse

- Increased family support services for families experiencing drug misuse

- Enhanced income supports and targeted education and employment opportunities for those with addiction problems who are in rehabilitation.

6.4.5 Victims of domestic violence and trafficking

A range of issues were identified in relation to victims of domestic violence and trafficking including the importance of:

- Developing a national funding framework to resource services working with victims of domestic violence and trafficking
- Considering the different cultural needs of ethnic minority groups in the planning and implementation of prevention strategies to address domestic violence
- Ensuring the full implementation of the Strategic Plan of the National Steering Committee on Violence against Women
- Amending the *Domestic Violence Act 1996* to give greater protection to co-habitees and those with a child in common but who are not residing together
- Adopting and implementing a comprehensive strategy to combat trafficking in women and girls
- Mainstreaming the work of the Barcelona Declaration through the establishment of local and national targets.

6.4.6 Men

A range of issues were identified in relation to men including the need to:

- Develop a co-ordinated action plan to address the needs of marginalised men
- Develop specific services to tackle the growing incidence of exclusion amongst vulnerable men
- Identify young men as a vulnerable group in NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 and further develop relevant services for this group e.g., targeted health services, education and employment programmes etc.

6.4.7 Carers

A range of issues were identified in relation to carers including the need to:

- Provide enhanced financial resources to support the national expansion of Carer Co-ordinator positions and more financial support for voluntary organisations working with family carers
- Establish a Cost of Care payment to cover the additional costs arising from caring for a person in their own home

- Increase allowances and benefits available to carers (e.g., the Domiciliary Care Allowance, Fuel Allowance) and abolish the means test for the Carers' Allowance.

6.4.8 Lesbians, gays and bisexuals

A range of issues were identified in relation to disadvantaged lesbians, gays and bisexuals (LGBs) including the need to:

- Develop an infrastructure to enable LGBs to participate in the policymaking process
- Explicitly address the needs of LGBs in the Guidelines for Poverty Proofing
- Include LGB groups in the monitoring and review mechanisms for NAP/inclusion.

6.4.9 People with disabilities

A range of issues were identified in relation to people with disabilities and other special needs including the need to/importance of:

- Promoting a holistic view of the needs of people with disabilities e.g., by developing comprehensive assessments of need
- Appointing a Minister of State with specific responsibility for the co-ordination of policy relating to people with disabilities. This would ensure reduce duplication across government departments and provide a 'champion' for disability issues at Cabinet level
- Addressing outstanding issues in relation to the Disability Bill
- Challenging the traditional approach to disability e.g., a social model rather than a medical perspective
- Providing targeted active labour market programmes and measures e.g., create a package of supports to enable the participation of women with disabilities in active labour market programmes
- Improving the accessibility of public services
- Prioritise access to transport e.g., promote the availability and increase the funding available under the motorised grant. Reform of the travel pass system for people with disabilities to enable a companion (not necessarily a family member) to travel with them at all times. In the absence of suitable public transport, establish a voucher system to subsidise use of private transport
- Re-structuring income supports as per the *Review of Income Support Schemes* (2003)

- Providing a Cost of Disability payment
- Extending the present system of Community Development within the Health Services Executive to include Services to Older People and Services to People with Disabilities
- Providing community-based medical, therapeutic and rehabilitative services
- Increasing the availability of aftercare facilities and services for those suffering from long-term or terminal illness
- Providing universal medical card access
- Ensuring the consistent administration of local authority grants allocated under the Disabled Person's Grant Scheme e.g., introduce a national policy for the administration of the grants, require decisions on applications to be made within a fixed time limit, establish an independent appeals system
- Implementing personal budgets and micro-Boards to give people with disabilities and/or their families control over access to income supports and other necessary services
- Providing more resources to support the Grant Scheme for Resource Teachers and Special Needs Assistants in primary and second level education
- Developing more supports in third-level education e.g., greater availability of assistive technology and personal assistants.

6.4.10 People with mental health illnesses

A range of issues were identified in relation to improving resources and supports for people with mental health illnesses including:

- Adoption of a rights based approach to mental health provision
- Identification of mental health as a specific area for intervention in NAP/inclusion
- Prioritising of funding for housing provision for single homeless persons with a history of mental illness
- Development of co-ordinated, inter-sectoral and inter-agency response to service provision in health services, provision of housing, etc.
- Greater provision of community based and multi-disciplinary responses to mental health difficulties
- Development of discharge planning from hospital settings as a fundamental entitlement for all persons with mental health illnesses

- An increase in the number of day and home respite places for people with mental health difficulties
- Development of workplace based prevention and early intervention measures to enable those with mental health illnesses to participate in employment
- Review the Back to Work scheme to ensure it responds to the needs of people with mental health problems.

6.4.11 Elderly people

A number of areas of concern were particularly prominent in the comments made namely – overcoming loneliness and isolation, adequate provision of income and housing supports and access to services and participation. A range of issues were identified and suggestions proposed including:

- A commitment to pro-active planning, delivery and development of services for older people. This should be supported by the development of an appropriate data strategy to identify current and future needs and the establishment of monitoring structures linked to local and national level government processes
- Achievement of the *Sustaining Progress* commitment to increasing the level of Qualified Adult Allowance for pensioner spouses to the level of the Contributory Old Age Pension, and for this to be paid directly to the Qualified Adult
- Linking the basic rate of state contributory and non-contributory pensions with the cost of living
- Increasing the Living Alone and Aged 80 Allowances in line with inflation
- Supplementing the state pension with a second tier pension, reflecting people's living standards prior to retirement
- Retrospective extension of the Homemaker's Scheme to include older women
- Reviewing the flexibility of the Older Persons grant allowance to ensure it meets the needs of older people
- Abolition of refuse charges for older people
- Extension of the present Community Development system within the Health Services Executive to include Services to Older People
- Greater provision of community-based social and health services to support the elderly in independent living

- Implementation of the recommendations of the Equality Authority's report, *Implementing Equality for Older People*
- Enhanced transport services (public and private) for older persons
- Provision of necessary supports to assist elderly, former local authority tenants who have purchased their homes from local authorities with the maintenance and upkeep of their properties
- Development of a database of ideas and opportunities during retirement (with models of best practice) for organisations working with older people.

6.4.12 Adults with low literacy and numeracy skills

A range of issues and proposals were identified in relation to policies and measures to support adults with low literacy and numeracy skills including:

- Development of mechanisms to provide adults lacking literacy skills with a voice to inform national and local policymaking
- Implementation of a national numeracy strategy
- Development of community-based assessment, tuition and support systems within existing adult literacy services for adults with specific learning difficulties
- Additional resources for the National Adult Learning Board
- Establishment of Local National Adult Learning Councils.

6.4.13 Asylum seekers and refugees

A range of issues were identified in relation to policies and programmes relevant to asylum seekers and refugees including:

- Full implementation of the National Action Plan Against Racism
- Development of a national English Strategy for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Measures to address the absence of systematic data on ethnic minorities
- Abolition of the Habitual Residency Condition and the system of direct provision for asylum seekers and replacement with the right to full social welfare entitlements
- Development of work programmes for refugees

- Give asylum seekers who have been awaiting processing of their claim for asylum for more than six months the right to work
- Provision of accessible pregnancy and maternity support services for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants
- Identify the needs of, and implement targeted initiatives, to facilitate the participation of refugee women in education, employment and health care
- Develop a long-term integration strategy to foster the effective participation of refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland.

6.4.14 Migrant workers

A range of issues were identified in relation to migrant workers including proposals to:

- Abolish the Habitual Residency Condition
- Review the operation of the work permit system and allow those employed under this system to access active labour market training and education programmes
- Provide accessible information on rights and entitlements in the workplace
- Remove barriers to higher education for immigrants and other ethnic groups
- Provide for the rights and entitlements of all migrants and reduce the exploitation of migrant workers in the workplace
- Develop and implement an Irish Integration Strategy and develop the necessary cross-departmental support infrastructure to support the strategy
- Appoint an Immigration Ombudsman to monitor admission, residency, family reunion and access to citizenship issues.

6.4.15 Travellers

A range of issues were identified in relation to Travellers including proposals to:

- Support the development of an overall focus on Travellers identity and culture, including recognition of Travellers as a minority ethnic group, both in the development of Traveller specific policies and practice and in the wider social inclusion and equality arena
- Establish a statutory Traveller agency to co-ordinate, monitor and enforce the implementation of Government policy on Travellers
- Target Travellers for mainstream training and employment opportunities

- Implement pro-active measures to address discrimination in the labour force
- Develop self-employment as an employment option and build-in equality and diversity approaches within enterprise supports
- Provide appropriate accommodation with outreach support for young, homeless Travellers
- Develop gender impact statements in relation to health, equality, anti-racism and other policies of relevance to Travellers to ensure that initiatives take account of the reality of Travellers lives.

6.4.16 Children

It was generally agreed that the most effective way for Government to assist children in poverty or at risk of poverty was through a mixture of income supports, access to quality services and measures to enhance participation in both society and the economy. A range of proposals were identified including:

- The mainstreaming of children's issues across government policymaking by means of a 'rights of the child' perspective
- Development of a second tier child income support payment to tackle child income poverty among low-income families
- Development of meaningful partnerships between professional services and families to tackle child poverty
- Provision of Visitors Centres at prison with special facilities for children
- Focus on child poverty amongst migrants and ethnic minorities
- Full citizenship to children of asylum seekers who entered the county as minors and who are 18 years or older
- Continued development of community based family support services.

6.4.17 Prisoners and ex-prisoners

A range of issues were identified in relation to ex-prisoners and their families including proposals to:

- Extend protection offered by Equality legislation to ex-prisoners
- Establish an agreed system for provision of suitable post-release accommodation for all prisoners
- Create individual plans for the release of each prisoner to target access to welfare payments, housing, education and/or employment

- Create a national framework of support for prisoners families and examine operation of welfare payments and supports for prisoners spouses

- Provision of Visitors Centres at prison with special facilities for children.

6.5 Objective 5 – Mobilising all relevant bodies

A number of submissions focused on the structural and institutional processes underpinning Ireland's commitment to tackling poverty and social exclusion. A range of points are identifiable in respect of the discussion relating to this objective.

- First, there appeared to be general agreement that the implementation of NAP/inclusion 2003–2005 has led to improvements in internal co-ordination across national Government policies and programmes especially in relation to reporting on progress in meeting targets. Nevertheless, a number of submissions argued that NAP/inclusion did not seem to be sufficiently influential upon major decision-making and resource allocation priorities

- Second, while there was a general acceptance of the existing NAP/inclusion structures, there was also a general consensus regarding the need to strengthen links between the local, regional and national structures supporting NAP/inclusion and to articulate the local and community dimension of NAP/inclusion. Submissions placed a clear emphasis on the continued need to conceptualise anti-poverty work as a societal issue and for all social actors to work together to achieve anti-poverty objectives

- Third, submissions continuously referred to the importance of government creating a supportive environment for the mobilisation of resources within the community and voluntary sector to ensure their effective participation in anti-poverty processes.

6.5.1 Data

The absence of systematic data on groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion forms a significant barrier to the development, implementation and monitoring of targeted social inclusion policies to address these issues. The following general points were made in relation to the data collection strategy supporting NAP/inclusion:

- Data on social, educational and health services must be disaggregated by gender, ethnicity and urban/rural divide

- Baseline indicators should be developed to enable annual performance comparisons of NAP/inclusion against poverty and social exclusion data

- Further data collection strategies must fit within the existing structure of the Office for Social Inclusion's Data Strategy and tackle significant data deficits in relation to areas and groups such as people with disabilities, ethnic minority groups, Travellers, gays, lesbians and bisexuals, rural poverty and food poverty

- The need to develop mechanisms to collect and process poverty data in relation to smaller geographical areas

- The need to establish appropriate labour market data collection mechanisms for identified target groups to enable monitoring of progress towards the achievement of employment targets within NAP/inclusion.

