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|  <b>Office for Social Inclusion</b><br>An Oifig um Chuimsiú Sóisialta<br><b>Social Inclusion Forum Workshop</b> |                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Women – Decision Making and Participation</b> |
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**National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2003-2005**  
**Relevant extracts from the Office for Social Inclusion's First Annual Report**

Ireland's second National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAP/Inclusion) covering the period 2003-2005 was submitted to the European Commission on 31 July 2003. The Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) is the Government Office with overall responsibility for developing, co-ordinating and driving the NAP/Inclusion process.

OSI's first Annual Report on the implementation of the Plan was launched on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2004 by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs. This report was produced by the OSI in consultation with relevant Government Departments who have policy responsibility for the social inclusion targets and commitments contained in the Plan, and with representatives of the Social Partners through the Social Inclusion Consultative Group.

The Annual Report sets out achievements against published social inclusion targets relating to women as a group who are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion. Some of those achievements are not relevant to the specific subject matter of this workshop and so, they will not be dealt with in any detail in this brief. The following aspects of the Annual Report are however of relevance to this workshop.

Copies of the report, in both Irish and English are available on line through the OSI website – [www.socialinclusion.ie](http://www.socialinclusion.ie) – or by contacting the office at 01 704 3851.

**National Women's Strategy**

A key recommendation in Ireland's Report to the United Nations on the National Plan for Women, published in October 2002, was the development of a National Women's Strategy as the framework for Ireland's gender equality agenda for the coming years.

Sustaining Progress provides for the development of a National Women's Strategy. Scoping of the Strategy has been largely completed and meetings have been arranged with the Social Partners and the National Women's Council to discuss the development of the Strategy. It is intended that the Strategy will be completed during 2005.

**Increasing the employment participation of women**

One of the main employment targets in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion is to increase the employment rate of women to an average of more than 60 per cent in 2010, as envisaged in the National Employment Action Plan.

The following are details of activities that focus on increasing female participation in the workforce.

- **Equality for Women Measure in the NDP**

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform is implementing an Equality for Women Measure which will provide targeted opportunities for women in training and decision making. The Measure is a positive action programme funded under the National Development Plan. It is intended to transfer the lessons from the measure to the mainstream. Among the interventions being delivered which will provide opportunities for disadvantaged women are:

- Outreaching to very marginalised women, including refugee women, older women, women with disabilities and Traveller women.
- Promoting the empowerment and participation of women at community level.
- Developing new linkages between women's organisations and service providers
- Developing progression routes to employment for very disadvantaged women
- Developing new interfaces between public services and specific categories of women.
- Training women to become involved in influencing policy at all levels.
- Developing linkages to structures of local decision making

The Equality for Women Measure is currently funding 70 projects nationwide; 51 in the Southern and Eastern Region and 19 in the Border, Midland and Western Region. A total of €14.5 million has been allocated over a three year period to these projects, of which approximately €3 million is co-financed by the EU.

Proposals for implementation of Phase II of the measure have recently been approved. The primary focus of Phase II will be on women experiencing economic disadvantage. Of the almost €11 million earmarked for Phase II of the Measure, over the period 2004-2006, €7 million has been set aside to fund the development of projects located in RAPID areas. There will also be a focus on mainstreaming the learning from Phase I. Funding will be made available to third level institutions to assist women to develop and pursue careers in science and technology.

- **Workforce Gateway for Women Initiative**

Gateway for Women is an initiative aimed at proactively encouraging women to return to the workforce. It is supported by IBEC, ICTU, the National Women's Council of Ireland and the Northside Partnership, Dublin. It is jointly funded by FÁS and The Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform under the Equality for Women Measure (EWM).

Delivery is through the local FÁS Employment Services Offices and through the Local Employment Services (LES) offices. Pre-work training is delivered through FÁS Training Services and Community Services, using local resources (e.g. local women's groups, local facilitators, etc.). Work-based training is currently being piloted with 10 women post-placement.

The 'Gateway' process has successfully acted as a vehicle to promote, assess, select, train and develop women returners to the workforce. Starting in Dublin, the pilot process has, over the last 12 months, been extended to the West: It was expanded in 2004 to the North East and North West of the country funded under the Peace II programme, and part-financed by the NDP and FÁS.

By July 2004, almost 700 women had engaged with the 'Gateway' process since its commencement.

Of the approximately 700 women who have actively engaged with the process, 54 per cent have progressed to employment or further training/education. A further 40 per cent are in continued mediation. Some 600 women have received pre-work support, while some 460 have received specific skills training and work experience. This process also provides for on-the-job training and development. Such training greatly enhances the employability and career potential of women returners and minimises the risk of them falling into the category of low-paid workers.

