

**NAPS Policy and Process –  
what have we learned?**

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## Abstract

Using a ‘new governance’ framework, this paper charts the evolution of the Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) and assesses the extent of change in policy institutions, the processes and performance, as well as looking at the implications that these hold for policy accountability and the role of the state in fostering social inclusion. The evolution and progress of the NAPS is assessed against the three-fold ambitions that NAPS was originally intended to achieve, namely: greater integration in policy initiatives involving cross-cutting departmental responsibilities; the introduction of ‘poverty impact assessments’ to all government initiatives and key policy areas; and, developing the participation of people living in poverty. It finds that for a variety of reasons, these objectives have been only partially achieved and that there is as much to be learned from a closer examination of the policy *process* associated with NAPS as there is from an evaluation of the policy *outputs*.

Key words: Anti-poverty strategies, social inclusion, new governance

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## Abbreviations

BEPG	Broad Economic Policy Guidelines
CDBs	County/City Development Boards
CLÁR	Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais
CWC	Community Workers Cooperative
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DJELR	Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
DoEHLG	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
DoELG	Department of the Environment and Local Government (now DoEHLG)
DSCFA	Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (now DSFA)
DSFA	Department of Social and Family Affairs
EAPN	European Anti-Poverty Network
ECCE	Early Childhood Care Education
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
Forum	Forum of People with Disabilities
GLEN	Gay and Lesbian Equality Network
IDPC	Inter-Departmental Policy Committee
INOUE	Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed
IPA	Institute of Public Administration
IRL	Irish Rural Link
ITM	Irish Travellers Movement
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NAP s/in	National Action Plan on social inclusion
NCIP	National Childcare Investment Plan
NDA	National Disability Authority
NDS	National Disability Strategy
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NPW	National Parks and Wildlife
OPEN	One Parent Exchange Network
OMC	Office of the Minister for Children
OSI	Office for Social Inclusion
PIAs	Poverty Impact Assessments

RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development Programme
RAS	Rental Accommodation Scheme
SGP	Stability and Growth Pact
SICG	Social Inclusion Consultative Group
SMI	Strategic Management Initiative
SPCs	Strategic Policy Committees

## 1 Introduction – Research design and conceptual framework

The Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS), at the time of its inception and since, has been presented as an example of innovative public policy delivery, both in terms of the policy output it produced and in terms of the policy process from which it emerged. This report focuses on the second of these and seeks to explore what the NAPS experience can tell us about the evolution of governance mechanisms aimed at tackling social exclusion in Ireland.

The move from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ has gained popular recognition as a short-hand way of referring to a series of recognised trends in contemporary government behaviour related to the evolution of new policy styles and substance. Although there is no uniform prescription for the precise outcome of these trends, there is broad agreement about the kinds of changes in policy practice that they imply.

In terms of policy architecture, new governance models are associated with an increased incidence of bargaining or communicative institutions, as opposed to the relatively hierarchical organisation of state bureaucracy and political institutions associated with traditional government frameworks (Peters and Pierre, 2000a).

In terms of policy process, new governance models are heavily premised upon the involvement of a range of non-state actors (though it is not always clear who these actors are, or ought to be). Kooiman’s (1999) social political model, for example, is centrally occupied with the issue of how different actors (those who govern and those who are governed) interact with each other. The inclusion of new policy actors, both across the policy domain and between different levels of government, often gives rise to another key characteristic – the advent of so-called ‘multi-levelled governance’ (Bache and Flinders, 2004).

Within this context, it is supposed that the move from ‘old governance’ to ‘new governance’ signals ‘profound shifts in authority relationships’ (Michalski *et al*, 2001; Pierre, 2000) – one where the emergence of a more prominent role for non-state actors is seen as an important factor, so that the evolution towards a (new) governance mode is dependent not just on the ‘actions of governments themselves’,

but on a wider range of civil society actors (Peters and Pierre, 2000b). The traditional notion of ‘government as hierarchies’ has given way (in varying degrees) in most analyses to one in which the state retains a central position, but where it exercises its influence more indirectly through co-ordination and steering and the deployment of resources under its control, and where as a consequence, state institutions display greater heterogeneity and fragmentation with less reliance on traditional constitutional powers (Hirst, 2000; Peters and Pierre, 2000a). In such scenarios, it is argued that policy outcomes are achieved through a combination of formal bureaucracy that provides public accountability and informal networks that enable access to local knowledge (Sabel, 2001).

In more contemporary governance models, the degree to which the state actually loses power, encapsulated by Rhodes’ (1994) notion of state ‘hollowing out’, has been questioned. Some suggest that there has instead been a ‘filling in’ of the state spaces that reflects a redefinition of the state’s role, rather than its withdrawal (Marinetto, 2003). Others argue that the state has not assumed a more facilitative, brokering, or ‘pacting’ role, but maintains its dominant ‘power’ role in goal setting and the mobilisation and distribution of resources (Clegg and Clasen, 2004).