Many submissions (19) called for improved data collection mechanisms to develop an accurate, appropriate and comprehensive picture of the needs and experiences of vulnerable groups, with general agreement that significant data deficits exist with regard to local and regional poverty data and specific groups notably, Travellers, homeless persons, carers, women, lone parents, and LGBs. Submissions called for additional data collection in relation to:

- Travellers access and participation in education and health services and the labour market (4)

- Homelessness (3)

- Lone parents access to and participation in education, employment and health services (2)

- Carers experiences of poverty (1)

- Basic education needs of socially excluded adults (1)

- The needs and experiences of lesbians, gays and bisexuals (1)

- Dietary behaviour and social inequalities in dietary behaviour (1)

- Educational, health, housing and welfare needs of migrant workers and their families (1).

Other submissions called for specific research to be undertaken on for example, the relationship between social exclusion and mental health (Schizophrenia Ireland), domestic violence issues (Exchange House, Travellers Services), barriers faced by lone parents in accessing services (One Family), the health status of Travellers and lone parents (OPEN, Irish Travellers Movement, Pavee Point) and the relationship between NAP/inclusion priority areas and food poverty and social inequality in food (Crosscare).

6.5.2 Poverty proofing

A number of submissions (16) called for enhanced poverty and equality proofing of legislative frameworks. Submissions favoured the continued provision of the necessary support and resources to enable the entrenchment of poverty and equality proofing as working tools within public policy making and implementation.

In addition, many felt that poverty proofing of policies did not necessarily ensure that policies did not have an unexpected negative impact on vulnerable groups. A large number of submissions argued for a variety of extended proofing processes including rural, equality, mental health, health impact assessments, disability literacy, child, lone parents and gender proofing, and for proofing mechanisms to recognise and respond to the needs of vulnerable individuals and families including those who are homeless, children, minority ethnic groups, Travellers, lesbians, gays and bisexuals, and those with low literacy and numeracy skills. One submission called for the development and mainstreaming of the pilot integrated proofing process developed by The Equality Authority.

6.5.3 Co-ordination of NAP/inclusion with overall government policies

A striking aspect of many of the submissions was the extent to which they identified ways in which the achievement of NAP/inclusion objectives could be accomplished through the implementation of existing legislation or the implementation of recommendations and findings by previous government task forces/committees in relation to specific policy areas and target groups. It was felt to be vitally important that the myriad of different strategies interact and are interdependent where possible in order to provide coherent solutions to policy issues. Specific reference was made to tying in the implementation of the recommendations of the following reports with the implementation of NAP/inclusion 2006–2008:

- *National Spatial Strategy*
- *National Disability Strategy*
- *Implementing Equality for Older People* (The Equality Authority)
- *Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Illness and Disability Payment Scheme* (2003)
- Report of the Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs on *The Position of Carers* (2003)
- The report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community
- The *Traveller Education Strategy* and the *Traveller Health Strategy 2002-2005*
- The Report of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- The Department of Education and Science's *Educational Inclusion Action Plan*

- The recommendations of the Educational Disadvantage Committee
- The *White Paper on Lifelong Learning*
- NESF (2005) report on *Early Childhood Care and Education*
- *Report on the Expansion of the Cervical Screening Programme*
- *White Paper on Voluntary Action*
- *Strategic Plan of the National Steering Committee on Violence Against Women*
- The forthcoming National Development Plan 2006- 2010.

Submissions also proposed the establishment of a range of new bodies to oversee and monitor the implementation of particular policy objectives in the areas of housing, transport and general and health services, including:

- A Rural Housing Commission to deal with issues of housing and village design in rural areas
- A National Rural Transport Office to link and support the development of rural transport services
- A Traveller Accommodation Agency to monitor the adequacy and delivery of local Traveller Accommodation Programmes
- A dedicated Housing Advice Service for older people to assist with the identification of suitable accommodation options
- A statutory independent complaints and appeals procedure within the health and social services
- An Advocacy Office to represent socially excluded individuals in their dealings with public services
- An Immigration Ombudsman to monitor admission, residency and other related immigration and citizenship issues.

A number of submissions emphasised the fundamental need for ongoing co-ordination amongst government departments to create greater alignment between policy areas and 'joined-up' policy to address poverty and social exclusion. The submission of the Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force called for the continuation of Special Initiatives in any future social partnership agreements to enable social partners to work together to reduce the impact of social inequalities on particularly vulnerable groups.

6.5.4 Co-ordination at a local level

There was recognition of the growing participation of local government in the NAP/inclusion processes through for example, the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network, the pilot Social Inclusion Units in Local Authorities and inclusion of a social inclusion dimension in City/County Development Board Strategies. One submission noted that there are clear links between NAP/inclusion and the work of Local Authorities, particularly in relation to housing and accommodation, but also in relation to urban poverty, rural disadvantage and access to services in general. Particular reference was made in a number of submissions to the work of the pilot Social Inclusion Units within Local Authorities. Proposals in relation to the work of these units include:

- The development of a national-local structure to advance social inclusion in Local Authorities including a structured feedback process and the development of linkages between the delivery of social inclusion at national and local level including community and voluntary organisations (11)
- Mainstreaming of Social Inclusion Units across all Local Authorities and mainstreaming of local government social inclusion work through the relevant government departments (4).

It was argued that Local Authorities could partner other agencies and organisations to deliver targets on health, education and unemployment, particularly in the context of their role with City/County Development Boards, the work of their Strategic Policy Committees, the implementation of RAPID and support for community fora/platforms (Joint submission by the Eight Pilot Local Government Social Inclusion Units). A range of submissions called for the establishment of clear structures to support the implementation of local social cohesion measures.

Other suggestions for improving delivery and co-ordination at a local level include:

- Mapping of local level actors and activities
- Identification of objectives and indicators for use at local level that are related to the national objectives and indicators specified within NAP/inclusion
- Require all relevant bodies involved in anti-poverty and social inclusion activities to develop a strategy linking local priorities to the National Action Plan
- Include a social inclusion agenda in Local Authorities 5-year Corporate Plan and annual operational programmes and link this to NAP/inclusion targets
- Recognition of the usefulness of local Anti-Poverty Strategies developed by local authorities in understanding the dynamics of particular disadvantaged areas and communities

- Allocation of responsibility for poverty proofing at the local level to the Social Inclusion Measure Groups of City/County Development Boards with support from Local Authority Social Inclusion Units
- Allocation of funding to City/County Development Boards to support the work of community and voluntary groups engaging in anti-poverty work
- Anti-poverty and social exclusion strategies should build upon the work of City/County Development Boards, RAPID programmes, childcare companies, Local Drugs Task Forces and Community Development organisations in order to specifically deal with local actions
- Additional recognition and support for the delivery of the Integrated Target Group Plans at local level
- Establishment of a concrete mechanism to align the work of the Local Development Social Inclusion Project and Community Development Projects with NAP/inclusion targets and to measure their contribution to progress towards achieving these targets.

A number of submissions referred to concerns regarding the lack of impact being made by NAP/inclusion at the very local level in the most disadvantaged areas. It was suggested that NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 prioritise the development of a model of practice at local community level for active engagement of local and community development organisations working in disadvantaged areas (Ringsend Action Project).

6.5.5 Cross-border co-operation

The submission from the Combat Poverty Agency called for greater attention to be paid to the development of North-South collaborative work to promote inclusion and peace-building on an all-Ireland basis.

6.5.6 Supports for local and community sector

There was widespread consensus regarding the importance of clearly articulating the local and community dimension within NAP/inclusion. Submissions (14) argued for increased supports for community and voluntary organisations involved in anti-poverty and social exclusion work, in particular the provision of multi-annual funding to aid strategic planning and the implementation of the commitments within the *White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity*. There was strong support for a continued focus on community development approaches in anti-poverty work. However, the submission of the Irish Travellers Movement noted what it termed the disparity between commitments given in government strategies and policies to the development of an 'enabling approach' and 'the adoption of community development principles of participation and inclusion' and the reality of government agencies/departments dealings with the community and voluntary sector for example, the exclusion of the Community Platform and its member organisations from important institutions following the decision not to sign up to *Sustaining Progress*.

A number of submissions (6) called for continued support and resources for the National Anti-Poverty Networks Programme arguing that it formed a key support for grassroots anti-poverty work and facilitated the involvement of those directly experiencing poverty in policymaking. Submissions expressed their support for the work of the Combat Poverty Agency particularly its role in linking anti-poverty activity to policymaking processes and its support for community development approaches to tackling poverty.

One submission called for the discontinuing of the policy under which Community Development Projects (CDP) work plans must be endorsed by the relevant City/County Development Board (CDB) arguing that in some instances conflicts of interest may arise between the proposed work plan of the CDP and that of the CDB (Irish Travellers Movement). This submission also called for an increase in the number of Traveller CDPS and enhanced resourcing of Traveller organisations through the CDP programme and the National Anti-Poverty Networks Programme. One submission called for a review of the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs current process for administering grants to Community Development Projects (Tralee CDP). Other supports requested include:

- A national state-backed insurance scheme for community groups
- Greater recognition for the work of volunteers
- Provision of post-graduate academic programmes in community inclusion
- Development of a knowledge management platform to act as a conduit for partnership building and community learning
- Allocation of a specific budget for the establishment of mainstreaming projects from the previous round of the Equality for Women measure.

6.5.7 Participation of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups

Policies which seek to counter social exclusion must be participative as part of the wider move towards promoting active citizenship, enhancing democracy and community participation. There was general agreement that the NAP/inclusion consultation and implementation processes must support the direct involvement of persons experiencing poverty and social exclusion in decision-making processes.

A number of submissions (12) called for the inclusion of specific measures to promote the conditions required to enable people in poverty to contribute to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of NAP/inclusion 2006–2008. The representation of vulnerable groups on the monitoring and steering committees of relevant state agencies and bodies was suggested as one method of ensuring their contribution to policymaking. One submission struck a note of caution however, warning that processes to enhance participation must recognise the power and resource differentials that exist between particular groups in the policy process.

Six submissions called for the implementation of the recommendations of the *White Paper on Voluntary Action* to support the involvement of relevant target groups in policy development, implementation and monitoring processes. The role of advocacy groups and initiatives in preventing the exclusion of vulnerable groups from policy and practice was emphasised in a number of submissions (4), with calls for NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 to acknowledge the importance of advocacy organisations and approaches in facilitating vulnerable people to access their rights and entitlements. One submission noted the importance of state agencies and bodies developing appropriate outreach strategies to underpin their work with marginalised groups (Irish Travellers Movement).

A number of possible suggestions were advanced for enhancing participation including the establishment of:

- An electoral participation initiative for disadvantaged communities as per the commitment within the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (Irish Travellers Movement)
- Citizens juries to monitor the achievement of health and housing targets (Network of Service Providers for One Parent Families in Tralee)
- Client councils' to represent users of services experiencing poverty and social exclusion (Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force)
- A national 'Active Citizen' co-operative to promote the principles of active civic engagement (The Dublin 12 Active Citizens).

6.5.8 Monitoring and evaluation

Few submissions discussed the monitoring and evaluation of NAP/inclusion although there was much discussion of the persistence of data deficits and the corresponding difficulties in measuring progress towards the achievement of NAP/inclusion targets. The involvement of all stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation processes was seen as critical with respondents (13) arguing for the allocation of a specific budget line to enable the effective participation of the community and voluntary sector in these processes.

