

Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí

Department of Social Protection

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The Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion sets out the Government decision to revise and enhance the national social target for poverty reduction, arising from the review of the national poverty target.

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Updating the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016 (NAPinclusion) identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. The plan prioritises 12 high level goals and identifies up to 150 actions across Departments and agencies with a remit in social policy, as part of a strategic approach to make a decisive impact on poverty over the period to 2016.

The Irish Government first introduced a National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) entitled Sharing in Progress, 1997-2007, designed to ensure that those experiencing poverty and social exclusion would share in the fruits of the economic development being achieved at that time, and to make a major impact on combating poverty. This Strategy subsequently led to the development of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion in 2007.

Implementation of NAPinclusion has been actively monitored over its duration via the annual Social Inclusion Report. This is one of the formal monitoring and reporting mechanisms set out in the Plan. Preparation and compilation of the report is coordinated by the Department of Social Protection, with input from relevant Government Departments. To date five such reports have been prepared for Government, covering the periods 2007, 2008, 2009-2010, 2011-2012 and 2013-2014 respectivelyⁱ.

Need for Updating

Since 2008, Ireland has experienced a major economic recession complicated by banking and fiscal crises. It is clear that the challenges facing the country are now very different to when NAPinclusion was drawn up in 2007.

Similarly, the Government's response to combating poverty has adjusted. There is now a greater focus on modernising the social protection system, improving effectiveness and efficiency of social transfers and strengthening active inclusion policies. Furthermore, new strategies have emerged, or are being developed, which are not adequately reflected in NAPinclusion.

As a result of such dynamic in economic, social and political contexts, certain NAPinclusion goals and actions became out of date or less relevant. Current priorities and policies indicated that updating of NAPinclusion for its remaining two years 2015-2016 was required.

This updating process was carried out as a transitional measure pending a full review of NAPinclusion in 2017.

Extending the Timeframe

In addition to the required updating, the timeframe of NAPinclusion is being extended by one year, to 2017 for the following reasons:

- To coincide with the interim National Social Target for Poverty Reduction in 2016. It is expected that the results of the CSO SILC 2016 will be published in late 2017.
- To bring NAPinclusion in line with all stakeholder departments' Statements of Strategy, which cover the period 2015-2017.
- To acknowledge 2017 as the 20th anniversary of Ireland's first national poverty strategy and poverty target in 1997. Consultations on future NAPinclusion strategy beyond 2017 could be framed around this landmark anniversary.

ⁱ See www.socialinclusion.ie for Social Inclusion Reports

Updating Process

The Social Inclusion Divisionⁱⁱ in the Department of Social Protection conducted a focused updating of NAPinclusion to cover an extended 2015-2017 timeframe. Government Departments that have responsibility for delivering the programme of goals and actions set out in the Plan were consulted. Each Department was invited to indicate how the high level goals

might be reformulated to better reflect the current issues and interventions to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

In addition, the 2015 Social Inclusion Forum featured a consultation with community and voluntary groups on the current poverty challenges and the key priorities for the period 2015-2017.

Building an Inclusive Recovery

The links between work and poverty are well-established; employment is critical as a route out of poverty. Creating inclusive labour markets is an important element in addressing the needs of those furthest from the labour market and with the highest poverty risk. This is recognised in the Medium-Term Economic Strategy 2014-2020:

“The Government’s purpose is to ensure a job rich recovery and to set Ireland on the path to sustainable prosperity, which will provide jobs and opportunity for our people, provide high quality public services and encourage innovation in business and across society. This will enable the building of a fairer Ireland by helping to reduce inequality and improve poverty outcomes across society, with a particular emphasis on child poverty in line with the Programme for Government”(p 15).ⁱⁱⁱ

Ireland faces a number of challenges in addressing unemployment and high poverty risks, particularly for the long-term unemployed, families (especially

lone parent families) and jobless households. It is also important to consider the gender dimension, not only in terms of female labour market participation and work-life balance, but also in terms of positive outcomes for individuals and for their children.

Ireland is recovering from an unprecedented economic crisis that engulfed the country in recent years. Evidence of an economic recovery continues to emerge. Financial stability has been restored with public finances returned to a sustainable path. The country has exited from the EU-IMF bailout programme and delivered a return to job creation and economic growth.

