

POVERTY TODAY

A guide to Sharing in Progress



National Anti-Poverty Strategy

JULY 1997



This leaflet on the National Anti-Poverty Strategy was produced as a supplement to *Poverty Today*, the quarterly journal of the Combat Poverty Agency. Produced as a 'special' on the Strategy, the July issue provides discussion and analysis from several authors on aspects of the Strategy. These include articles on its potential, themes, targets, challenges and monitoring and evaluation. Copies of *Poverty Today* or further copies of this leaflet are available from Publications Section, Combat Poverty Agency Tel. 01 670 6746

Background

At the UN world summit in Copenhagen in March 1995, the Irish government committed itself to the agreed goal of "eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international co-operation as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind" (Copenhagen Declaration, Commitment 2).

Out of this developed the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), a major initiative to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Ireland by targeting five key areas for co-ordinated action by all government departments and state agencies at national, regional and local level. The strategy puts the needs of the poor and excluded among the issues at the top of the national agenda and seeks to create the conditions to enable people break out of the cycle of poverty.

This strategy has been endorsed in Partnership 2000, the national agreement between the government and social partners such as the employer bodies, trade unions, farming organisations and voluntary and community organisations.

Challenge

The challenge is huge. It will mean ensuring that the benefits of sound economic management and growth are distributed fairly and in particular are used to tackle the causes of poverty and social exclusion. It will involve changing deep-seated social structures and attitudes which cause poverty.

If successful, the outcomes of the strategy will be significant also. Individuals and families will benefit from a higher standard of living and the chance to develop their skills and life opportunities. There are also the non-measurable, but very real, benefits of greater independence and self-esteem, relief from the stress of poverty and the strain it places on relationships, hope for the future and pleasure in an improved living environment.

Failure to eradicate poverty will impose huge social and economic costs on the whole society from the social disruption, violence and stresses produced by a divided and unequal society.

What is Poverty?

As well as absolute lack of money, poverty involves isolation, powerlessness and exclusion from participation in the normal activities of society because of inadequate income and resources. Unequal distribution of resources and opportunities contributes to poverty. Society must assist in providing for people's social, emotional and cultural needs as well as their physical wants.

The NAPS defines poverty in the following way:

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.

Although there has been real improvement in incomes since 1987 - the ESRI Living in Ireland Household survey identified the extent of long-term poverty. Nine per cent of households were living on 50% of the national average income and experiencing basic deprivation. Fifteen per cent of households were living on 60% of the national average income and experiencing basic deprivation.

Who are the Poor?

Two main groups are affected; those actually living in poverty and those at high risk of poverty. The ESRI survey showed that households headed by an unemployed person and households headed by someone working full-time in the home were the largest groups living in poverty.

At greatest risk of poverty were:

- the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed
- children, especially those living in large families
- single adult households and households headed by someone working in the home
- lone parents
- people with disabilities.

Other groups include homeless people, Travellers and some members of the gay community. Disadvantage and unemployment affect every area of Ireland but some poverty is concentrated in decaying inner city areas, large public housing estates on the periphery of cities and town, and in underdeveloped, isolated rural areas. In these areas, people suffer cumulative disadvantage. Poverty also can affect men and women differently.

Overall Aims of NAPS

The overall aim of the NAPS is to reduce the 9% to 15% of the population who are consistently poor, as measured by the ESRI, to less than 5% to 10%, between 1997 to 2007.

It is recognised that five key areas need to be tackled if there is to be any significant progress in eradicating poverty. These are:

- educational disadvantage
- unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment
- income adequacy
- disadvantaged urban areas
- rural poverty.

Targets and Strategies

There are specific targets for each of these five areas. The first three areas are of central importance. There is a recognised link between unemployment and poverty. Educational disadvantage increases the risk of unemployment and consequent inadequate income. Targets for the first three strands are:

EDUCATION

Target: to eliminate early school-leaving before the Junior Certificate and reduce early school-leaving at Senior Cycle level so that the percentage of those completing the Senior Cycle will increase to at least 90% by the year 2000 and 98% by the year 2007

Supporting strategies include:

- assisting with the costs of education for low income families
- increasing pre-school education
- preventing educational disadvantage at primary level
- ensuring continued provision for special education needs
- improving measures for Traveller children
- tackling early school leaving and
- supporting lifelong learning.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Target: to reduce the rate of unemployment, on the basis of the Labour Force Survey, from 11.9% at April 1996 to 6% by 2007; to reduce the rate of long-term unemployment from 7% to 3.5% by 2007 with a particular focus on the very long-term unemployed

Supporting strategies include:

- continuing the macro-economic policy direction of recent years
- increasing the overall level of jobs and income generating opportunities in the economy
- ensuring the unemployed can access the skills necessary to take up available jobs and can increase the wages they command when employed
- tackling barriers to employment for the unemployed
- reviewing labour market programmes such as the Community Employment, Part-time Job Opportunities

and Jobs Initiative and increasing the number of places by 10,000 as resources permit

- establishing a working group on the employment potential of the social economy
- improving the labour force participation of women, people with disabilities and the Traveller community
- focussing on tax improvements for the low paid.