In light of these new governance themes and issues, the NAPS presents a useful exemplar of shifts in governance because of its primary focus on social inclusion. Social inclusion is a complex concept, but one that usefully highlights a range of ‘new governance’ issues since efforts to promote inclusion are necessarily cross-cutting thematics that typically require multi-agency responses. In this context, it is understood that 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 that is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources, people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people (Office for Social Inclusion, 2005a).

Building on the internationally acknowledged success of Irish ‘partnership government’, the stated intention of the NAPS was to change government policy

*process* as much as *policy outputs* (de Rossa, 1997). This was to be achieved through the use of a range of new policy fora and with European Union (EU) involvement. In consequence, the central concern of this report is to examine whether the NAPS has effected changes in public policy processes and to what extent these changes might reflect significant policy shifts: first, in terms of changing attitudes towards social exclusion; and second, in terms of new policy processes implied by the ‘new governance’ policy paradigm.

The paper draws its conclusions from a mixed methods research strategy, combining policy analysis and academic literature search and review, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to uncover public policy attitudes towards social inclusion. In order to generate attitudinal data regarding the breadth and depth of knowledge about social inclusion amongst senior civil servants, during the summer of 2005 we carried out a survey of senior civil servants in the Departments of Finance; Education and Science; Health and Children; Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Environment, Heritage and Local Government; Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Justice, Equality and Law Reform; An Taoiseach; and Social, Community and Family Affairs.

998 self-administered questionnaires were sent out to all civil servants from Assistant Principal Officer upwards in these Departments;<sup>1</sup> 237 questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 24 per cent). The questionnaires asked for details of the civil servant’s knowledge of, and attitudes towards, social exclusion and the role of the NAPS in combating exclusion (see Appendix 1). In all, 23 questionnaires were returned unanswered: 7 because the individual concerned no longer worked within the Department; 2 because the respondents did not wish to complete the questionnaire; and 14 were bundled together from the Department of Finance, with a note to say that ‘this does not apply to us’.

The responses to the questionnaires were supplemented by 26 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders from relevant government Departments, state agencies and advocacy groups at national and local level. The survey research and elite interviews were analysed using SPSS and Nvivo software respectively.

The remainder of this report is divided into seven sections, with a view to establishing whether or not the NAPS represents the kind of policy-making innovation described by ‘new governance’ reviewed above. Following an overview of the genesis and origins of the NAPS in section 2, section 3 examines the institutional evolution of the NAPS’ policy architecture, in order to assess whether we see a definitive shift in relation to changing policy architecture. Section 4 looks at the NAPS and the EU dimension to social inclusion, especially since the advent of the EU’s ‘open method of coordination’ of policies of member states, with a view to assessing the multi-levelled dimension to the NAPS. Key elements of the NAPS’ policy process are addressed in sections 5 and 6. Section 5 examines the NAPS’ impact on policy formulation, whilst Section 6 looks at the implementation of the NAPS’ ambitions at national and local level. Following from this, section 7 presents four short case studies of the roll-out of the NAPS’ objectives in individual policy areas, with a view to giving a more holistic impression of the NAPS’ impact. Finally, section 8 provides the conclusions of the research: first, in relation to a variety of key empirical findings; and second, in terms of the conclusions we may draw about the NAPS as a ‘new governance’ policy process.

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<sup>1</sup> Names and addresses of the sample were obtained from the *IPA Yearbook and Diary*.

## 2 The genesis of NAPS – Origins and influences

The NAPS represented the first attempt by any state to adopt an explicit target against which progress in reducing poverty could be monitored (see Table 2.1). The NAPS' overall objective of 'considerably reducing the numbers of those who are "consistently poor" from 9%–15% to less than 5%–10%', as measured by the national Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), is often referred to as its 'global target'. In this context, 'consistent poverty' is defined as being below 50–60 per cent of average household income and experience of basic deprivation as measured by at least one of eight indicators (Department of Social and Family Affairs, 2001). In addition to this, the NAPS identifies five priority areas for government action with associated targets in the areas of educational disadvantage; unemployment; income adequacy; disadvantaged urban areas; and rural poverty.