A number of submissions called for the identification of broad objectives and indicators for use at local level that are linked to national level objectives and indicators in NAP/inclusion. One submission called for an evaluation of NAP/inclusion to-date to measure its impact at national and community level and for the 2006–2008 Plan to include a dissemination strategy and implementation plan for each objective and key target (Centre for Community Inclusion). Others called for:

- The setting of targets to ensure that resources specified within the NAP/inclusion are allocated during the lifetime of the plan and their outcomes measured

- The provision of regular data by publicly funded bodies and agencies to monitor the progress and implementation of the NAP/inclusion as it relates to their work

- The evaluation of NAP/inclusion policies and related actions to clearly indicate their impact on one-parent families (Traveller Health Unit, HSE Southern Area; Students, Diploma in Community Rehabilitation, UCD; One Family)

- Regular gender impact analyses of all social and economic policies and anti-poverty measures and suggested the use of a human rights framework as a tool against which to measure progress in the elimination of poverty (The Women's Human Rights Alliance).

6.5.9 Corporate social responsibility

Two submissions explicitly referenced the role of the private sector in NAP/inclusion. The Combat Poverty Agency called for the inclusion of corporate social responsibility as an explicit element of the regulatory framework for Irish business and for public and private sector companies to be encouraged to develop corporate social responsibility strategies. A submission also called for third level institutions to initiate Professional Development Programmes in the area of corporate social responsibility. The submission by Crosscare discussed the potential role of private industry in developing good practice in corporate business efforts to address food poverty and called for NAP/inclusion to explore and promote such initiatives. Finally, the submission of the South West Inner City Cluster called for the development of a transparent, monitoring system to track the cost-benefit analysis of Public-Private-Partnerships and the development of protocols for engagement with these.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE

ORGANISATIONS/INDIVIDUALS WHO MADE SUBMISSIONS

Age Action Ireland
Area Development Management Ltd (Pobal)
ATD Fourth World

Ballymun Local Drugs Task Force
Barnardos
Belcamp Estate Steering Committee
Border, Midland and Western Regional Assembly
Bray Partnership Marginalised, Disadvantaged and Unemployed Cluster Group
Bray Partnership (Community Development Team)

Care Alliance Ireland
Centre for Community Inclusion, St Angela's College, Sligo
Clara Family Resource Centre
Combat Poverty Agency
Comhairle
Community Development Department, Health Services Executive, Wexford Community Services
CORI Justice Commission
Cork City Council
Crosscare

Dalton, G
Dublin City Council Social Inclusion Unit

Emigrant Advice
Exchange House Travellers Service

Family Support Agency
Ferdia
Financial Regulator
Free Legal Aid Centres

Gallagher, D (Consumer Association of Ireland)

Gay and Lesbian Equality Network

Hallissey, M&M

Headway Ireland

Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Irish Rural Link

Irish Senior Citizens Parliament

Irish Traveller Movement

Irish Wheelchair Association

Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs

Joint Submission by Focus Ireland, Irish Traveller Movement, Simon Communities of Ireland, Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Threshold

Joint Submission by the Eight Local Government Social Inclusion Units

KWCD Partnership

Lakelands Football Club

McCarthy, P.J.

Meehan, R

Migrants Rights Centre

National Adult Literacy Agency

National Women's Council of Ireland

Network of Service Providers to One Parent Families in Tralee

Neylon, R

O'Cleirigh, P

O'Neill, T

O'Shea, S

One Parent Exchange and Network

One Family

Pavee Point

People with Disabilities in Ireland

Presentation Centre for Policy and Systemic Change

REHAB
RGDATA
Ringsend Action Project Limited
Roscommon County Council

Schizophrenia Ireland
School of Applied Social Science, UCD
Simon Communities of Ireland
Society of St Vincent de Paul
South Dublin County Council Social Inclusion Unit
South and Mid-West Community Development and Family Resource Centre Programmes
South West Inner City Cluster
Students, Diploma in Community Rehabilitation, UCD
Summerhill Active Retirement Group

Tallaght Partnership
The Donahies Community School (Adult Students)
The Dublin 12 Active Citizens
Threshold
Tralee Community Development Project
Traveller Health Unit, Health Services Executive Southern Area
Treoir

UCD and UCD Students Union

Vincentian Partnership for Justice

Wicklow County Council, Social Inclusion Unit
Women's Aid
Women's Education and Resource Centre, UCD
Women's Equality in Bray
Women's Human Rights Alliance

APPENDIX TWO

OSI REQUEST FOR WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS – CONSULTATION FORMAT AND GUIDELINES

The Office for Social Inclusion provided detailed Guidelines for those wishing to make a written submission in response to the first stage of the consultation process. The Guidelines identified the broad objectives for the national plans as set out below in bold print with brief explanations in ordinary type, where necessary:

Facilitating participation in employment;

Facilitating access by all to

a) **Resources**, such as social welfare payments,

b) **Rights**,

c) **Goods**, and

d) **Services**, such as health, education, housing, transport, cultural, legal, recreational and sporting services;

Preventing the risks of exclusion such as homelessness, addiction, indebtedness, living in disadvantaged areas;

Helping the most vulnerable groups such as children, lone parents, older people, people with disabilities, the unemployed, migrants, Travellers, ethnic minorities, prisoners families, people discharged from institutions;

Mobilising all relevant bodies in fighting poverty and social exclusion, such as creating greater awareness about the plan among policy makers, other stakeholders and the general public, ensuring that the plan's objectives are taken into account in policy development and implementation and in the administration of services and programmes, facilitating consultation at all stages of monitoring and evaluating its implementation and its further development.

The Guidelines noted that the importance of promoting equality between men and women in all aspects of the fight against poverty and social exclusion should be taken into account in making proposals.

Those making submissions were then asked to set out the policy measures they would wish to have included in the plan.

PART TWO

Consultation Seminars on NAP/inclusion 2006–2008

Report by
Sinead Riordan
The Policy Institute, Trinity College Dublin

SECTION ONE
Introduction

This report summarises the main conclusions arising from the regional consultation seminars organised by the Office for Social Inclusion to inform the development of the NAP/inclusion 2006–2008. Seven regional seminars were held during November and December 2005 in Carlow; Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim; Cork; Dublin; Donegal; Limerick; and Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. The seminars were designed to support the participation within the NAP/inclusion process, of those with either direct experience of poverty and/or who work with groups and communities experiencing social exclusion. A total of 512 people attended the seminars including representatives from government departments, state agencies, the community and voluntary sector, and members of the general public.

The seminars sought to gather participants' views on the local, regional and national implementation of the NAP/inclusion policies and measures. Seminars were structured to elicit participants' views on the implementation and success of the NAP/inclusion actions and measures in respect of facilitating access to employment, education and training, health and care, and housing and income supports. Seminars also sought to explore the urban and rural dimensions of poverty and gender issues. Participants were asked to:

- Identify priorities for change in respect of the above actions
- Identify what policies and measures worked
- Identify the policies and measures that were not working in respect of each of the above areas
- Suggest improvements to current policies and actions.

SECTION TWO

General comments on progress

At each seminar there was some discussion and comment on the general economic and social context within which the NAP/inclusion 2006–2008 is being designed. A frequent comment related to the perceived juxtaposition between the high economic growth enjoyed by certain groups in Irish society and the continued marginalisation and exclusion of vulnerable groups from full participation in society. Unsurprisingly, regional disparities and differences in rural and urban experiences of poverty and social exclusion emerged as a strong theme.

Many participants commented on progress achieved to-date in tackling poverty and social exclusion. It was widely agreed that previous NAP/inclusion policies and measures had led to improvements in the design and implementation of policies, programmes and services of major significance to the lives of those experiencing poverty and/or social exclusion. Participants welcomed the process by which specific groups are identified as vulnerable and targeted for additional supports and measures within the NAP/inclusion. It was observed that a number of additional groups should be identified as vulnerable in the NAP/inclusion namely, carers, lone parents and the rural poor. Positive feedback was received regarding improvements in the provision of active labour market programmes for vulnerable groups, educational policies (particularly those targeted at improving school retention and completion rates and second-chance and vocational training), specialist primary healthcare pilot initiatives, housing income supports and initiatives to improve access to transport in rural areas.

With respect to the institutional structures underpinning the NAP/inclusion, progress was noted in respect of internal policy co-ordination across national, regional and local government. Government departments in general were considered to have improved the level and quality of customer service offered to members of the public. Other notable improvements included an increase in integrated or co-ordinated service delivery across the range of service providers. However, steps towards developing integrated policy and implementation were believed to be hampered by:

- Some continued reluctance on the part of agencies/organisations to engage with other agencies to develop integrated service responses due to competing organisational objectives and remits
- A lack of 'real' consultation with stakeholders in policy development and implementation
- Limited implementation of shared information management systems precluding the sharing of common data across agencies and the development of responses tailored to individual/local/regional need
- The lack of data on local and regional trends (e.g., poverty, labour market), which militates against the development of integrated and tailored service response at local and regional level. Enhanced, targeted data collection was viewed as essential to enabling the NAP/inclusion to identify and address the needs of disadvantaged groups

- Competition amongst agencies and organisations for a limited pool of funding. This was identified as a particular issue for the community and voluntary sector. The lack of multi-annual funding for community and voluntary service providers was seen as a limiting such providers' ability to implement and develop strategic, long-term services.

SECTION THREE

Cross cutting issues

3.1 The rural/urban dimension of poverty and social exclusion

A strong message emerging from the consultation was the need to ensure that the NAP/inclusion policies and programmes are cognisant of, and responsive to, the different needs of those experiencing poverty in rural and urban areas.

Priorities for change

- Implementation of rural and urban proofing of the NAP/inclusion policies and programmes
- Development a data strategy to collect data on rural poverty to ensure that the NAP/inclusion policies and programmes reflect and respond to rural experiences of poverty and social exclusion
- Development of regional employment infrastructure supports to support the development of industrial/manufacturing employment in rural and regional areas
- Policies and programmes to prioritise responses to rural unemployment arising from the decline in agricultural employment
- Further investment in basic services in rural and regional areas to address current deficits in provision. Priority service areas include: transport, housing, health and care services and educational provision
- Improvement in transport services for rural and urban dwellers.

What is working?

Specific initiatives identified as working well in rural and urban disadvantaged areas include:

- Rural Transport Initiative
- Community Development Projects
- Family Resource Centres
- Citizen Information Centres
- Money Advice and Budgeting Services
- Rural Social Scheme
- Community Development Support Programmes

- Area Development Partnership companies
- County Development Board Social Inclusion Groups.

These services were variously seen to have improved access to information, provided employment opportunities, helped families address the issue of indebtedness, built the capacity of target groups to participate in policymaking and supported improved consultation processes. In general, it was felt that there was increased co-operation between statutory agencies.

It was acknowledged that the implementation of the RAPID and CLAR programmes had led to positive improvements in service delivery and allocation of resources to disadvantaged urban and rural areas included within the programmes. However, it was considered timely and necessary to review the design and implementation of these programmes to assess impact and to consider the inclusion of new and emerging areas of disadvantage.

What is not working?

Rural areas and smaller urban areas in the regions were not considered to have benefited from the employment growth arising from the Celtic Tiger. Related employment opportunities are heavily centred on major urban areas generating large-scale, long-distance commuting from rural areas to urban centres, spawning a new wave of social problems. The changing nature of agriculture (in particular, the decline in agricultural employment) was considered a potential factor contributing to the exclusion of those who previously may not have experienced poverty or social exclusion. For example, at the Limerick seminar it was noted that the decline in the traditionally robust agricultural economy of Co. Limerick placed a new cohort (i.e. small farmers) at risk of poverty. Measures to address rural poverty, especially amongst farmers, were considered to be insufficient with a number of specific deficiencies identified for e.g., inadequate farm assist thresholds, the ineligibility of low-income farm families for medical cards. Participants from rural areas called for the inclusion of preventative measures within the NAP/inclusion to tackle the potential growth in poverty and social exclusion within communities affected by these changes.