INCOME

Target: to ensure all policies in relation to income support, including employment, tax, social welfare or pensions provide sufficient income to enable people move out of poverty and live in a manner compatible with human dignity

Supporting strategies include:

- ensuring that there is consistency between social welfare policy, employment and labour market policies, pay rates, occupational pensions etc.
- consideration of approaches for establishing measures of income adequacy
- facilitating the transition from welfare to work through reducing unemployment and poverty traps
- developing child income support measures
- ensuring that all citizens have adequate replacement income in retirement
- developing integrated personal taxation measures
- working to ensure that means-testing of welfare payments poses as little disincentive as possible
- examining the individualisation of social welfare payments
- examining child care issues
- extending the Money Advice and Budgeting Services and further developing the Free Fuel Scheme.

For disadvantaged urban areas the aim is to ensure that the targets for education, employment and income adequacy are achieved in these particular areas. Specifically, it is to reduce the marginalisation of communities living in disadvantaged urban areas by increasing their standard of living and providing opportunities for participation.

With rural poverty, the aim is to overcome the distinct elements of rural poverty and isolation, through the provision of services, so that the targets for education, unemployment and income are achieved in those areas.

Pursuit of the set targets will require a greater emphasis on measuring the impact of programmes and improving their design and delivery to achieve the required results. In relation to additional resources, a re-ordering of Government spending priorities will be required, with expenditure increases in some areas, such as measures to reduce long-term unemployment, being compensated for by reductions in other areas.

Principles

The following principles underlie this strategy and inspire all action to achieve it:

- ensuring equal access and participation for all
- guaranteeing the rights of minorities, especially

- through anti-discrimination measures
- reducing inequality and especially addressing the gender dimensions of poverty
- development of the partnership approach, building on national and local partnership processes
- actively involving the community and voluntary sector
- encouraging self-reliance through respecting individual dignity and promoting empowerment
- engaging in appropriate consultative processes especially with users of services.

The development of NAPS involved wide-ranging consultation with and participation of people who experience poverty at first hand, with the voluntary and community sector, and with the social partners.

Institutional Arrangements

The following structures have been put in place to underpin the NAPS.

POLITICAL:

- A cabinet sub-committee will be established to deal with issues of poverty and social exclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach and including all ministers whose brief includes policy areas relevant to tackling poverty, including the Minister for Finance.
- The Minister for Social Welfare will have responsibility for overseeing the strategy day-to-day and will appear before the Social Affairs Committee to update the Oireachtas on developments with NAPS.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

- The NAPS Inter-Departmental Policy Committee will continue and will be chaired jointly by the Departments of the Taoiseach and Social Welfare. The committee will comprise senior officers with responsibility for ensuring that the NAPS provisions for their particular department are implemented.
- A team to co-ordinate the implementation of the strategy will be established under the Strategic Management Initiative and be based in the Department of Social Welfare. It will comprise core staffing and be augmented, on a full-time or part-time basis, by officials from the key departments involved. Departments will be required to build the NAPS targets and principles into their Strategic Management Initiative statements.
- These arrangements will be put in place for three years after which their effectiveness will be reviewed.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- The National Economic and Social Forum will have responsibility for monitoring the social inclusion element of Partnership 2000 and consequently will report regularly on the NAPS.
- The Combat Poverty Agency will constitute another key element of the monitoring arrangements. It will oversee an evaluation of the NAPS process which will include consideration of the views and experience of the voluntary and community sector, and will present

the results of this evaluation to the inter-departmental committee. As well as having a role in the provision of information and education, the Agency will also support, in an advisory capacity, individual government departments and local and/or regional structures in the development of anti-poverty strategies. The Agency will be particularly called upon to advise on anti-poverty strategies in the context of the local government reform process.

- Consultation with and the involvement of the community and voluntary sector which has characterised the NAPS process will continue and develop.

Partnership

Continuation and development of the consultative mechanism with the community and voluntary sector, service users and those with first hand experience of poverty will be maintained through:

- involvement in working groups or necessary
- monitoring of the NAPS in the context of arrangements for monitoring Partnership 2000
- continued funding of national anti-poverty networks
- occasional consultative seminars with the community and voluntary sector.

Local and Regional Level

The future development of local government provides an opportunity to foster social inclusiveness and equality of opportunity. Relating to this local anti-poverty strategies may be drawn up by local authorities.

Information and Research

The need to inform the general public and the public service about the National Anti-Poverty Strategy is acknowledged as being of key importance for government department and the Combat Poverty Agency.

The need to strengthen the collection, analysis and discussion of data on poverty and to identify gaps is also acknowledged. The Combat Poverty Agency and relevant government departments will have a research role.

Further Information on



Contact:

Department of Social Welfare
Tel. 01 704 3827