**Table 2.1: NAPS' key areas and targets**

AREA	TARGET
Educational disadvantage	To eliminate early school-leaving before junior certificate; to have 90 per cent completing the senior cycle by 2000 and 98 per cent by 2007; to ensure there are no students with serious literacy and numeracy problems in early primary education within 5 years
Unemployment	To reduce the rate of unemployment (as measured in the Labour Force Survey) from 11.9 per cent in April 1996, to 6 per cent by 2007; and reduce the rate of long-term unemployment from 7 per cent to 3.5 per cent, with particular focus on the very long-term unemployed
Income adequacy	To contribute to reducing the percentage of the population whom the ESRI has identified as 'consistently poor' from 9–15 per cent to less than 5–10 per cent by 2007; all social welfare payments to reach the minimum of the lower range recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare
Disadvantaged urban areas	To reduce the numbers suffering the greatest deprivation in disadvantaged urban areas by increasing their standard of living and providing opportunities for participation, thus reducing the measured indicators of disadvantage in the area, especially the rate of unemployment, and particularly long-term unemployment, by 2007
Rural poverty	To ensure that strategies are developed with regard to the provision of services in rural areas, especially those concerned with educational disadvantage, unemployment and income adequacy, so that the overall targets of the NAPS are achieved in rural areas

Source: Government of Ireland (1997)

The first impulse towards the NAPS came at the Copenhagen UN World Summit on Social Development in 1995, when the then Minister for Social Welfare and leader of the Democratic Left in the so-called 'Rainbow coalition' (with Fine Gael and Labour), Proinsias de Rossa, announced the Irish government's commitment to drawing up a NAPS. This ten-year strategy was subsequently launched in April 1997 as 'a mechanism for changing the mindset of the decision-makers in our society, to factor in a consciousness of poverty into all public policy decisions' (De Rossa, 1997).

On the one hand, the NAPS was quite clearly an initiative spawned by a centre-left government, and the imprint of this government's ideas could be seen in other major policy initiatives that complemented and augmented the NAPS. The insertion of articles 136 and 137 into the Amsterdam Treaty, enshrining the first unambiguous EU reference to combating social exclusion, during the Irish hosting of the EU Presidency, is but one example. Equally significant, the Rainbow coalition's stewardship of the fourth national agreement, *Partnership 2000*, was considered by many the most ambitious yet and reflected a significant shift of emphasis compared to other programmes.

Alongside commitments to pay increases and tax reduction, this pact was notable for its inclusion of representatives from the community and voluntary sector, which, combined with a thematic approach to the identification and prioritisation of objectives, broadened the programme's sphere of interest (National Economic and Social Forum, 1997). As a result, *Partnership 2000* laid a stronger emphasis on dealing with inequality, long-term unemployment and social exclusion than had been the case in other agreements (see Appendix 2). It was responsible for the creation of the Equality Authority (which replaced the Employment Equality Agency), a commission on wage differentials, and one on the family, as well as a review body for special education. Additionally, the programme signalled a measure of agreement on action to modernise the public service, enlisting the social partners in support of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI), plus an explicit endorsement that 'developing partnership in the workplace' was key to building a more competitive Ireland (Roche and Cradden, 2003).

On the other hand, the broader political and economic circumstances pertaining at that time made the moment propitious for such a project. The inclusion of the community and voluntary pillar in the social partnership arrangements reflected the

government's acknowledgement of the importance of civil society in public policy deliberations. This point had already been conceded by the previous Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition government with the creation of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in 1993. Set up under the Office of the Tánaiste (deputy Prime Minister), which was itself an innovation demanded by Labour's inclusion in the coalition, the NESF was 'designed to include women's organisations, the unemployed, the disadvantaged, youth, the elderly and people with a disability, in order that they might influence public policy' (Spring, 1997).

More generally the trend towards consultative policy-making was by this time a well-established *modus vivendi*, supported by developments within and outside the state (O'Donnell, Adshead and Thomas, 2007). At domestic level, by the time of the third national agreement, the *Programme for Competitiveness and Work* (1994–1996), the 'partnership process' had become strongly embedded into the architecture of Irish governance. All the main political parties had been involved at one stage or another of the partnership process, and business and union representatives began to acknowledge 'the cultural shift' to partnership governance (Interview B, 08/02/2006; Interview C, 08/02/2006). From the government's point of view, there was an acknowledgement of the collective comfort in those peak level engagements that people brought to the table (Interview C, 08/02/2006).

These changing patterns of governance were further promoted by Ireland's EU membership where, 'compared to other European states, Ireland was uniquely susceptible to Europeanisation effects because of the nationwide consensus in favour of EU membership' (Adshead, 2005:162). In attempting to respond to sequential EU Structural Fund reforms, Irish governments were obliged to reorganise policy processes, giving greater voice to a wide range of stakeholders identified by the reforms. This, combined with the change of attitude at national level to government and policy-making, facilitated a change in the structure and style of government, which has been characterised as a move towards 'new governance' (Adshead and Quinn, 1998).