As the country is moving in the right direction, the Government has set a further priority to broaden and deepen this economic recovery in a manner that is felt in the daily lives of individuals, families and communities across the country, so that the ongoing programme of economic repair will now be accompanied by an equal emphasis on social recovery and improved living and working standards.

ⁱⁱ The Social Inclusion Division has a central role in co-ordinating the ongoing development of the Government’s National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016

ⁱⁱⁱ Government of Ireland (2013) *a Strategy for Growth: Medium-Term Economic Strategy 2014-2020*. Dublin: Government Stationery Office.

The Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016 offers a roadmap on how working families and low and middle income workers will be supported to ensure the dividend of recovery is felt everywhere. This will be achieved through various priorities including:

- Reduction of tax rates for low- and middle- income earners to be delivered over a number of budgets, which will also help promote more job creation and improve Ireland's attractiveness as a location of investment.
- Establishment of a Low Pay Commission to make recommendations on the minimum wage to Government, based on consultation and evidence.

- Introduction of measures to assist low income families by improving the system of child income supports such that those moving from welfare to work will retain payments for children to ensure that people are better off in work.
- Increased access to subsidised childcare and after school places by extending eligibility and rebalancing parental contributions for families making their way into employment.

The Social Impact Assessment of the welfare and income tax measures in Budget 2016^{iv} found that households with children are the biggest beneficiaries of the Budget, including working lone parents and unemployed couples with children.^v

Active Inclusion Strategy

The overall strategy for active inclusion is set out in the National Reform Programme 2011 and is framed around the 'developmental welfare state', as outlined in NAPinclusion.

Active inclusion means enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job. Active inclusion is intended to tackle various challenges including: poverty, social exclusion, in-work poverty, labour market segregation, long-term unemployment and gender inequalities. It has three main policy components:

- **Adequate minimum income:** provision of adequate income support. This could be by linking out-of-work and in-work benefits, and by helping people to access the benefits they are entitled to.

- **Inclusive labour markets:** making it easier for people to join the workforce, tackling in-work poverty, avoiding poverty traps and disincentives to work.
- **Access to quality services:** helping people participate actively in society, by accessing quality services

Social protection through the provision of income support payments as well as access to employment and related services is central to the promotion of active inclusion. The Government's priority in recent years has been to underpin the sustainability of the welfare system into the future, including provision for increasing pensioner numbers arising from demographic pressures

^{iv} SIA is an evidence-based methodology which estimates the likely distributive effects of welfare and tax policies on household income and social groups. It uses the ESRI tax/welfare model, SWITCH, to simulate the impact of budgetary changes on a representative sample of households from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions.

^v See: Department of Social Protection (2015), *Social Impact Assessment of the Welfare and Income Tax Measures in Budget 2016*, Dublin: Department of Social Protection. See: <http://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/SocialImpact2016.aspx>

In recent years, the policy of transforming the social protection system into one which focuses on maximising employability by providing training, development and employment services side by side with income support has been further expanded.

This strategy contributes to the overarching goal of Government to grow the economy and reduce unemployment. Getting people back to work will also assist those at risk of poverty.

National Social Target for Poverty Reduction

The Government published a comprehensive review of the national poverty target, as originally set out in NAPinclusion, in 2012. Based on this review, the Government revised and enhanced the poverty target, now renamed the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction. The revised target is to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 (interim target) and to 2 per cent or less by 2020, from the 2010 baseline rate of 6.3 per cent.

The Social Inclusion Monitor, prepared by the Department of Social Protection, is the official report of progress towards meeting the national social target for poverty reduction and supporting indicators.^{vi}

Europe 2020 Poverty Target

In June 2010, the European Council adopted *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* which sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy for the 21st century. The Strategy reinforces interaction between economic, employment and social policies which is deemed essential to foster sustainable growth, job creation and social and territorial cohesion.

As part of the Strategy, the European Council agreed five headline targets on employment; research and development; climate change; education; and poverty. The targets are seen as being interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

The poverty target is to lift 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion by 2020. As their contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target, Member States are required to set out national poverty targets based on appropriate national indicators, taking into account national circumstances and priorities.

Ireland's contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target is set out in the National Reform Programme 2013. It seeks to lift a minimum of 200,000 people out of 'combined poverty' by 2020 (combination of at-risk-of-poverty, basic deprivation and consistent poverty), using a 2010 baseline.