The limited availability of Social Economy scheme places in rural areas was criticised, as were the progression rates from supported employment programmes in general to mainstream employment. It was suggested that prioritising the development of sustainable rural employment would assist in addressing the over-subscription of Community Employment and Social Economy schemes and develop viable progression routes for such scheme participants. The limited availability of flexible employment opportunities in rural areas was seen as a key barrier to the involvement of those with caring responsibilities (especially women) in the labour force.

Deficiencies in access to public transport were acknowledged in both rural and regional urban areas. There was widespread agreement as to the inadequacy of basic service provision in isolated rural areas and that access to essential services was undermined by the lack of rural public transport, which increases individuals' difficulties in accessing the

limited services available. Participants from regional urban areas called for the expansion and development of urban transport systems in response to the growth in urban populations and to facilitate access to services and participation in employment. Broadband services were identified as a vital component missing from rural infrastructure. The absence of such services were considered to hamper efficient business practices, the implementation of the Government's e-Inclusion programme and the development of facilities such as distant learning, etc.

How could things be improved?

A commitment to the generation of rural-based employment opportunities was seen as essential to tackling rural poverty and social exclusion, particularly in light of the decline in full-time agricultural employment opportunities.

Deficits in the rural transport infrastructure should be tackled. For rural areas, participants favoured:

- A greater allocation of resources to support the existing work of the Rural Transport Initiative and to allow for the scheme's national expansion
- Widening the functions of the Rural Transport Initiative to include the provision of transport to participants in active labour market programmes. This would require the involvement of a range of statutory agencies in the design and implementation of this expansion and a commitment by such agencies to meeting the arising additional expenditure
- The introduction of a taxi voucher/waiver system to allow people living in isolated rural areas with limited public transport to use private transport to access essential services
- Improved public and private transport accessibility.

In urban areas, participants called for:

- Improved public and private transport accessibility
- The waiver of the peak hour transport restriction associated with the Free Travel Pass to allow holders to use transport services to access essential services.

The slow development of co-ordinated actions by government departments and local and national agencies was criticised. Participants called for greater co-ordinated action by government departments and agencies on a local and national basis. The issues of poverty and social exclusion in the Border counties were felt to be accentuated by the lack of consideration given within the NAP/inclusion to the impact of the Border and North-South issues on poverty within the region. Specific suggestions included:

- Border, rural and urban proofing of the policies and programmes

- The recognition of Cross-County hinterlands for direct action in addition to local structures
- A move towards SMART NAP/inclusion targets, including interim targets for long-term targets
- The NAP/inclusion should identify and prioritise measures in areas that are currently excluded from access to social cohesion funds.

It was noted that many community and voluntary service providers were insufficiently resourced to implement new national programmes. Community and voluntary organisations should be adequately resourced to enable their participation in such national programmes. The commitments within the *White Paper on Voluntary Activity* should be fully implemented.

It was strongly agreed that the issues of anti-social behaviour and substance misuse are faced by both rural and urban communities. Participants favoured the development of a security-led and social response to these problems namely the development of stronger community policing and the provision of recreational and community facilities in disadvantaged areas. Participants argued that:

- Communities should be involved in the development of community policing policies
- Community police should be named individuals, responsible for named areas. They should be trained in the needs of their designated community
- A level of commitment/consistency is needed to ensure that there is continuity over time in terms of the areas that community police are responsible for. This will enable them to build strong relationships in the community.

Participants called for genuine political will to support the implementation of the National Drugs Strategy, which should focus on responding to emerging needs in rural and urban areas.

3.2 Gender

The Office for Social Inclusion's focus on gender as a cross cutting issue for this consultation process was welcomed and there was broad agreement that the NAP/inclusion should consider and respond to the specific needs of socially excluded men and women. Participants called for the gender proofing of the NAP/inclusion and the gender disaggregation of the Plan's performance indicators. Greater knowledge on women's experience of poverty was necessary to ensure that policies and programmes address the difficulties arising for those with caring responsibilities and the arising barriers to accessing active labour market opportunities. Suggested modification and additions to the NAP/inclusion policies and programmes arising from the consideration of gender issues included:

- Enhanced provision of services and supports for victims of domestic violence
- Measures to tackle the trafficking of women and children
- Measures to address poor health outcomes amongst men and women within vulnerable groups
- Development of gender specific health services to encourage take-up of services
- Recognition of the growing incidence of suicide and substance abuse among young males in rural and urban areas and provision of the range of necessary services to address this.

SECTION FOUR

Facilitating access to employment

Priorities for change

The priorities identified for change can be grouped into four broad areas of action:

- Actions to support and expand existing active labour market programmes and measures
- Actions to promote inclusive labour market opportunities
- Actions to support and improve the development of integrated policies and programmes
- Actions to support the participation of vulnerable groups.

Priorities for change

- Recognition that social inclusion measures and national development priorities should be developed in a complementary manner
- Inclusion of social inclusion measures within National Development Plan
- Greater inter-agency co-operation in the delivery of services
- Improved data collection, analysis and monitoring of national and regional labour market trends
- Consultation and involvement of vulnerable groups in the development of active labour market programmes
- Review of the operation of social welfare and taxation systems to remove employment disincentives
- Commitment to tackling long-term and youth unemployment
- Development of sustainable employment opportunities in rural and regional areas
- Development of rural employment and industrial infrastructure to support sustainable employment opportunities
- Focus on improving progression rates from active labour market programmes to sustainable employment

(continued overleaf)

- Expansion of supported employment programmes particularly the Community Employment Scheme, Rural Social Scheme and the Employment Support Programme for People with Disabilities
- Recognise the role played by the transport infrastructure in facilitating access to employment and active labour market programmes and address identified weaknesses in such provision
- Enhanced provision of affordable and accessible early childhood care and education
- Specialised supports for Travellers, carers and people with disabilities to enable participation in active labour market programmes
- Recognition and support for participation in atypical employment e.g., carers, seasonal employment, part-time employment
- Prioritise the role of employers in supporting the participation of vulnerable groups in employment and in facilitating access by workers with low-level qualifications to further education and training opportunities
- Protection and enforcement of employment rights amongst migrant workers
- Flexible provision of training and education programmes to facilitate participation by those with caring responsibilities
- Mainstream successful pilot programmes of good practice in employment, education and training
- Up-skilling of workers with low-level qualifications
- Access to education and training opportunities for migrant workers.

What is working?

There was broad support for the range of targeted active labour market programmes (ALMPs) in particular, measures for vulnerable and marginalised groups, and acknowledgement that participation in paid employment was key to combating poverty and social exclusion. Discussions acknowledged the significant decrease in national unemployment rates.

Participants identified a range of programmes and measures which they believed supported access to employment and training opportunities including:

- Community Employment Scheme and the Rural Social Scheme – the value of which was seen to equally accrue both to the individual participant and the broader community
- Employment Support Schemes for people with disabilities
- Jobs Initiative
- Business-Training Programmes
- Social Economy Programme
- Community Development Projects.

Participants emphasised the importance of developing local employment programmes whose structures are informed by local employers and support agencies. The focus on developing individually tailored measures and employment supports (as implemented through the National Employment Action Plan) was praised. General trends towards increased inter-agency working as evidenced by increased inter-agency co-operation in the delivery of services were welcomed. The transfer of the Social Economy Programme to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was welcomed.

The provision of additional targeted income financial supports for those seeking to return to the labour market or engage in vocational education and training opportunities was welcomed. Specific supports referenced included:

- Family Income Supplement
- Back to Work Allowance
- Enterprise allowance
- Provision of childcare and eldercare allowances to support the participation of those with caring responsibilities in education and training opportunities.

Some improvements in the provision of and access to childcare supports were noted (with particular acknowledgement of the role of County Childcare Committees in this). The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme was seen as a valuable support for those looking to re-enter employment/education. Welcomed improvements in education and training provision and structure included the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and the increase in VEC Adult Guidance and VTOS schemes.

What is not working?

Across the seminars, a range of common themes emerged in relation to specific policies, programmes and issues, which it was felt were not being adequately addressed at present. Significant weaknesses were identified and/or discontent expressed with regard to:

- The failure to address key barriers to participation in employment and education and training opportunities including the lack of childcare and eldercare and access to transport
- Continued presence of employment disincentives arising from the interaction of the social welfare and taxation systems
- The lack of priority given to the development of sustainable employment opportunities in rural and small urban areas
- Limited availability of targeted initiatives responsive to the needs of vulnerable groups
- Cutbacks in existing supported employment programmes including the Community Employment Scheme and FAS funded labour programmes. These cutbacks were believed to have greatly reduced the opportunities for vulnerable groups, especially people with disabilities, to progress to mainstream employment
- The continued exclusion of vulnerable groups – including Travellers, carers, migrant workers, lone and teenage parents, those experiencing intergenerational unemployment and people with disabilities – from participation in employment and vocational education and training opportunities
- Continued presence of unemployment black spots in rural and small urban areas, characterised by high long-term unemployment and the exclusion of particular groups from the labour market.

How should things be done better?

At the policy level, there were calls for greater integration and co-ordination of policies across government departments and between existing strategies. Many suggestions were proposed in respect of improving the structures supporting the operation of active labour market policies and programmes including:

- Greater integration of active labour market policies and programmes across key government departments e.g., Department of Education and Science and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

- Better data collection and management information systems to ensure an adequate flow of information on rural poverty and assist with poverty mapping

- Better information sharing and common data systems across agencies. This serves the dual purpose of supporting inter-agency working by raising awareness amongst diverse agencies and organisations of the variety of actors and providers in each local and regional area

- Provision of diversity awareness training to front line service providers.

Some seminars discussed the use of labour market measures to achieve social inclusion objectives. Some argued that social inclusion and labour force measures should be discrete and stand-alone, while others argued that participation in the labour force and the achievement of social inclusion are closely intertwined requiring each type of measure to take account of and consider each other's objectives. Following from this, the importance of including social inclusion measures in the next National Development Plan was emphasised.

A strong theme was the change in rural employment opportunities with the decline of traditional occupations for example, farming, textiles and fishing, as sources of well-paid, sustainable employment. There was widespread agreement that future regional employment and training programmes should concentrate on identifying and supporting sustainable employment in suitable sectors e.g., tourism, hospitality. Questions were raised regarding the extent to which active labour market policies and programmes, including existing schemes such as the Social Economy Programme, were structured to respond to emerging and future trends in rural unemployment, with particular question marks hanging over the extent to which such programmes created genuine sustainable employment. It was argued that policies and programmes must recognise the particularities of rural unemployment and poverty and recognise that even within areas with small populations, a great diversity of needs exist amongst and within vulnerable groups which programmes and structures must respond to and engage within in order to be successful. Greater co-ordination between state agencies working to achieve this objective was seen as vital and it was suggested that County Development Boards play a lead role in this.

A range of proposals emerged in relation to improving the overall design and implementation of active labour market programmes and measures. It was suggested that such programmes should in general prioritise the identification of barriers to participation and:

- Increase the flexibility of programme structures to facilitate the participation of those with caring responsibilities, engaged in employment, etc.