### 3 Institutional evolution and adaptation of the NAPS

Following a period of engagement with civil society the NAPS was launched in April 1997, immediately after which a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion was set up to meet on a monthly basis. Chaired by the Taoiseach, the committee includes all Ministers whose brief involves policy areas relevant to tackling poverty, including the Minister for Finance. By 1998 the work of the Cabinet Committee was being supported by a Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion, comprising high-level civil servants from relevant Departments, whose function was to prepare the agenda and recommendations for review by the Cabinet Committee.

In addition, the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee (IDPC)<sup>2</sup> that originally developed the strategy remained in place to oversee its implementation and the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs was given day-to-day responsibility for its roll-out. At its first meeting after the launch of the NAPS, the IDPC agreed that a system of policy-proofing in relation to the impact of major policy measures on poverty should be established. Following an agreement with the social partners in July 1998, the government adopted a pilot poverty-proofing system as part of official Cabinet procedures. As a result, memoranda for government and key policy initiatives that require significant policy decisions by Cabinet must now indicate clearly the impact of the proposals on groups in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty (Goodbody Economic Consultants, 2001:13).<sup>3</sup>

The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA), now known as the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA), was tasked with setting up a dedicated 'NAPS Unit'. This unit, in addition to providing the secretariat to the IDPC, was given responsibility for co-ordinating and developing cross-departmental action in support of social inclusion initiatives and liaising between a variety of the NAPS' stakeholders (including government Departments, other national and international agencies, the social partners and the EU).

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<sup>2</sup> Comprising senior civil servants, plus representatives of FÁS (*Foras Áiseanna Sáothair* – the Training and Employment Authority), Pobal (an intermediary organisation established by government to oversee the dispersal of EU Global Grant funds), and the Combat Poverty Agency (a statutory body responsible for providing policy advice and research on poverty and anti-poverty policies).

<sup>3</sup> As of January 2006 the concept of poverty proofing has now been replaced with Poverty Impact Assessments (PIAs).

Originally, the Strategy envisaged that the NAPS Unit would be mirrored by a similar unit in the Department of the Taoiseach's office, which could provide political and administrative support for the Unit's work. It was also intended that a SMI team, comprising its own core staff, plus representatives from other relevant Departments, would be located in the DSCFA, complementing SMI's support structure centrally in the Taoiseach's office and liaising with the Combat Poverty Agency where appropriate. This reflected the Rainbow government's view that 'a key element of the strategy is the extent to which it will be underpinned by the Strategic Management Initiative' (Bruton, 1997). Following the change of government in June 1997, however, these developments did not come to fruition.

In order to promote the work of the NAPS Unit at departmental level, it was intended that the NAPS Unit would include permanent representatives from other relevant Departments on a full or part-time basis, supported where necessary by external expertise (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000b). The corollary of this would be the appointment of NAPS Liaison Officers to all government Departments, acting as the first point of contact in relation to the NAPS issues within their Departments. The appointment of permanent representatives from other Departments and the uptake of external expertise did not occur. Moreover, instead of appointing NAPS Liaison Officers to all Departments, staff were placed only in those Departments whose remit directly included anti-poverty work (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000b:39). This is important since the NAPS is intended as an overarching strategy statement and, as such, 'its focus is on co-ordinating and integrating policy responses. It remains the responsibility of individual Departments to implement their own programmes' (Department of Social and Family Affairs, 2001).

In relation to the monitoring and evaluation of the NAPS, the NESF, which already had responsibility for monitoring the social inclusion element of the national agreement 1997–2000, *Partnership 2000*, were asked to specifically report on the progress of the NAPS implementation. The Combat Poverty Agency was charged with overseeing the evaluation of the NAPS process, 'which would include consideration of the views and experience of the community and voluntary sector', and report back to the IDPC (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000b: 36). The agency was also to provide information and education material, advice and support, to individual government Departments and other appropriate local and regional government structures. These developments at

national level were augmented by parallel developments at sub-national and European levels.

At local level it was assumed that the reforms designed to give local government an enhanced role in strategic and economic planning, arising from the *Better Local Government* initiative (Government of Ireland, 1996), would further advance the NAPS objectives. At European level, following the Lisbon Summit in March 2000, the requirement for member states to each produce a National Action Plan on social inclusion (NAP s/inc), provided a further opportunity for peer review and the development of monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

## 4 NAPS and the EU – ‘Lisbon Europe’ and Social Inclusion<sup>4</sup>

### 4.1 Introduction

In 1997 Article 137 of the Amsterdam Treaty gave the first explicit reference to ‘social Europe’ by requiring the EU to support the actions of member states to combat social exclusion and thus to ‘improve knowledge, develop exchanges of information and best practices, promote innovative approaches and evaluate experience’. It was not, however, until the Lisbon Summit in March 2000 that the EU began to specifically address social policy. The launching of the ‘Lisbon Strategy’, widely regarded as a watershed moment for the EU, signalled the EU’s most conspicuous move into the social policy arena. With the intention of making the EU ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion,’ the Lisbon Summit agreed to ‘make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010’ (Nice European Council, 2000).