## **Childcare for Employees/Trainees**

### **(i) Employment Participation and Childcare**

At a time of economic buoyancy the need to increase labour force participation is particularly important. The number of women in employment has grown from 483,000 in 1995 to 771,000 in 2004, an increase of approximately 60 per cent. The increase in female participation in the workforce has given rise to significant challenges in the provision of care, especially childcare. This affects the parents, the carers, and those receiving the care.

The availability of high quality and affordable childcare greatly influences employment participation rates especially of lone parents and may also influence birth rates. The importance of childcare in the drive against poverty and social exclusion is highlighted by, not only the number, but, also the different types of references to it in the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

### **(ii) Implementation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) 2000 – 2006**

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (D/JE&LR) has overall responsibility for the formulation of national policy on childcare and the implementation of childcare services in order to meet the childcare needs of parents. The EOCP aims to maintain and increase the supply of childcare facilities and places, improve the quality of childcare services and introduce a coordinated approach to the delivery of childcare services.

Funding for the EOCP is channelled through the two Regional Operational Programmes of the National Development Plan / Community Support Framework 2000-2006 (NDP/CSF), as elements of the Social Inclusion and Childcare Priority Sub-Programme. Both Operational Programmes refer to the lack of childcare as a significant contributor to exclusion from available education, training and employment opportunities. They note that this impacts most severely on women, in particular disadvantaged women and single parent families.

The EOCP operates under three sub-measures to meet its aims:

- *Capital Grant Schemes*; provides grant support towards building, renovation, upgrading or equipping of childcare facilities in order to increase the supply of childcare places;
- *Staffing Grant Scheme*; provides support towards staffing costs for community based childcare in disadvantaged areas; and

- *Quality Improvement Measure*; aims to enhance quality awareness and improve quality of all childcare facilities through the development of childcare training, networks and other initiatives.

The benefits of the EOCP in supporting employment, education and training are clearly seen from the Annual Survey of Grant Beneficiaries. The 2003 Survey shows that, among 37,730 parents whose child/children were attending childcare services almost 90 per cent of the fathers and 70 per cent of the mothers are actively engaged in employment, education and training, the primary aim of the Programme.

### **Funding**

A total of €263 million out of a total Programme budget of €449.3 million has been committed and it is estimated that this will create 29,639 new childcare places and support a further 27,418 existing places.

The indicators for the EOCP have been reviewed following a recommendation from the Mid-term Review of the NDP. These will provide for more detailed information on the impact of this programme on social inclusion.

Of the €263 million allocated under the EOCP, €219.8 million relates to capital funding for community based/not for profit and private childcare facilities and staffing funding for community based /not for profit groups. €43.2 million has been allocated to Quality Improvement measures.

The revised funding allocation to each Sub-measure following the Mid-term Reviews are as follows:

- of the €154.5 million funding available for Capital Development, €119.0 million has been allocated to the end of June 2004
- of the €193.5 million of funding available for staffing grant assistance, €100.8 million has been allocated to the end of June 2004
- of the €83.3 million funding available for quality enhancement, €43.2 million has been allocated to the end of June 2004.

To the end of July 2004, €45 million had been committed to funding childcare services operating in RAPID areas. A further €23 million had been committed to funding childcare services in CLÁR areas.

The Mid-Term Review of the National Development Plan and the Regional Operational Programmes brought an increase in funding provision for childcare in Ireland from the European Social Fund (ESF) in both regions and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in the Border, Midland and Western (BMW) region. This brought the total Programme budget to €449.3 million (from €436.7 million).

### **(iii) Progress towards an improvement in the provision of childcare**

During the period of the Annual Report, the following areas, have been highlighted by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform as areas in which progress has been made toward an improvement in the provision of childcare

- The thirty-three City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) received funding of over €6.7 million for the implementation of the 2004 Action Plans which are linked to their

five-year strategies. The CCCs aim to foster the development of childcare to meet the needs of their city/county. Actions for 2004 include: preparation of information; networking; capacity building for providers; social inclusion measures; equality and diversity measures; accredited training and other quality enhancing measures.