- Recognise and support atypical forms of employment
- Link to mainstream educational programmes to facilitate the transition from education/training to mainstream employment and or additional vocational education and training opportunities
- Prioritise the progression of participants to sustainable employment
- Reconsider the length of time than any one participant is eligible to remain within active labour market programmes in recognition of the need of some for longer-term support before transitioning to mainstream employment
- Address youth (18-25 years) unemployment by, for example, developing a scheme of targeted supported employment similar to the Community Employment Scheme
- Respond to barriers to participation arising from lack of access to basic services e.g., improved public transport in rural areas
- Accurate and accessible information on the opportunities available for those excluded from the labour market was deemed essential. Such information should be literacy proofed and available in a range of media and languages.

There was agreement that a more strategic policy focus was required to support the up-skilling of employees with low-level qualifications. Specific proposals included:

- Provision of flexible training (e.g., full-time, day-time) as the requirement for full-time participation often restricts full-time employees from taking part
- A greater emphasis placed on employers' role in ensuring employees access to training and up-skilling opportunities. Social partnership should promote the role of small, medium and large employers in facilitating the up-skilling of the labour force.

It was generally agreed that policies and programmes must address the perceived existence of a 'benefits trap' and the associated disincentives to participation in employment and/or education/training initiatives arising from the interaction of the social welfare and taxation systems. It was argued that particular attention should be given to:

- The tapered retention of secondary benefits as recipients' transition into long-term, sustainable employment
- A review of the earning limits as they apply to the retention of particular social welfare payments upon moving into employment.

A range of suggestions were advanced in respect of improving policies and programmes as they apply to a number of specific groups.

People with disabilities

- A strong argument was advanced for recognition of the links between a person's general health and the potential role of employment in facilitating general health. The potential occupational therapy side-benefits arising from participation in employment for people with disabilities were identified
- Widen eligibility for the Supported Employment Programme, the Disability Allowance, etc.
- Ease restrictions on the receipt of benefits by people with disabilities in employment for example, allow retention of the medical card and other secondary benefits
- Require employers to employ a legal minimum percentage of people with disabilities
- Enforce minimum accessibility standards for general infrastructure (transport, buildings)
- Allow persons in receipt of invalidity pensions to engage in any form of paid employment or active labour market programme.

Travellers

- Active labour market policies and programmes must be flexible and responsive to the needs of Travellers. A specific issue was the appropriateness of current incentives offered through existing employment and training schemes to encourage the participation of Travellers
- Review the adequacy of current financial incentives offered to encourage participation in active labour market programmes
- Active labour market programmes should support the development of self-employment opportunities as this is often the preferred employment option of Travellers
- Introduce measures to address discrimination faced by Travellers in accessing employment opportunities
- Review the qualification related entry requirements for training and education courses and ensure that these are not exclusive of Travellers.

Migrant workers

There was a strong sense that in the event of an economic downturn, migrant workers would be particularly at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Specific suggestions included:

- The implementation of a national strategy to support the integration of migrant workers
- Facilitating the participation of migrant workers in vocational education and training opportunities
- Repeal of the Habitual Residency Condition
- Accreditation of overseas qualifications.

Carers

- Allow carers to access active labour market programmes without losing their carers allowance and secondary benefits
- Increase the number of hours which a carer may work while in receipt of benefits
- Increase in respite care places.

SECTION FIVE

Facilitating access to services – education

Priorities for change

The priorities identified for change can be grouped into four broad areas of action:

- Data and monitoring systems
- Actions to support adult education and life-long learning
- Actions to address educational disadvantage at primary and secondary level
- Actions to support the participation of vulnerable groups in education.

Priorities for change

- Greater inter-agency co-operation in the delivery of services
- Adoption of a rights-based approach to access to education
- Improved monitoring and data analysis mechanisms to track progression through education
- Equitable targeting of resources and supports for all levels of education
- Develop a system whereby educational resources and supports follow the learner
- Universal access to early childhood care and education services
- Reduction in primary and secondary level class sizes
- Provide additional support services for children with special educational needs and children with disabilities
- Measures to address early school leaving
- Expansion of educational disadvantage initiatives and mainstream successful pilot initiatives
- Access to vocational education and training opportunities for migrant workers
- Accreditation of overseas qualifications
- Review the system of educational income supports

(continued overleaf)

- Prioritise provision of, and access to, adult education and lifelong learning opportunities
- Increase the participation rate of male adults in adult education programmes
- Increased funding and resources for community and voluntary providers of adult education services
- Review system of income supports for participants in third level education.

What is working?

The critical role that schools and the wider education system have to play in tackling poverty and social exclusion was emphasised. There was broad support for a range of specialist intervention and support programmes to tackle educational disadvantage but it was important that the state commitment to the provision of long-term, multi-annual funding of programmes to achieve best results. At a policy level, the Department of Education and Science's new strategy, *Delivering Equality of Opportunity* in schools, was welcomed.

A range of measures in relation to educational provision for three broad groups – people with disabilities, early school leavers and adult learners – were seen to work well. In relation to children and people with disabilities or special needs the following were felt to work well:

- Individual learning plans developed by educational psychologists for disabled children
- Tailored curriculum's for children with special needs
- Increase in number of resource and special needs teachers
- Commitment to supporting the participation and integration of children with disabilities and special needs in mainstream education
- An identified instance of best practice was the development of third level access programmes for people with disabilities by Sligo Institute of Technology and St Angela's College, Sligo.

In respect of measures to combat early school leaving the following were felt to work well:

- The School Completion Programme
- Increase in variety of programmes available to second-level students to encourage their retention in education e.g., Leaving Certificate Applied
- Specific training and education programmes for early school leavers or those seeking to return to education/training such as Youthreach, Post Leaving Certificate Programmes, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and the Back to Education Scheme for lone parents.

Specialist intervention programmes (e.g., community access and pre-development courses, adult guidance counselling services) supporting the return and participation of adult learners in education were praised. It was noted however, that the mainstreaming of successful pilot initiatives often resulted in the loss of a number of the key characteristics that contributed to a project's success. Community and voluntary organisations were acknowledged as playing a valuable role in the provision of adult education opportunities. Specialist support programmes for adult learners (e.g., National Learning Network) were felt to work well. New developments in adult education provision were welcomed particularly:

- The appointment of Community Education Facilitators by Vocational Education Committees (VEC)
- Improved access to adult education through VEC Community Training Centres
- Improved provision of adult literacy services
- The FETAC system of qualification accreditation – certifies and acknowledges educational and training achievements across a wide range of programmes and measures. This was considered an important step towards recognising and valuing the diversity of educational and training experiences.

What is not working?

The present education system appears to be continually failing some students. In particular, there are major gaps in educational resources and supports for Travellers and children with disabilities within mainstream education.

A range of general and specific comments were offered in relation to perceived weaknesses in mainstream primary and second level education provision:

- Primary and second level curriculums are overly focused on academic qualifications and should also emphasise vocational skills and qualifications

- Class sizes are too large
- There is a lack of specialist educational support services and diagnosis and assessment services for children with behavioural and learning difficulties
- Large numbers of early school leavers and lack of integrated response between services to identify potential early school leavers.

Community based adult education providers are challenged by low resources and the lack of dedicated long-term funding and this issue must be urgently addressed. There remained a clear need for alternative education programmes for particularly vulnerable or isolated groups and increased provision in rural areas.

High education and training costs (e.g., fees) were felt to exclude many low-income earners and welfare dependents from participation. The eligibility criteria for accessing educational income supports were considered to be overly rigid (e.g., requirement that one is a full-time student) and exclusionary of many. The lack of training and education opportunities in rural areas for people with a learning disability who have completed second-level education was noted as was the falling participation rate of adult males in adult education and further learning opportunities.

How should things be done better?

A wide ranging set of proposals were advanced in respect of how educational provision and support could be improved – comments focused on:

- Additional resources and supports for primary and secondary schools
- Educational supports and provisions for vulnerable groups particularly children with disabilities and early school leavers
- Community based life-long and second-chance education
- Increased investment in early childhood care and education programmes
- Integrated policy and service design and implementation.

There was generally felt to be a number of key challenges yet to be addressed within mainstream primary and secondary education provision. Participants called for:

- A reduction in class sizes at primary and second level
- More specialist educational support services for children with special needs to enable their participation in mainstream education
- Universal access to early childhood care and education services

- An increase in breakfast/after-school/homework clubs
- The development of an individual learning plan for children in education reflective of their individual skills
- Increased provision of specialist educational services (e.g., psychological services, special needs teachers) in rural and urban disadvantaged areas.

In respect of educational supports for vulnerable groups, participants favoured:

- The implementation of appropriate support mechanisms (e.g., access to psychological services, speech therapy, tailored academic curriculum) to support the different learning abilities of students
- More outreach services for Travellers and children who are homeless
- Resources to follow 'the learner' rather than being tied to a particular cycle or programme of education
- Enhanced and co-ordinated institutional supports for third level students requiring additional supports and/or with special support needs
- Additional supports for young parents in education e.g., more affordable and accessible childcare places, and more opportunities for participation in pre-schools for children from disadvantaged families.

In relation to the participation of children and adults with disabilities or special needs in education, participants called for:

- A review of the adequacy and efficiency of current educational provision and supports for people with disabilities
- Greater provision of educational supports for disabled children and children with behavioural and learning difficulties
- Disability awareness training for teachers and service providers
- The development of specific programmes, in line with international models of best practice, to encourage and enable children with disabilities in the transition from second to third level education.

With regard to early school leavers, participants identified the following issues:

- Expansion of youth vocational education and training programmes
- Reduce the age threshold for youth vocational education and training programmes

- The provision of income supports for early school leavers engaged in specific training programmes, e.g., Youthreach, was seen in some instances to act as a disincentive to children to remain in mainstream education. It was felt that the Department of Education and Science should review its role in the provision of such supports

- The need to prioritise the achievement of agreed school completion targets and reduction in early school leaving.

The provision of community-based adult and life-long education emerged as a strong theme with calls for:

- The development of localised responses and greater co-ordination amongst agencies/services charged with providing transport, education and employment to support the participation of marginalised groups in education and training opportunities

- An increase in adult education provision, including specialist adult education and training support programmes (e.g., the National Learning Network)

- Development of multi-annual funding streams to support community and voluntary providers of adult and community based education

- Greater commitment to funding educational programmes for older people (e.g., computer training) and recognition of the value of life-long learning

- Free access to adult and second chance education (including third level education) for asylum seekers and refugees and provision of English language classes for those for whom English is not their first language

- A review of financial support structures e.g., review the eligibility criteria for the Back to Education Allowance to support the participation of lone parents and low-income employees with low level qualifications who wish to engage in part-time education and up-skilling opportunities

- Ensure childcare and eldercare provision is adequate to meet the needs of adults with caring responsibilities who wish to participate in adult education.

At a policy and implementation level, participants called for:

- Continued attention to developing integrated policy responses to educational needs across departments and agencies e.g., link the Department of Education and Science's Educational Inclusion Strategy to other relevant national strategies

- The implementation of monitoring and data analysis mechanisms to track children's progression between primary and secondary level education and to monitor early school leaving. This data should also inform long-term policy planning
- Identification and promotion of models of good practice for educational services engaging with hard-to-reach and vulnerable communities.

SECTION SIX

Facilitating access to services – health and care

Priorities for change

The priorities identified for change can be grouped into three broad areas of action:

- Actions targeted at increasing the access of vulnerable groups to services
- Actions targeted at improving the institutional and structural supports for policymaking
- Actions targeted at increasing the provision of services.