Recognising the role played by quantitative indicators and targets in the implementation of monetary union, it was argued that there was a case for setting targets in terms of poverty and social exclusion similar to those that had been achieved earlier in the macro-economic field as part of the Maastricht process (Atkinson, 2002: 627). Broadly speaking, the Lisbon targets comprised of: facilitating participation in employment and access to resources, rights, goods and services; preventing the risks of social exclusion; helping the most vulnerable; and mobilising all relevant bodies towards the social inclusion agenda (see Atkinson *et al*, 2004).

In consequence, it was agreed that each member state should prepare a biennial NAP s/inc for consideration by the European Commission, in order to foster the exchange of best practice and peer review. A key element of this so-called Open Method of Co-ordination is the preparation of a regular Joint Report by the Commission and Council, which ideally goes beyond simple description so as to provide critical analysis of action in member states with a view to improving overall performance in all member states.

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<sup>4</sup> The term ‘Lisbon Europe’ is taken from Brigid Laffan (2001).

## 4.2 The Open Method of Co-ordination as policy instrument

Although the Lisbon leaders coined the term ‘open method of co-ordination’ and described its features, the Lisbon Summit was not the first time that this kind of policy concertation had been attempted. It was, in many respects, modelled on the European Employment Strategy (Trubek and Mosher, 2003), launched in 1997. The method also had prototypes in the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines (BEPG) and in the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) (Tepsa, 2002), as well as in codes of conduct in business taxation (Radaelli, 2003). Open Method of Co-ordination

Radaelli (2003: 17) suggests that the best way to understand this mix of new and old policy practices is to think of Open Method of Co-ordination as a ‘legitimising discourse’ within the circle of EU leaders, which is able to draw together and provide a common rationale for a variety of existing, yet scattered, policy practices.

Nevertheless, the Lisbon European Council (23-24 March 2000) is credited with establishing Open Method of Co-ordination as a policy mechanism in its own right, with its own distinctive features. As such, Radaelli (2003: 15) notes that the Open Method of Co-ordination has the following properties and instruments:

- fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving goals in the short, medium and long terms
- establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world, tailored to the needs of the different member states and sectors as a means of comparing best practice
- translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets
- periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes (Presidency Conclusions, point 37)

The ‘method’ in its ‘most sophisticated form’ also comprises the use of guidelines, bench-marking and sharing best practice, multi-lateral surveillance, indicators, iterative processes, and implementation through domestic policy and legislation without recourse to EU legislation (Radaelli, 2003: 16). All in all, by allowing some European influence to filter into domestic policy areas previously not covered by the EU, the ‘open method’ represents an EU ‘soft-policy’ – one which recognises that social policy remains the responsibility of member states. The EU Commission

provides objectives, guidelines and indicators and monitors policy progress of implementation, but the responsibility for policy lies unambiguously with the member state.

### **4.3 NAPS and the Open Method of Co-ordination**

This section considers the relationship between the NAPS and the EU open method of co-ordination, through an examination of the Irish government's NAP s/inc and the EU response to them in the European Council's Joint Report on Social Inclusion. This is a process that, according to Bulmer and Radaelli (2004), may easily be classified as 'facilitated co-ordination' and, as our examination of the case demonstrates, EU influence is both limited and largely at the 'ideational level'.

### **4.4 NAP s/inc (2000–2002)**

It could be argued that the outcome of the European Council meeting in Lisbon, in March 2000, presented something of a 'poisoned chalice' for Ireland's NAPS. For Ireland, the requirement to produce a NAP s/inc, so soon after devising a NAPS, provided a perfect opportunity to demonstrate the government's commitment to tackling social exclusion.

Instead, the Irish government appears to have viewed the submission of the first NAP s/inc as a distinct and quite separate government activity (Atkinson, 2002: 629). The Commission commented in its Joint Report that 'neither the analysis which underpins the NAPS nor any of the recent evaluations of this strategy are adequately reflected in the NAP s/inc' (Commission of the European Communities (CEC), 2001: 109).

Suggesting that trend information on poverty was not adequately provided, that rural deprivation was endemic, and that there were no specific references to social rights within the plan, the Commission argued that the plan lacked an explicit analysis of the problems of social inclusion, including health, rural deprivation, housing and transport (CEC, 2001). In sum, 'it [the NAP s/inc] does not provide a quantitative or qualitative critique, nor any adequate evaluation evidence from the first four years of the Anti-Poverty Strategy' (CEC, 2001: 56).