- The CCCs receive separate funding for the childminding initiative which provides training, information and networking for childminders and a Quality Awareness Programme of short lectures for childminders. The Development Grant Scheme provides grants of up to €630 (subject to a maximum of 90 per cent of total expenditure) to childminders to cover quality enhancement costs. In the first six months of the scheme, over 1,200 childminders availed of the lecture series.
- Seven National Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NVCOs) supported under the EOCP, were allocated funding of €2.56 million for their 2004 actions linked to their three year strategies. Actions for 2004 include: quality assurance, promotion and development of best practice, preparation of information, networking, professional development and training, and the promotion of quality awareness among the EOCP Beneficiaries, and the Childcare Sector.
- The D/JE&LR encourages a high level of collaboration among CCCs, among NVCOs, and between CCCs and NVCOs, to promote an integrated approach to the delivery of childcare.
- The D/JE&LR chairs the National Childcare Co-ordinating Committee (NCCC), which oversees the development of an integrated childcare infrastructure throughout the country and whose membership comprises representatives of the statutory and non-statutory sectors including the Social Partners and the NVCOs.
- In June 2004, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform published "Developing Childcare in Ireland- A Review of Progress to the end of 2003 on the Implementation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006". The report also outlines childcare provision in Ireland prior to the EOCP 2000-2006. The appendices to the report include a list of grant approvals under the Programme to the end of December 2003. The Department will publish a short update of the report on a half yearly basis and a further comprehensive review in 2006.

#### **(iv) FÁS trainees and childcare payments**

FÁS introduced a pilot childcare allowance scheme in 2001 to assist parents who are the primary minder of their children to avail of the necessary training that would allow them enter or return to the workplace. The payment is made to the childminder on behalf of the parent. Payment is €63.50 per child per week and the scheme is costing approx €5 million per annum.

In 2003 FÁS commissioned two reports on the effectiveness of this intervention. These findings are currently being considered in conjunction with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

#### **Gender pay gap**

A Consultative Group Report to Government on Male/Female Wage Differentials has been published and distributed to interested parties. Commissioned research into the gender pay

gap for graduates, arising from the Report's recommendations, is now underway. It is expected that this research will be completed by end 2004.

## **Work-life balance**

### **(i) Parental Leave**

#### **Report of the Working Group on the Review of the Parental Leave Act 1998**

In line with the agreed recommendations in the Report of the Working Group on the Review and Improvement of the Maternity Protection Legislation, the General Scheme of a Bill to amend the Parental Leave Act 1998 was approved by the Government on 8 September 2004, with a view to implementation at the earliest possible date. The main provisions of the General Scheme are as follows:

- The extension of the parental leave entitlement to persons in loco parentis to an eligible child;
- The increase in the maximum age limit of an eligible child from 5 years to 8 years;
- The period of parental leave not to end later than the day on which a child with a disability attains the age of 16 years
- Employees provided with an additional alternative entitlement to take parental leave in separate blocks, each block consisting of a minimum of 6 continuous weeks; and
- An employee permitted to request the suspension of parental leave for a period of sickness following which the parental leave recommences.

### **(ii) Maternity Leave**

#### **Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004**

The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 amends the Maternity Protection Act 1994 to give effect to the outstanding recommendations of the *Working Group on the Review and Improvement of the Maternity Protection Legislation*. The Act, which was signed into law on 19 July 2004, provides for a number of improvements, for example:

- A new provision reducing the compulsory pre-confinement period of maternity leave from 4 weeks to 2 weeks;
- Provision for expectant mothers to attend one set of ante-natal classes without loss of pay (except the last 3 classes in a set). Provision for a once-off right to fathers to paid time off to attend the two ante-natal classes immediately prior to the birth;
- Provision for breastfeeding mothers who have given birth within the previous 6 months with an entitlement, without loss of pay, to either an adjustment of working hours or where breastfeeding facilities are provided by the employer, breastfeeding breaks;
- Provision for termination of additional maternity leave (subject to the agreement of the employer) in the event of illness;
- Provision for an employee to postpone the period of maternity leave/additional maternity leave (subject to the agreement of the employer) in the event of the hospitalisation of the child; and
- Provision that an employee's absence from work on additional maternity leave will count for all employment rights associated with the employment (except remuneration and superannuation benefits) such as seniority and annual leave.

The Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 commenced on 18 October, 2004.

### **(iii) Adoptive Leave**

#### **Adoptive Leave Bill 2004**

On 27 May, 2003 the Government agreed to improve the existing adoptive leave provisions in line with the new maternity leave provisions contained in the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Bill 2003 (now Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004).