Priorities for change

- Greater inter-agency co-operation in the planning and delivery of services
- Rights-based holistic approach to health policy planning and service delivery
- Rural and equality proofing, health impact assessments of health policies
- Improve the information and research base in relation to health status, service access and health outcomes for vulnerable groups
- Prioritise the development of sustainable communities, health promotion, access to services etc.
- Targeted primary and secondary health services for vulnerable and isolated groups
- Assign multi-annual funding lines to support community and voluntary health service providers
- Implement a national mental health strategy and develop continuum of services for those with mental health illnesses
- Increase long-term residential care places and subsidise cost of care for low income residents
- Regulation of care facilities
- Greater provision of respite care, sheltered housing and home help services for the elderly

(continued overleaf)

- Increase the income eligibility thresholds for the medical card and grant an automatic entitlement to a full medical card to low-income families, people with disabilities and all children aged less than five years
- Introduce a portable Cost of Disability payment which people can carry with them into education, training and employment
- Improved provision of the range of necessary supports for carers
- Examine access to health services e.g., role of transport
- Continued support for the range of male and female specific health services
- Improved information provision
- Address the privatisation of health care
- Improved children and family services
- Improved health services for the homeless
- Increase in drug and addiction rehabilitation services.

What is working?

Respondents welcomed new institutional structures such as the Health Services Executive, the National Disability Authority and the NAP/inclusion Health Group. Improvements in data strategy for health services were welcomed as were efforts to address data deficits in respect of particular groups. The general operation of regional public health services, primary care initiatives, considering the limited facilities and resources available, was praised. A range of programme and service improvements were name checked as useful and supportive including:

- Dental services
- Improved access to health services for the homeless
- Parenting courses for parents whose children have disabilities or parents with disabilities with non-disabled children
- Social housing provision for the elderly

- Specialist primary healthcare initiatives targeted at vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups such as Traveller Liaison Officers and the Primary Care Course for Travellers
- The widening of access to the medical card service together with the Medical Access Programme was believed to have led to general improvements in access to and take-up of health services amongst vulnerable groups
- The role of Community Development Projects and locally based services provided by community and voluntary groups in facilitating access to services within a community based setting
- The Rural Transport Initiative
- Free Travel Pass for people with disabilities
- Community and voluntary providers of services for the elderly.

It was believed that there was an improved awareness of mental and physical health issues in general across the broad community and a growing acknowledgement of the value of a holistic approach to health and health promotion. In respect of carers the following supports and developments were welcomed:

- Growing awareness of carers and caring issues
- Support provided to local-based carers groups
- Income supports to enable the purchase of respite care
- Introduction of the home care subvention; although there were calls for an increase in the basic rate of the subvention.

Participants identified a range of local and regional services operated by community and voluntary organisations which worked well including rural transport schemes such as Rural Lift and the Social Car Scheme.

What is not working?

Particular deficits were noted in respect of the provision of:

- Mental health services
- Drug and addiction rehabilitation services
- Community-based health promotion services

- Support services for carers
- Respite care options
- Recuperation/step-down services and regional and local nursing home places.

Key gaps identified in current service provision included:

- People with disabilities are not automatically entitled to a medical card
- Inadequacy of current income supports for carers. It was noted that less than one in five carers are in receipt of state income supports and even these recipients do not generally qualify for other State income supports such as contributory pensions
- Lack of respite care for families who act as carers
- Lack of rural transport acts as a barrier to accessing heath services
- Lack of assisted living services to support the independent living of elderly people or those who require a low level of care
- Insufficient male and female specific health services
- Barriers to services arising from age limits: e.g., a person with a disability who reaches the age of 65 is categorised as an older person and their eligibility to services is determined by this latter categorisation. However, this may exclude them from certain services specific to a person with a disability
- Provision of healthcare services for Travellers, drug users, the elderly and carers
- The slow implementation of agreed national health strategies and plans.

The lack of regional health services was identified as a major contributor to poor health outcomes amongst the rural population. This was felt to be aggravated by the lack of input from persons living in rural areas into the national health policy. A strong theme was the difficulties encountered by those living in remote rural areas in accessing primary and secondary health services. Such difficulties were attributed to: (a) the large geographical distances patients had to travel to access services; and (b) a lack of consistency and continuity in service provision. Other barriers to accessing services included a lack of public transport, administrative bureaucracy, access to and ability to interpret information and structural problems.

How should things be done better?

A range of suggested improvements and alterations to a number of specific services and provisions emerged from the broad discussion. A general theme was the need to develop a holistic, rights-based approach to service delivery and provision and to build awareness amongst the wider public and health services of the needs of vulnerable groups particularly carers, people with disabilities and low-income families. Specific suggestions for improvements in institutional mechanisms included:

- Use of health impact assessments across public policy areas
- Implementation of the National Health Strategy
- Enhanced data collection and analysis of change at national, departmental and regional level to ensure an accurate overall picture of the health system's functioning and develop an evidence-based approach to guide policy planning and service delivery
- Improve the information and research base in relation to health status, service access and health outcomes for vulnerable groups
- Rural proof health policy
- Strategy to address data deficits on the health needs and experiences of vulnerable groups including the collection of disaggregated data for health service use and health outcomes within rural areas
- Greater co-ordination and integration of policies and services across government departments and the development of co-ordinated approaches to the delivery of services to vulnerable families
- Creation of a single over-arching funding structure to fund pilot projects in health and care services
- Mainstreaming of successful pilot projects which have been proven to respond to the needs of an area and vulnerable groups
- Provide information that is literacy and numeracy proofed and available in a range of media
- A reduction in the administrative burden required to access entitlements.

The importance of developing sustainable, healthy communities was emphasised and it was strongly argued that the wider environment was an important aspect of this. Participants argued for greater responsibility to be shown by the relevant authorities in this regard but also recognised the need for citizens to take responsibility for building and developing sustainable communities.

A second theme was the need to further develop preventative health services and to deliver these through a variety of settings including schools, community based groups and mainstream health services. It was argued that there should be a greater emphasis on developing preventative solutions to the broad social determinants of health. Participants called for improved access to services such as:

- Psychotherapy and psychological services for children
- Counselling and information provision for vulnerable families to assist them in parenting
- Maternity services and crisis pregnancy support
- Mental health care services
- Substance/alcohol rehabilitation units
- Targeted health services for men and women.

A review of the eligibility criteria for the medical card was recommended as it was widely agreed that the loss of the medical card upon movement into employment acts as a major barrier to participation in employment opportunities for many low-income families.

Mental health care services emerged as a key area requiring additional investment and expansion. These services were vital to combat the growing incidence of suicide, self-harm and depression in rural and small urban communities. Consideration should be given to enabling access to these services through community (e.g., GP) rather than hospital services to increase the uptake of such services. An active, outreach health promotion strategy supported by community based counselling and therapeutic services would help inform awareness of the problems of suicide and substance misuse in rural and urban areas.

Childcare provision was seen as a very important element of health and care but participants argued that the local community should play a lead role in the design and development of community childcare services. Community-based, flexible childcare strategies were favoured. The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme was discussed. There was some criticism that childcare places supported by the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme were tied to participation in active labour market programmes as it was felt that this excluded those with caring responsibilities who could not participate in employment/training opportunities but who still required occasional access to flexible childcare provision.

The lack of support services for carers and the elderly was strongly criticised. A range of suggested improvements were outlined in respect of each of these groups.

Carers

- Identification of carers as a vulnerable group within the NAP/inclusion
- Increase in income supports to help carers meet the financial costs arising from caring
- Abolition of the means test for the Carers Allowance
- Automatic entitlement to a medical card for carers
- Increased provision of respite care services for carers and examine alternative methods of providing day and respite care.

Care of the elderly

- Increase the provision of assisted living services to support those who are capable of independent living but require support to do so
- Increase in sheltered/supporting accommodation for those who need care but who do not wish to reside in long-term, residential care
- Extension of the home help service and additional emphasis placed on up-skilling and accrediting home helps
- Regulation and inspection of long-term care facilities
- Increase in recuperative and short-term care placements for the elderly following discharge from hospital
- Increase in state funding support for community and voluntary providers of support services for the elderly.

Strong support was also expressed for the introduction of a portable Cost of Disability payment which people can carry with them into education, training and employment.

SECTION SEVEN

Facilitating access to resources – housing

Priorities for change

The priorities identified for change can be grouped into three broad areas of action:

- Actions targeted at increasing and improving the delivery and supply of social and affordable housing
- Actions targeted at increasing the accessibility of housing for vulnerable groups
- Actions targeted at developing sustainable communities.

Priorities for change

- Adopt a right-based approach to access to housing
- Integrated service delivery across housing providers
- Increase end users and other stakeholders' involvement in planning and implementation of housing policy
- Improved data collection, analysis and monitoring to track housing need
- Ensure that housing supply is brought more into line with demand
- Meet existing NAP/inclusion targets for numbers of new builds under social and affordable housing programmes
- Additional resources to support voluntary and community providers of affordable housing
- Delivery of an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures to meet the needs of different types of household
- Increase supply of social and affordable housing stock in rural areas
- Implementation of the Travellers Accommodation Programme across all local authority areas and monitoring of progress in meeting agreed targets
- Cease the sale of existing social and affordable housing stock

(continued overleaf)

- Expansion of local authority Tenant Liaison Scheme and other tenancy support schemes e.g., pre-tenancy training, estate management schemes
- Refurbishment of disused local authority housing stock and maintenance of existing housing stock
- Address the marginalisation of disadvantaged housing estates
- Increase in diversity of accommodation options for the homeless, people with mental health illnesses
- Increased provision of accommodation for victims of domestic violence in rural areas
- Reduce administrative burden associated with applying for social housing
- Improved information provision on housing rights and entitlements
- Review impact of Habitual Residency Condition on migrants/immigrants ability to access accommodation
- Review the eligibility criteria for the Rent Supplement Scheme with a view to increasing the number of people eligible for the scheme
- Increased regulation of private rental sector.

What is working?

Respondents welcomed the increased focus on the provision and monitoring of social and affordable housing outputs. Similarly, it was felt that there had been tangible improvements in the consultation processes used by government departments and agencies when developing housing legislation and provision, although weaknesses remained. A range of inter-agency initiatives and schemes were identified as working well including:

- Homelessness Forums
- The Voluntary Housing Forum (Limerick)
- Housing Forum which brings together public, private and voluntary organisations involved in housing provision (Cork)

- The implementation of the RAPID programme
- Regional Homeless Officers.

Improvements in the provision of information on housing needs through a more joined-up, inter-agency approach were noted.

A range of improvements in local authority accommodation services and processes to link local authorities with their tenants and the wider community were noted such as:

- The provision of pre-tenancy training was viewed as a positive step in developing and maintaining strong local authority-tenant relationships and supporting good practice in estate management
- The representation of relevant groups on the Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees
- Tenant Liaison Officers and community-based Estate Management Officers
- Shared ownership initiative
- Grants supporting improvements or modifications to local authority housing stock.

It was generally agreed that while the development of Traveller Accommodation Plans was working well at national level, the implementation at local level of these plans by local authorities was less successful due to a lack of grassroots support for the programmes. In areas where the Programmes were felt to be working well, participants praised the provision of a range of different accommodation types and agreement by the relevant local authority to yearly targets in respect of accommodation Traveller families.

The development of voluntary housing provision was welcomed and considered to offer another level and type of social housing particularly suited to tenants with additional needs as it offers services to support the independent living of tenants. Transitional housing schemes, while needing additional resources to support their work, were felt to work well. Improvements in access to emergency housing and accommodation options were noted, particularly the meeting of the NAP/inclusion targets on the provision of emergency accommodation.

What is not working?