In response, the Director of the NAPS Unit suggested that both the timing (less than twelve months before the NAPS' review) and the time-frame (six months) for completion of the NAP s/inc were inadequate, arguing that:

The Commission are a little out of touch with national pressures; you couldn't develop a NAP realistically in six months. Policies have a long gestation period; you identify a problem, you have to come up with solutions to it, you have to convince the Department of Finance, and so many people. One policy is competing with another ... and there's no real easy solution (Interview, 29/06/2004).<sup>5</sup>

In terms of the institutional evolution of the NAPS, this suggests three possible explanations: first, government mechanisms for monitoring the strategy were not yet operational; second, the monitoring mechanisms were in place, but the systems of feedback to the government were not; third, monitoring and feedback mechanisms were in place, but the drafters of the NAP s/inc report were unaware of them, or perhaps unwilling to share them with the European Commission.

After publication of the first NAP s/inc, the Commission heavily criticised the Irish plan. In an original draft of the report, the member states were classified into four different groups. Ireland joined Belgium, Germany, Spain and Italy. This, the Commission determined, exhibited 'elements of a national strategy that (was) being improved in order to reflect new realities or made more coherent' but that did not set overall targets (Ferrera *et al*, 2002: 12). This system of classification was subsequently withdrawn and 'rewritten to praise good practices rather than criticise bad ones' (Zeitlin, 2003: 26). In the final draft, Ireland was praised for its exponential economic growth, record decrease in both short and long-term unemployment, and fall in the national measure of poverty. Even so, the Commission still saw fit to criticise many elements of the plan.

On a general note, the Commission expressed concerns over increasing income disparities and noted that Ireland had the lowest percentage spending of GDP on social protection in the EU: this stood at 16 per cent in 2001, compared to an average of 27.5 per cent across the EU (Healy and Reynolds, 2003: 56). More specifically, the Commission noted that although the NAP s/inc contained a long list of pre-existing policies, it was very short on new initiatives and approaches. This less than positive view was shared by many in the community and voluntary sector, who pronounced the plan 'extremely disappointing' (EAPN, 2002: 69). Many complained that it was less

participative than other strategic processes and that their contributions were 'less valued' (Commission of the European Communities, 2001: 57).

#### **4.5 NAP s/inc (2003–2005)**

By the time Ireland's second NAP s/inc (2003–2005) was compiled, most of the commitments made under the first NAP s/inc had been fulfilled (O'Donnell and Moss, 2004), and the revised NAPS had set new (36) targets and objectives in the area of social inclusion (Government of Ireland, 2002). In consequence, the 2004 Joint Report was able to note the 'substantial strategic progress made since the first plan', especially in terms of the 'ambitious new targets and institutional arrangements' put forward in the NAPS review (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 177). In addition, the wider engagement of civil society through the social inclusion forum was noted and praised.

Many other aspects of the plan were also welcomed in the report, including the fact that commitments to increase social expenditure had for the most part been fulfilled, a large number of key targets had been introduced which were quantifiable and time-focused, and the plan was much more comprehensive than the previous NAP s/inc, covering a wider range of issues.

Nevertheless, the Commission reiterated concerns expressed in the first Joint Report (over the continued income disparities which particularly affected the elderly, those with large families, and lone parents), along with a number of new ones. It noted that persistent poverty stood at 13 per cent – one of the highest rates among the EU countries – and that the number of people falling into the 'at risk of poverty' category had risen from 19 to 21 per cent between 1998 and 2001 (CEC, 2003: 176). Additionally, health, rural disadvantage, housing and homelessness were all singled out as being in need of further attention. The policy of 'direct provision' for refugees and asylum seekers was condemned as militating against social inclusion.

The rights-based approach included in the plan was deemed to be insufficient, and the strengthening of the social inclusion coordinating mechanisms at local and regional levels was identified as being crucial to 'ensure an integrated approach that will enable the successful delivery and implementation of the NAP objectives' (CEC,

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<sup>5</sup> Unpublished MA dissertation, Anna Freerick, UCD, September 2004, p.24.

2003: 179). Overall, the report identified, as a major concern, the challenge of ensuring that sufficient resources were available to underpin the commitments made.

Many of these concerns were amplified by the community and voluntary sector in Ireland. The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) voiced concerns relating to this NAP s/inc (EAPN, 2003; Farrell, 2003; Hanan, 2004). There was acknowledgement that the requirement to produce a NAP s/inc managed to keep the concern of addressing poverty on the European political agenda. However, it was generally noted that although the second NAP s/inc contained strong statements about the importance of the Lisbon objectives, these were not well reflected in its policy content.