Child Poverty Target

The Government has agreed a child target to lift at least 70,000 children out of consistent poverty, based on 2011 baseline rate.

Government policy around tackling poverty for children and families is articulated in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF), the national policy framework for children & young people 2014-2020.

In line with this target, the Government has prioritised the implementation of a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty, building on the lifecycle approach in NAPinclusion and informed by the European Commission Recommendation on 'Investing in children: Breaking the cycle of disadvantage'

^{vi} See www.socialinclusion.ie for Social Inclusion Monitors

The whole-of-government approach includes child and family income supports, prevention and early intervention services for children and parents in disadvantaged areas, a national programme to tackle educational disadvantage, a new physical activity plan, increased provision of school meals and access to labour market for jobless households.

A separate action plan will be developed in the context of the work programme of BOBF. Progress will be monitored and evaluated through the processes and structures set out in BOBF. Therefore this issue is not included in the updated NAPInclusion 2015-2017.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

The updating provided an opportunity to consider NAPinclusion in the context of the recently agreed 2030 Agenda, which includes the new Sustainable Development Goals.

In September 2015, a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals was

agreed at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York. These goals, which are universally applicable, represent an ambitious plan to eradicate poverty, address environmental degradation and climate change and build a more peaceful, fair and sustainable world by 2030.

The agreement of these goals sets the course for the entire world to deliver a more sustainable, prosperous and peaceful future for all.

A number of these goals specifically relate to poverty and as such are relevant to the updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017. These include eradicating extreme poverty, reducing by half the proportion of men, women and children living in poverty, and implementing appropriate social protection systems and measures. Ireland's responsibilities under the relevant goals and associated targets will be supported by the continued implementation of NAPinclusion during the period to 2017.

Stakeholder Engagement and People Experiencing Poverty

The Government is committed to engagement with a wide range of stakeholders with an interest and involvement in social inclusion policies and practice. This includes people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and those groups that work with them. The participation of people experiencing poverty is supported through institutional structures such as the Social Inclusion Forum, and various social inclusion initiatives, such as UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Social Inclusion Forum

The annual Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) is part of the institutional structures put in place to underpin the implementation, monitoring and on-going development of

the Government's social inclusion agenda. It provides a forum for wider public consultation and discussion on social inclusion issues, in particular for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the groups that work with them.

The Forum also provides an opportunity for engagement between officials from Government Departments, community and voluntary organisations and people experiencing poverty in relation to the NAPinclusion. This annual event was recently brought forward to the start of the year to better influence policy development, including the European Semester cycle of economic policy guidance and surveillance.^{vii}

^{vii} See www.socialinclusion.ie for SIF conference reports

United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

Each year civil society is engaged and supported through an annual scheme of funding to support community and voluntary groups under a Public Awareness Funding Initiative for United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 17th October (UN Day).

The types of project that have received funding in recent years under this scheme include once-off initiatives with a national/regional or local focus that aim to:

- Create public awareness of the UN International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and of poverty in general;
- Involve people at risk of, or experiencing poverty;
- Express solidarity with the fight to eradicate poverty globally.

A specific requirement of the scheme is that all funded activities must take place on or around 17th October.

Young Social Innovators

The Department of Social Protection has provided financial support to the Young Social Innovators (YSI) programme for the past six years. The YSI was established in 2001 to raise social awareness among 15-18 year olds in Ireland so that they might become effective champions for social justice.

Its Social Innovation Programme targets 2nd level students and is based on experimental learning and underpinned by strong professional development for educators and resource provision. Over 6,500 teenage participants from all of Ireland undertake hundreds of projects throughout Ireland each year. These projects are showcased at an annual event usually held in May.

Updated High Level Goals

The Government has agreed 14 updated high level goals for the period 2015-2017, an increase of two on the previous number of 12. They consist of reformulated and updated versions of high level goals from the existing NAPinclusion along with new goals based on new and emerging issues. They include a focus on early childhood development, youth exclusion, access to the labour market, migrant integration, social housing and affordable energy.

These goals reflect the outcomes of stakeholder consultations carried out during the review process, the Statement of Government Priorities 2014-2016 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

They focus on:

- Ensuring children reach their true potential;
- Supporting working age people and people with disabilities, to increase employment and participation;
- Enabling older people to maintain a comfortable standard of living;
- Improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged areas and vulnerable groups.