Key themes included:

- Insufficient supply of social and affordable housing

- Lack of rural social and affordable housing
- Weaknesses in the implementation of Part V of the Planning Act
- Difficulties faced by certain groups (e.g., single males) in accessing social and affordable housing
- Limited implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes and what was perceived as a lack of commitment on the part of the respective authorities to appropriate consultation with, and involvement of, Travellers in the associated decision-making processes
- The marginalisation of disadvantaged rural and urban local authority housing estates
- Lack of sheltered/supported housing and accommodation for groups with special needs e.g., the elderly, people with disabilities
- Inconsistencies across regions and areas in level and type of homeless service provision.

The ongoing marginalisation of disadvantaged local authority housing estates was noted with concern. The growing trend of the movement of long-term residents to private estates and the increase in privately-owned but rented housing within such estates were considered key factors driving this marginalisation. The turn around time on unoccupied local authority housing was considered to be too slow, resulting in properties being vandalised and rendered unfit for use in the absence of an extensive refurbishment programme.

Particular issues were noted with the supply of appropriate housing options for vulnerable groups (lone parents, separated fathers) and those with special needs in public and private accommodation options. These groups are over represented on local authority housing waiting lists and high private rents act as a barrier to the private rented sector. Particular difficulties in accessing suitable accommodation were noted in relation to homeless or single, low-income males. Key factors contributing to these difficulties included the lack of purpose-build local authority accommodation or private rented accommodation with many units in both the public and private sector targeted at family households. A particular issue arising in relation to private rented accommodation was the high cost of such accommodation and the lower level of rental allowance available to single rent allowance applicants, which accordingly forced many such applicants to rent accommodation unsuitable to their needs. A general theme was the need to ensure that concentrations of members of new Irish communities did not develop in any one housing estate or general area to avoid the potential social exclusion of these communities from the broad populace. Persistent data deficits in respect of the housing needs of vulnerable groups were identified as a key stumbling block to monitoring progress in identifying level and type of housing need and the monitoring of progress in meeting these needs.

Particular deficits were noted in sheltered accommodation provision for those with mental health illnesses and hostel and emergency homeless accommodation. Inconsistent homeless service provision was attributed to the failure to develop standardised measures for the application of homeless services within housing legislation, leading to noticeable regional variances in the extent and type of provision available. Changes in the composition of the homeless population were also referenced and participants called for homeless services to recognise and respond to these. Some argued that current data on the level of homelessness did not accurately reflect the level of hidden homelessness and data collection mechanisms should be adjusted accordingly to allow quantification of the extent of this problem.

Concern was expressed about the proliferation of holiday homes in rural and scenic areas, particularly in Donegal. Particular concerns were noted in relation to the adequacy of the service infrastructure to support large numbers of holiday homes and the 'knock-on' effect on land prices and exclusion of local communities from access to housing in their local area.

How should things be done better?

Key proposals included:

- Increased provision of accessible social and affordable housing to ensure that housing supply is brought more into line with demand
- Regular monitoring and reporting on progress towards achievement of social and affordable housing targets
- Delivery of an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures to meet the needs of different types of household
- Enforcement of local authorities' obligations under existing programmes and measures e.g., Traveller Accommodation Programme
- A commitment to the development of sustainable communities through the provision of necessary community facilities and services on existing and new housing estates
- The development of a range of housing types in recognition of the housing needs of various individual groups (e.g., people with disabilities, single men, lone parents, the elderly, etc.)
- Increase in transitional and/or sheltered accommodation options
- Improved regulation of the private rental accommodation sector
- Intensive programme of refurbishment of unoccupied local authority housing units

- Review the operation and impact of the Habitual Residency Condition on access to housing.

It was suggested that the NAP/inclusion should:

- Set performance indicators and concrete targets to measure and monitor progress in achieving social housing build targets
- Consider adopting the NESC (2005) targets for social housing outputs
- Monitor and enforce the implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes (e.g., apply penalties to local authorities that are failing to implement the programme)
- Require all new social and affordable housing outputs to meet best practice and standards in respect of accessibility
- Increase the income threshold determining eligibility for Rent Supplement
- Increased transparency and information on the operation of the housing allocation system
- Review the implementation of Part V of the Planning Act.

An increase in the NAP/inclusion social and affordable housing targets was considered essential as it was argued that the current targets were not reflective of the high level of demand. The concentration of social and affordable housing in urban centres was considered to be a key factor driving the growing movement from rural areas to urban areas in the absence of an adequate supply of such housing in rural areas. Participants called for an increase in social and affordable housing provision in rural areas and warned against an over-reliance on voluntary-led provision (e.g., through the Voluntary Housing Scheme) to meet this need.

A second theme was the insufficiency (and inappropriateness of some) of the current supply of social and affordable housing. Participants called for:

- Delivery of an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing measures to meet the needs of different types of household
- Increased involvement by tenants in the design of social and affordable housing to ensure that it is accessible and appropriate to their needs
- Cessation of the sale of existing social and affordable housing stock, as this was seen to lessen the opportunities available to vulnerable groups to access such accommodation
- Full implementation (and monitoring of progress towards achievements of targets) of the Travellers Accommodation Programme. Greater consultation

with Traveller groups to ensure a supply of appropriate accommodation options

- Increase in grant aid to owners of former local authority housing stock (particularly the elderly) to ensure adequate maintenance of housing.

The importance of ensuring that diverse policies and programmes contribute to the development of sustainable communities was emphasised. The provision of housing was not in itself sufficient. Basic services and facilities must be easily accessible by communities e.g., require all housing developers to build and fund community facilities.

A range of supports was considered necessary for low-income local authority tenants including: pre-tenancy courses, courses in parenting, budgeting, home management etc. It was suggested that pre-tenancy courses should be compulsory for social and affordable housing applicants. It was generally agreed that housing allocation lists and procedures should be more transparent and accountable. Participants also called for greater financial resources to support essential repairs and maintenance on the housing of elderly local authority tenants and those who live in private housing, where these persons are not able to meet the full costs of such repairs, etc.

Participants also argued for additional state support for existing statutory bodies dealing with homelessness and warned against an over reliance on community and voluntary provision of such services. Participants called for improved, multi-annual funding of community groups and facilities in recognition of the key role such groups and services play in developing sustainable communities. The need to develop adequate policies and processes to facilitate working relationships between the various organisations and sectors involved in the provision of social and affordable housing at both national and local level was emphasised. Inter-agency working was identified as key to addressing many of the weaknesses in current provision as identified above.

SECTION EIGHT

Facilitating access to resources – income supports

Priorities for change

- Actions to provide an adequate income
- Actions to provide income supports for vulnerable groups
- Actions to support the administration of actions and programmes.

Priorities for change

- Commitment to the provision of a responsive welfare state for all citizens
- Poverty, rural and gender proof income support policies and measures
- Identify carers and lone parents as vulnerable groups within the NAP/inclusion
- Introduce a common means test applicable to all income support schemes
- Individualise social welfare payments so that each adult gets a payment in his/her own right
- Continual assessment of the interaction of the social welfare and taxation systems and their impact on low income workers and people dependent on welfare payments
- Increase in basic adult social welfare rates
- Increase in child income support allowances and benefit
- Increase in income supports for the elderly
- Improve income supports for carers
- Extend the eligibility period for secondary benefits for those moving from welfare to work
- Increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and remove cohabitation criteria
- Prioritise take-up of Family Income Supplement

(continued overleaf)

- Tackle financial indebtedness and isolation
- Regulation of money lenders
- Income supports to meet the cost of long-term residential care
- Introduce a portable Cost of Disability payment which people can carry with them into education, training and employment
- Improved information provision on rights and entitlements and decision-making in relation to benefits
- Review income supports to encourage school retention amongst children in low-income families
- Review the Habitual Residence Condition and system of direct provision for asylum seekers
- Address food poverty.

What is working?

There was widespread acknowledgement that the current welfare system of provision acted as a safety net for those experiencing difficulties. The existence of basic social welfare allowances, as well as secondary and ancillary payments such as fuel allowance, free travel, Rent Supplement, were seen as a positive support for those dependent on social welfare payments. Specific income supports welcomed included:

- Back to Education Allowance
- Back to Work Allowance
- Respite grant for carers
- Child Benefit.

Income supports designed to support people to re-engage with active labour market programmes (e.g., Back to Work Allowance, Back to Education Scheme, Community Employment Scheme) were considered vital supports to enable people to meet the costs associated with re-entering the labour force. Targeted and adapted active labour market programmes in rural areas, such as the Rural Social Scheme for low-income farm families, were welcomed.

Improvements were noted in ease of access to information on social welfare services and entitlements. These improvements were largely attributed to:

- Appointment of an Information Officer in local social welfare offices
- Improved customer service
- Work of the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) and Citizens Information Centres.

Participants also noted an increase in inter-agency activity with increased liaison between relevant services and agencies such as the Revenue Commissioners, Local Authorities, Health Area Executives, etc.

The requirement that private landlords register for rent supplement purposes was viewed positively as it was hoped that this would lead to a rise in the standard and regulation of private rented accommodation and the standardisation of rent levels.

What is not working?

Participants acknowledged the value of existing income supports but argued that large numbers of welfare recipients remain in poverty. Current income supports for low-income families were considered to be insufficient to meet basic needs or to enable recipients to participate fully in society. While payments were considered inadequate, entitlements to secondary benefits (e.g., medical cards) were seen as very valuable to social welfare dependents. It was recognised that the fear of losing such benefits acted as a disincentive to the transition from welfare to work. A key related issue was the fact that those who did take up work typically moved only into low-income employment, which did not compensate for the loss of such benefits.

A low level of take-up of supplementary income supports was noted particularly amongst those eligible for Family Income Supplement and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. This was partly attributed to a lack of awareness of the supports and the associated red tape in applying for them. The Family Income Supplement was not felt to be working as effectively as it should. This was attributed to the rigidity of such schemes e.g., its failure to recognise atypical forms of employment such as seasonal work and a lack of awareness amongst target groups of the supplement. Continuing discrimination against minority groups (e.g., Travellers) was considered a significant barrier to the breaking the cycle of welfare dependency amongst vulnerable groups.

How should things be done better?

There was general agreement that although the very existence of the range of benefits and income supports was positive and made a significant difference to the lives of those in receipt of them, significant improvements both in the rates and administration of these benefits were necessary. The need for front-line staff to recognise the right of claimants to such services was emphasised. A related issue was the need for transparent and accountable decision-making amongst service providers, particularly in relation to decisions on an individual's entitlement to discretionary payments. It was argued that the expansion of integrated services provision across the public services would greatly lessen the administrative burden for both the service provider and service user.

The interplay between the social welfare and taxation systems was a focus of much discussion. Participants widely agreed on the need to address the negative impact arising from the interaction of these systems, which results in employment disincentives. A frequent proposal was to allow those returning to work to retain secondary benefits, such as the medical card, for a longer period and to increase the income threshold for secondary benefits. There was widespread agreement that the operation and integration of basic social welfare supports and secondary benefits should be reviewed to ensure that policies facilitate people's participation in employment and/or training.

Specific suggestions for improvements to the basic social welfare system included:

- Abolition of the range of social welfare benefits to be replaced with one guaranteed minimum benefit payment supplemented by additional targeted payments
- An increase in the basic adult social welfare payment and the benchmarking of this to Gross Average Industrial Earnings
- Review of the Back to Work Scheme to assess its impact in enabling people to transition to full-time, sustainable employment
- Review of the Habitual Residency Condition with a view to extending the entitlement to welfare rights to migrant workers
- Individualisation of the social welfare system to address the exclusion of women who are not on the live register and accordingly cannot receive welfare payments or access training and employment programmes in their own right
- Increase the level of income support available through the Rent Supplement scheme in response to the high cost of private rented accommodation

- Reduce the administrative burden placed on applicants applying for benefits by extending the application of the Household Budget Package to a wider range of schemes and benefits
- Introduce a common means test for all schemes, including Supplementary Welfare Allowances
- Supply food vouchers to all welfare dependents to address the growing issue of food poverty.