Echoing criticisms of the first NAP s/inc, it was suggested that the second NAP s/inc read more like a report than a plan, with few proposals either for the period of the plan or for the remainder of the NAPS as a whole (to 2010). Instead, the second NAP s/inc was seen to rely heavily on the existing revised NAPS and its contemporaneous social partnership agreement, *Sustaining Progress*. Those targets that were specified were a reiteration of those laid out in the revised NAPS, with little to indicate how they might be time-tabled, resourced or implemented. The absence of ethnic minority perspectives, or of gender-based or rights-based approaches to tackling poverty, were singled out as particularly disappointing, more especially since these themes had featured strongly in consultations prior to the compilation of the NAP s/inc.

A statement produced in response to the plan by the Community Workers Cooperative (CWC, 2003) suggested that it offered 'little indication that the government is serious about tackling poverty and social exclusion'. Instead, it argued, the document was primarily a recounting of existing government policies and commitments, 'presented without any critique of how these policies are actually delivering change on the ground' (CWC, 2003). In short, the plan 'restates the aspirations set in the NAPS review and in *Sustaining Progress*, but 'commits to no new resources or actions that might actually make a real impact on poverty or social exclusion' (CWC, 2003).

Admittedly, the revision of the NAPS does take account of some of the EU criticisms, but it could easily be argued that the impetus for these reforms comes as much from

the national political arena – through a pre-existing timetable for the NAPS review and the integration of the NAPS with pre-existing social partnership structures. More substantive issues highlighted by iterative Joint Reports (the need to develop relative poverty indicators, or to specifically address gender and ethnic minority based forms of exclusion, or to ring-fence resources to deliver on goals) remain largely ignored in successive Irish NAP s/inc's.

Nevertheless, there is an acknowledgement that, over time, 'a shared analysis of poverty had emerged' (O'Donnell and Moss, 2004: 6). More generally, it is clear that the discourse of Irish anti-poverty policy approaches is shifting. Policies that were once focused on 'poverty reduction' have over time switched their emphasis, first to 'income adequacy', then to 'combating social exclusion', and most recently to 'fostering social inclusion'. With relative income poverty (the proportion of the population falling below 60 per cent of median income) increasing from 15.6 per cent in 1997 to 21.9 per cent in 2004 (CSO, 2004), it is hard to find evidence of more substantive policy change.

What this tells us about the alleged changing role of the government *vis-à-vis* the EU in an Open Method of Co-ordination context is worth considering. In terms of the multi-levelled governance dimensions to the NAPS, the influence of the EU is important, but only insofar as it has helped to shape contemporary Irish attitudes to social pacts and partnership. In terms of direct influence on the content of NAPS' policies, the Open Method of Co-ordination has proven to be significant only at the ideational level and not in terms of concrete policy advice. Whilst the pessimist might conclude that evidence for the impact of the 'Lisbon Agenda' and the Open Method of Co-ordination on Irish social policy is poor, the optimist could reasonably argue that the attention given to Irish NAPS' and associated policies by the EU provides an additional potential impetus for policy reform that might not otherwise exist. Certainly, however, the responsibility for NAPS' policy orientations and impetus lies at the domestic level.

## 5 NAPS' Impact on Policy Formulation

Ireland's shift to more deliberative forms of public policy-making is well-documented (OECD, 1996). Whilst a good deal of attention is paid towards the EU's influence over policy processes through the application of new participative and consultative criteria embodied in the re-organisation and reform of EU Structural Funding (Adshead, 2002; Adshead, 2005; Adshead and Quinn, 1998; O'Donnell, 2000), the majority of attention is usually directed towards the development of associative and deliberative forms of policy-making in the realm of economic management (O'Donnell, Adshead and Thomas, 2007; O'Donnell and O'Reardon, 1997; O'Donnell and O'Reardon, 2000; O'Donnell and Thomas, 2002; O'Donnell, 1999).

The evolution of 'social partnership' – a series of national agreements agreed between government and the 'social partners' – is crucial not only to understand the shifts in governance that have taken place in Ireland since its inception, but also because it sets the context for subsequent attempts at the incorporation of civil society into public policy processes. Nevertheless, the term 'civil society' is only recently beginning to be used in discussions on public policy in Ireland, and when it is, is often applied rather loosely and most usually as a synonym for the 'social partners'. These are: business representative organisations; the trade unions; farming organisations; and since 1997, the 'community and voluntary sector'.

Arguably, in a social partnership context, Ireland's primarily economic-oriented and politically expedient definition of civil society masks the first substantive problem regarding its participation in public policy processes, since whilst it distinguishes between alternative components of civil society, it fails to acknowledge the substantive differences between them (arising from their origins, objectives, membership base or lack of it etc.). In relation to the pursuit of social inclusion, the diversity of interests and organisations represented within the state-defined 'community and voluntary sector' places huge constraints on their capacity to participate effectively.