Within each section of the lifecycle, a number of high level goals are being prioritized

Children: *Ensuring children reach their true potential*

Goal 1: Early Childhood Care and Education

Continue to invest in high-quality early years care and education for all children through free pre-school provision, by supporting families with childcare costs, in particular families on low incomes, and by improving the quality of provision.

Goal 2: Literacy and Numeracy

Increase the percentages of primary children performing at the highest levels in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 percentage points at both second class and sixth class by 2020. Reduce the percentage of children performing at or below the minimum level in the National Assessment of Mathematics and English Reading by at least 5 percentage points at both second class and sixth class by 2020.

Goal 3: Participation in Education

Promote a well-educated workforce supporting Ireland's recovery and deliver high standards of living for our citizens by reducing the percentage of 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education and not in further education and training to 8%; and increasing the share of 30-34 year olds who have completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 60%.

Goal 4: Child Income Support

Maintain the combined value of child income supports at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate and maximize their effectiveness in reducing child poverty, while continuing to support all parents with the costs of rearing children.

People of Working Age: *Supporting working age people and people with disabilities, to increase employment and participation*

Goal 5: Labour Market Activation

Provide all registered unemployed people with efficient, work-focused income supports together with the supports and direction required to help them plan and implement a pathway into employment. In particular provide people who are long-term unemployed and young unemployed with opportunities to enhance their job prospects through value-adding job search, guidance, work experience, education and training activities.

Goal 6: Welfare to Work

Provide effective support to jobseekers and recipients of the jobseeker's transitional payment (former recipients of One-parent Family Payment) via the Department's Intreo offices and provide information on available in-work supports should they transition into employment.

Goal 7: Youth Employment

Engage all unemployed young people under the age of 25 through Intreo, with a view to ensuring that they receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education. Enhance employability skills for young people through non formal and informal learning opportunities.

Goal 8: Employment of People with Disabilities

Support the increased participation of people with disabilities in work by building skills, capacity and independence; providing bridges and supports into work; making work pay; promoting job retention and re-entry into work; providing seamless support and engaging with employers, as part of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024.

Older People: Enabling older people to maintain a comfortable standard of living

Goal 9: Community Care

Continue to support older people to live in dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible. Where this is not feasible, support access to appropriate quality long-term residential care.

Goal 10: State and Workplace Pensions

Maintain the adequacy and sustainability of State pensions and improve, where possible, outcomes through the pension reform process. Develop a roadmap and timeline for the introduction of a universal, supplementary workplace retirement saving system that considers the constituent factors involved in constructing an efficient and effective broad scheme: design features; cost estimates and phase-in timeframe.

Communities: *Improving the lives of people living in disadvantaged areas and vulnerable groups*

Goal 11: Social Housing

Create a more flexible and responsive system of social housing support including a range of actions to ensure that social housing supports are responsive to people's needs as well as to improvements in their circumstances.

Goal 12: Primary Healthcare

Develop primary care services in the community which will give people direct access to integrated multi-disciplinary teams of general practitioners, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and others.

Goal 13: Migrant Integration

Promote the integration of migrants, and encourage social inclusion, equality, diversity and the participation of migrants in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities through a new migrant integration strategy.

Goal 14: Affordable Energy

Identify an appropriate energy poverty methodology and the data tools necessary to estimate and track energy poverty levels. Reform existing efficiency programmes, or develop new programmes as the best way of addressing energy poverty in the long term, as part of a new national affordable energy strategy.

Supporting Actions & Reporting Framework

The Social Inclusion Report is one of several mechanisms for reporting on progress on poverty and social inclusion. The Department of Social Protection will continue to fulfil its responsibility to report to Government on implementation of NAPinclusion over the period to end 2017. It is envisaged that the next Social Inclusion Report will cover the period 2015-2016 and will be completed in early 2017.

This report will include a focus on appropriate actions to support the implementation of the new goals. These actions will be agreed with all

stakeholder departments during its preparation. The report will be coordinated by the Social Inclusion Division with update material to be supplied by the relevant Government Departments to inform progress.

This will be followed by an independent review of NAPinclusion for the period 2007-2017. The review will be carried out during 2017 in accordance with the priorities of the Government. It will further reflect on the lessons of 20 years of government policies for targeting poverty to inform the next round of NAPinclusion, as required.

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