



What is being done about poverty and social exclusion?

Government strategies to combat poverty and social exclusion in Ireland



Office for Social Inclusion

An Oifig um Chuimsiú Sóisialta



What is poverty...

Poverty is defined in the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) as follows:

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally.

and social exclusion?

The second sentence of the NAPS definition also explains social exclusion:

As a result of inadequate income and other resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities, which are considered the norm for other people in society.

What are the main causes of poverty and social exclusion?

Different groups of people are at risk of poverty for different reasons – people who are not in paid work, children living in a household where the adults are unemployed, those who cannot work because of illness or having a disability, full time carers of children or elderly relatives, and those who have retired from work. People who are in paid work but are on low wages, especially if they have a spouse and children to support, may also be at risk. Living in a disadvantaged urban or rural area can contribute further to poverty.

What does the State do about poverty?

Having a job with good pay is one of the best routes out of poverty. The primary aim of the State is to ensure that more and better jobs are provided. It also supports people in getting these jobs through providing education and training and making lifelong learning possible. For those who do not have a job or who cannot work, the State normally provides a weekly Social Welfare payment, with extra benefits and allowances for children. It also aims to ensure that all residents have access to essential services such as education, health, care, housing, transport, culture and sports.

Why are strategies needed?

Joined up multi-policy strategies or plans, with clear objectives and targets, are needed to effectively combat the many causes of poverty and social exclusion. The main ones are:

National Anti-Poverty Strategy – a ten year Government plan involving all relevant Government departments and agencies - was introduced in 1997, revised and improved in 2002, and is currently being implemented.



National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/Inclusion)

Countries of the European Union made a commitment in 2000 in Lisbon to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010. To help achieve this aim they undertook to produce National Action Plans for social inclusion, based on agreed objectives.

What are the agreed EU objectives?

Ireland has agreed with the other EU Member States on a set of common objectives under which action will be taken to combat poverty and social exclusion. These are to –

- Facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services
- Prevent the risks of exclusion (e.g. homelessness, alcohol or drugs abuse, poor educational attainment, indebtedness)
- Help the most vulnerable (older people, children, women, people with disabilities, and emerging groups such as migrants and ethnic minorities)
- Mobilise all relevant bodies (Government Departments and Agencies, employers, trade unions, farmers, the community and voluntary sectors) in planning the strategy and effectively implementing it.

What is in Ireland's NAP/Inclusion?

The Irish Government's second **NAP/Inclusion** was adopted in July 2003 and covers the period to 2005 (the first plan applied from 2001 to 2003). It contains all the commitments made in the revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy. The Plan also reflects the social inclusion commitments agreed in *Sustaining Progress*, Ireland's current National Partnership agreement, including the special initiatives which were agreed for cross-Departmental action. These special initiatives are –

- Ending child poverty
- Tackling educational disadvantage – literacy, numeracy and early school leaving
- Long term unemployed, vulnerable workers and those who have been made redundant
- Care – children, people with disabilities and older people
- Migration and interculturalism
- Housing and accommodation
- Alcohol/drug misuse
- Including everyone in the information society



What actions does the plan provide for?

The plan sets down a series of actions to tackle poverty under each policy heading – employment, social welfare, education, health, housing and so on. Examples are:

- To eliminate long term unemployment as soon as circumstances permit but in any case not later than 2007
- To achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest social welfare payments by 2007
- To increase social welfare pension rates to €200 by 2007
- To deliver 41,500 local authority housing unit starts (including acquisitions) between 2000 and 2006
- To reduce the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and the highest socio-economic groups by at least 10% for circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries and poisonings by 2007
- To reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 90% by 2006
- To reduce the gap in life expectancy between the Traveller Community and the whole population by at least 10% by 2007

It also contains policies to support vulnerable groups and people in vulnerable situations, including people in areas of urban and rural disadvantage.

What is the Office for Social Inclusion?

The **Office for Social Inclusion**, based in the Department of Social and Family Affairs, works with relevant Government Departments and Agencies in coordinating the preparation of Ireland's National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/Inclusion), monitoring and evaluating its implementation, and coordinating its further development. This is done in consultation with representatives of the Social Partners, the Community and Voluntary sectors and other relevant interests.

A table setting out details of the structures supporting implementation of the strategies is overleaf.

Making the strategies happen

Institutional structures are in place to ensure that the strategies are implemented and developed, and that they meet the real needs of people in poverty and socially excluded.

NAPS Structures	Role
A Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by an Taoiseach	Overall direction of the strategies
A Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, drawn from all relevant Government Departments and chaired by the Dept. of the Taoiseach	Co-ordinates policy developments and reports to the Cabinet Committee
Oireachtas Joint Committee on Social and Family Affairs	Monitors strategies at political level
Office for Social Inclusion (OSI)	Co-ordinates the development of strategies, monitors and evaluates progress against objectives and targets
Management Group of Assistant Secretaries	Co-ordinates the work of the OSI, with relevant Government Departments
Social Inclusion Units in key Government Departments and agencies	Co-ordinates development and implementation of social inclusion strategies within Departments and agencies, in liaison with OSI
Social Inclusion Consultative Group includes representatives of Social Partners, Government Agencies and the community and voluntary sector	Provides advice on implementation and development of the strategies
Social Inclusion Forum (NESF)	Representatives of the community and voluntary sector and other relevant sectors, and people experiencing poverty, meet on an annual basis to advise on all aspects of the strategies
The Combat Poverty Agency	Advises Government on the prevention and elimination of poverty. Works with the OSI in developing and driving the strategies

How can I learn more?

The first OSI Annual Report (December 2004) sets out in detail the progress to date under the NAP/Inclusion.

This report is available on the Office for Social Inclusion Website – www.socialinclusion.ie. Printed copies in both Irish and English are also available from the Office for Social Inclusion (see contact details below).

You will also find on our website the revised NAPS (Building an Inclusive Society 2002) and the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005.

For further information contact Office for Social Inclusion



Office for Social Inclusion

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