The main provisions of the Adoptive Leave Bill 2004 are as follows:-

- provision for an increase in the adoptive leave period by 2 weeks to 16 weeks;
- provision for adopting parent(s) to attend required preparation classes and pre-adoption meetings with social workers/health board officials during work hours without loss of pay;
- provision for termination of additional adoptive leave in the event of illness, subject to the agreement of the employer;
- provision to split the period of adoptive leave/additional adoptive leave in the event of the hospitalisation of the child, subject to the agreement of the employer; and
- provision that an employee's absence from work on additional adoptive leave will count for all employment rights (except remuneration, superannuation benefits) associated with the employment.

### **Reconciling Work and Family Life**

The Department of Social and Family Affairs is examining the contribution made by its income support system to people reconciling work and family life. An important input to this work will be the 2003 OECD report "*Babies and Bosses: Reconciling Work and Family Life, Austria, Ireland and Japan, Volume 2*". On a broader level, the Department is preparing a strategy to coordinate policy in relation to families and family life. This study is due for completion by end of 2004 and will be published in early 2005.

### **Equality infrastructure**

#### **(i) Gender mainstreaming**

Gender Mainstreaming was established as the global strategy for promoting gender equality through the *Platform for Action* at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995. The need to ensure that attention to gender perspectives is an integral part of interventions in all areas of societal development was made clear in that document.

Ireland, together with all Member States of the United Nations countries, agreed to the *Platform for Action* in 1995. Prior to this a gender perspective informed education and training policies and also local development. Subsequent to the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action a gender perspective was brought to bear in our health and international aid policies. With the adoption of the National Development Plan 2000-2006, the gender mainstreaming commitment was translated into further areas of national policy in Ireland including areas of regional policy and infrastructure such as housing and transport.

To progress gender mainstreaming the NDP included the following commitments:

- requiring that equal opportunities be part of the criteria for selecting projects to be funded by the NDP;
- requiring indicators to be provided for each gender 'where the nature of the assistance permits';

- promoting a balance of women and men on Monitoring Committees;
- including a representative for equal opportunities, from a relevant Government Department or statutory body, on all Monitoring Committees;
- establishing a unit within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform to monitor gender mainstreaming in the NDP, and to advise on the development of appropriate indicators to measure this;
- establishing an Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion Co-ordinating Committee to oversee progress in equal opportunities issues in NDP spending.

## **(ii) NDP/CSF Gender Equality Unit**

The NDP Gender Equality Unit, based in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and co-financed by the European Social Fund, supports policy makers in Government Departments and Agencies to implement gender mainstreaming in the policies and programmes funded by the NDP/CSF. The work of the Unit includes training, development of gender disaggregated statistics and indicators, and research into gender equality issues. The Unit also advises on the impact of the NDP/CSF on disadvantaged women, where relevant, and liaises with the OSI and the Combat Poverty Agency in this regard.

The Unit has recently published several statistical reports: 'Women And Men in Ireland as Entrepreneurs and Business Managers'; 'women and men in Ireland'; and 'Geographic Gender Equality'. The Unit also published 'Developing and Implementing a Gender Equality Policy: a guide for community and voluntary groups' and a series of 'Gender Equality Relevance Sheets' for NDP Measure Managers and Implementing Bodies. In April 2004, the Unit organised a UK/Ireland conference entitled 'Gender Mainstreaming: Partnership in Practice', which focused on cross-sectoral partnership approaches to gender mainstreaming.

A number of additional areas of work, are also being implemented over the 2003-2005 period. These are as follows:

- *Work with Community and Voluntary groups:* A programme of work to support community & voluntary groups in the implementation of gender mainstreaming is currently being implemented. Supports include:
  - a conference on partnership working to promote gender mainstreaming;
  - training on effective lobbying and women in decision making;
  - a handbook on developing and implementing a gender equality policy;
  - a fact-sheet on men, boys and gender equality; and
  - a series of videos on women promoting gender equality.
- *Gender budgeting:* Two pilot gender budgeting initiatives were carried out in 2004, in a Local Area Partnership and County Development Board respectively;
- *Statistics:* Statistical reports on women and men in enterprise and gender equality across the Irish regions were published and widely circulated in 2004, along with a booklet outlining statistics on Women and Men in Ireland. A report on attitudes to women's role on the farm is also being produced and is due to be completed in August 2004;
- *Gender Impact Assessment:* The Unit aims to improve gender impact assessment of policies and programmes in the NDP/CSF as part of the results of the Mid-Term



Evaluation, with a view to obtaining stronger commitments and targets to address gender inequalities; and

- *Network of equal opportunities officers*: The Unit, in conjunction with Chwarae Teg in Wales, is funding the development of a network of those working on gender equality and other equality issues, in relation to the Structural Funds in the UK and Ireland. This will promote and exchange best practice on gender mainstreaming.