Income supports for low-income families were felt to work ineffectively. A range of specific improvements to targeted income supports were identified. Participants called for:

- An increase in the Child Dependent Allowance
- The introduction of a second tier of child income supports for low-income families
- Review of the take-up and operation of the Family Income Supplement
- Introduce refundable tax credits for working families
- An increase in the half-rate Maternity Benefit
- Provision of additional targeted income supports to facilitate school retention and completion amongst children from disadvantaged families
- Extend the eligibility criteria for Child Benefit to cover all students in full-time education to the age of 22 years
- An increase in the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance
- The removal of the cohabitation rule from the eligibility criteria for the One Parent Family Payment
- Increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment
- Development of equitable maintenance and income supports for separated parents
- Implementation of measures and supports to tackle indebtedness amongst low-income families.

While Family Income Supplement was viewed as a useful income support for low-income, working families there were concerns that take-up of this benefit was not being maximised due largely to lack of awareness of it and complicated application procedures. Suggestions to improve take-up of Family Income Supplement included: automatic notification about the supplement to those eligible when they notify the welfare authorities that they are rejoining the workforce; greater promotion by employers of the scheme amongst employees and joint identification by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and the Revenue Commissioners of working families with children who are eligible but have not applied and automatic rebates to such families.

A further theme was the need for the system of income supports to support the participation of those dependent on such payments in education and/or training. Key points emerging from the discussions were:

- The need to streamline the interaction of different benefits/income supports schemes
- The need to ensure a system of sustained income supports to support those with low level qualifications as they move from welfare to sustainable employment
- Support with childcare costs was essential to enable low-income families participate in education and training.

Specific suggestions were advanced in respect of carers, people with disabilities and migrants and asylum seekers:

Carers

- Increase the number of hours that a carer can work and retain the Carers Allowance
- Provide PRSI credits to those in receipt of the Carers Allowance
- Develop a 'Cost of Care' package for carers
- Abolish the means test for the Carers Allowance.

People with disabilities

- Introduce a portable Cost of Disability payment which people can carry with them into education, training and employment
- Provide additional income supports for parents of children with disabilities
- Review the implementation of the Employment Support Schemes for People with Disabilities in order to remove potential benefit traps.

Elderly

- Guarantee a basic income for the elderly
- Increase the Living Alone Allowance
- Increase in the Fuel Allowance and extend the duration of the scheme
- Introduce a national waiver scheme for the elderly in relation to the payment of waste charges.

Migrants and asylum seekers

- Repeal the Habitual Residency Condition
- Repeal the system of direct provision for asylum seekers.

APPENDIX

Priorities for change – summary tables

Facilitating Access to Employment

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Greater inter-agency co-operation in the delivery of services	>		>		>	>	>
Better labour data and monitoring of national & regional trends	>			>	>	>	
Access to education/training for low-skilled workers			>	>		>	
Access to education/training/employment rights for migrant workers	>			>	>		
Review interaction of social welfare and taxation systems	>	>				>	>
Support for atypical employment options		>	>		>		
Expand targeted active labour market programmes and prioritise progression rates	>		>				>
Improved information provision on services & entitlements			>	>		>	
Commitment to tackling long-term unemployment	>		>	>			
Greater involvement by employers in supporting the participation of vulnerable groups in employment & training	>		>	>	>	>	
Generate sustainable employment in rural areas			>	>	>		>
Consultation and involvement of vulnerable groups in policy design and implementation	>			>	>		
Flexible provision of training and education programmes		>	>		>		>
Mainstream successful pilot programmes of good practice in employment, education and training		>	>				

Facilitating Access to Employment (continued)

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Enhanced provision of affordable and accessible early childhood care and education programmes		>	>				
Specialised supports for Travellers				>	>		
Address youth unemployment			>				
Enhanced access to public transport in rural & urban areas	>	>	>	>	>	>	>
Include social inclusion measures in National Development Plans			>				
Specialised supports for Carers		>	>				
Specialised supports for people with disabilities	>	>	>				

Facilitating access to services – Education and Training

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Greater inter-agency co-operation in the delivery of services	>			>			>
Monitoring and data analysis mechanisms to track progression through education	>		>	>		>	
Early school leaving	>			>	>	>	>
Funding & resources for community and voluntary providers of adult education	>	>	>	>		>	>
Universal access to early childhood care & education services				>	>	>	
Access to education for migrant workers			>	>			
Accreditation of overseas qualifications				>			
Prioritise adult education & lifelong learning		>		>			
Expansion of educational disadvantage initiatives & mainstreaming of successful pilot initiatives	>		>			>	>
Provide additional specialist services for children with special educational needs e.g., children with disabilities, behavioural or learning difficulties	>	>	>		>		>
Target increased male participation in adult education			>				
Educational resources to follow the learner			>				
Review of the system of educational income supports	>				>		

Facilitating access to services – Education and Training (continued)

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Tackle barriers to participation in education experienced by vulnerable groups		>	>		>	>	
Review third level income supports		>			>		
Equitable targeting of resources and supports for all levels of education.	>						>
Provision of targeted training and education initiatives for vulnerable groups	>	>	>	>	>		>
Rights-based approach to educational services						>	
Reduction in primary and secondary level class sizes	>					>	
Enhanced support for people with disabilities in education	>	>				>	

Facilitating access to services – Health and Care

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Greater inter-agency co-operation in the delivery of services	>			>	>		>
Rights-based holistic approach to health policy planning and service delivery	>	>		>		>	>
Review eligibility criteria for the medical card.	>	>		>			>
Introduce a Cost of Disability payment	>			>			>
Provide more respite care, sheltered housing, home help service for the elderly	>	>	>	>	>		
Support for carers e.g., more respite care, carers groups.	>	>	>	>	>	>	>
Examine access to health services e.g., role of transport	>		>	>	>		>
Targeted primary and secondary health services to access hard-to-reach communities and those with special needs.			>	>			
Support for community and voluntary health service providers	>	>	>		>	>	
Implement a national mental health strategy & develop continuum of services for those with mental health illnesses	>	>	>		>		>
Increase in number of long-term residential care places & subsidise cost of care for low income residents			>			>	
Regulation of health and social care facilities			>				
Increase funding for male and female specific health services				>	>		
Provide a medical card for all children aged less than 5	>				>		

Facilitating access to services – Health and Care (continued)

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Grant an automatic entitlement to a medical card to people with disabilities					>		
Prioritise the development of sustainable communities, health promotion, access to services etc		>	>		>	>	
Improved information provision	>	>				>	>
Implement rural and equality proofing and health impact assessments of health policies	>					>	>
Develop data, monitoring and evaluation systems to track health service outputs & outcomes	>					>	
Address the privatisation of health care	>						
Improved children and family services	>						
Improved health services for the homeless & drugs mis-users	>						

Facilitating access to resources – Housing

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Building sustainable communities	>	>	>	>		>	>
Supply of diverse range of social and affordable housing options	>	>	>	>	>		
Integrated service delivery across housing providers	>			>			
Resources for voluntary and community providers of affordable housing			>	>	>	>	>
Expansion of local authority Tenant Liaison Scheme & other tenancy support schemes			>	>		>	
Retention and maintenance of existing social housing stock				>			
Support for maintenance of housing stock owned by elderly				>			
Implementation of the Travellers Accommodation Programme	>		>		>	>	>
Increase end users & other stakeholders involvement in planning and implementation of housing policy	>		>		>		
Address the marginalisation of disadvantaged housing estates		>	>				
Increase in social housing investment	>	>	>	>		>	
Increase rural social affordable housing stock			>				>
Increase in diversity of accommodation for the homeless	>				>		>
Increased provision of accommodation for victims of domestic violence in rural areas					>		
Reduce administrative burden in applying for social housing					>		

Facilitating access to resources – Housing (continued)

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Improved information provision on housing rights etc		>			>	>	
Review impact of Habitual Residency Condition on migrants/ immigrants ability to access accommodation					>		
Widen accessibility to the Rent Supplement Scheme					>		>
Refurbishment of disused local authority housing stock		>					>
Increased regulation of private rental sector	>	>					
Increase accommodation options for those with mental health illnesses						>	>
Establish a right to housing	>						
Monitor implementation of social housing targets	>						
Data collection & analysis to track need	>						

Facilitating access to resources – Income Supports

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Increase basic adult social welfare rates	>	>		>		>	>
Increase child income supports	>	>		>		>	>
Remove operation & integration of social welfare & taxation systems to remove employment disincentives & streamline interaction of schemes	>	>	>	>		>	
Extend the eligibility period for secondary benefits for those transitioning from welfare to work				>			
Prioritise take-up of Family Income Supplement	>		>	>	>		>
Tackle financial indebtedness & isolation			>	>			
Regulation of money lenders				>			
Support cost of long-term residential care				>			
Increase the earnings disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and remove cohabitation criteria		>		>	>		
Introduce a cost of disability payment	>		>				
Identify carers and lone parents as vulnerable groups within the NAP/inclusion			>	>			
Improved information provision on rights & entitlements and decision-making processes in relation to benefits		>	>	>	>		
Improve income supports for carers & ease eligibility criteria	>	>	>		>	>	>

Facilitating access to resources – Income Supports (continued)

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Review income supports to encourage school retention amongst children in low-income families			>	>			>
Introduce a common means test across all schemes					>		>
Reassertion of the national commitment to the provision of an adequate welfare state for all citizens		>					
Individualisation of the social welfare system	>	>					
Review the Habitual Residence Condition & system of direct provision	>	>				>	>
Reform of travel pass system to allow unlimited access		>					
Support with childcare costs for ALMP participants	>	>		>	>		
Increase in allowances for the elderly e.g., Living Alone, Fuel	>		>			>	>
Poverty and gender proof all income support measures	>					>	
Address food poverty						>	

Rural and Urban Issues

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Rural and urban proofing of policies and programmes		>		>	>		>
Data collection and analysis sensitive to rural issues and disaggregated by region, etc				>			
Develop regional employment infrastructure supports				>	>		>
Prioritise the development of sustainable rural employment	>		>	>	>		
Review operation of RAPID & CLAR programmes		>	>	>			>
Expansion of the Rural Transport Initiative	>	>	>	>	>		>
Develop rural and urban public transport structures		>	>	>	>		>
Address anti-social behaviour (including substance misuse) in rural and urban areas		>	>	>			
Increased community policing in rural and urban areas			>	>			
Prioritise strategic preventative policy and programme measures within the NAP/inclusion to address identifiable long-term social and economic issues of concern			>				
Resource community and voluntary service providers	>		>		>		
Develop rural based support structures for victims of domestic violence					>		
Information provision on services and supports					>		
Enhanced service integration and co-ordination across sectors	>	>					

Rural and Urban Issues (continued)

Priorities for change	Dublin	Cork	Limerick	Carlow	Carrick-on-Shannon	Mullingar	Donegal
Expand broadband services to rural areas		>					>
Develop rural and urban indicators for monitoring progress towards achieving the NAP/inclusion actions		>			>		
Focus on building sustainable communities		>					
Resource services funded through Interreg & PEACE programmes							>
Mainstream local authority Social Inclusion Units							>
Improved access to health services		>	>	>	>		>
Increased funding for specialist education and therapeutic services for children with special needs in rural areas		>			>		
Expansion of the Social Economy Programme	>		>	>	>		>
Address poverty amongst farmers	>		>				>