Originally it was intended that the community and voluntary sector would have a key role to play in the development and subsequent evolution of the NAPS. Following the first review of the NAPS, however, the Combat Poverty Agency noted that 'the

involvement of the community and voluntary sector in the implementation of the Strategy has been limited' (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000b: 40). Community and voluntary sector representatives were involved in two NAPS-led cross-departmental literacy initiatives, but these proved to be the exception rather than the rule and whilst national anti-poverty networks did have meetings with the NAPS Unit, for the most part these took 'the form of information exchange, rather than consultation or joint initiatives' (Combat Poverty Agency, 2000b: 41).

Moreover, whilst at the time of the first review there were seven National Anti-Poverty Networks,<sup>6</sup> there appeared to be no direct, formal or consistent mechanism for their involvement within the NAPS. A direct relationship to the NAPS existed only insofar as the Combat Poverty Agency maintained an on-going relationship with each of these groups as part of its own organisational remit.

Following the national review of the NAPS provided for in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000–2002)*, mechanisms for the incorporation of civil society were amended. It was agreed that a White Paper on Relations between the community and voluntary sector and the State would be published in April 2000 (Government of Ireland, 2000). Additionally, the NESF was charged with convening an annual NAPS Social Inclusion Forum, in order to facilitate the 'government's commitment to consult with all relevant stakeholders, including people experiencing poverty and the groups that represent them, in the fight against poverty and social exclusion' (National Economic and Social Forum, 2006: 5). Forum meetings are held in a single day: the morning is usually devoted to plenary sessions, with presentations by guest speakers and discussion; a series of parallel workshops takes place in the afternoon. The Social Inclusion Report is sent to a variety of government actors,<sup>7</sup> though there is no formal provision for any of these to report back to the Forum participants.

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<sup>6</sup> The Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOUE); the Community Workers Cooperative (CWC); the Irish Rural Link (IRL); the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN); the Forum of People with Disabilities (Forum); the Irish Travellers Movement (ITM); and the One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN).

<sup>7</sup> The Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion and all government ministers; the Senior Officials Group; the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI), the Social Inclusion Units in government Departments; local authorities and the Social Inclusion Consultation Group (SICG); as well as all NAPS-related organisations and groups represented at the meeting.

Other developments subsequent to the review included the creation of the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) and the Social Inclusion Consultative Group (SICG). The OSI replaced the NAPS Unit. It was still located in the DSFA, but now with nine dedicated staff and a Director (who was previously director of the NAPS Unit). The SICG was primarily a re-organisation of the IDPC to include representatives of the ESRI, the social partners and the community and voluntary sector ‘to advise on issues related to the development, implementation and evaluation of Ireland’s National Action Plan’ (Office for Social Inclusion, 2006: 21). The terms of reference for this group do not state how often it should meet, but in 2005 the SICG met twice (Office for Social Inclusion, 2006: 21). The first meeting was to review poverty-proofing measures and the OSI’s communications; the second was to prepare for the up-coming NAP s/inc 2006–2008.

A further result of the NAPS’ review was the establishment of a national consultation process prior to each NAP s/inc report. The OSI was charged with publicising the process, inviting ‘written submissions from organisations and individuals on the broad objectives and policy measures to be reflected in the Plan’ (Office for Social Inclusion, 2006: 26). The written stage of the consultation process would be followed by a series of regional and national seminars organised by the OSI, ‘designed to facilitate the participation with the NAP/inclusion process of people with direct experience of poverty and social inclusion and those that work with them’ (Office for Social Inclusion, 2006: 26). A report of both stages of the consultation process is included in the NESF Social Inclusion Forum and intended to inform social partnership talks.

Thus, whilst initially civil society’s access to the NAPS was quite broadly envisaged, following the NAPS’ review its participation seems to have been largely collapsed into the social partnership structure. To date Ireland has experienced six social pacts (see Appendix 2 for a list of national ‘programmes’), which are widely credited with facilitating the recent economic boom. The success of social partnership is important in our consideration of the NAPS: first, because the assumption that ‘social partnership’ is a success and works well underscores the rationale for civil society participation in the NAPS; and second, where gaps in the NAPS are identified, it is assumed that social partnership agreements can fill them (Connolly, 2007). The experience of the community and voluntary sector’s inclusion in the three social pacts since 1997, however, reveals a number of important issues regarding their engagement in the social partnership process.

Reflecting on their engagement within the process, one representative acknowledged that: ‘within the community and voluntary sector, the lack of uniform ambition regarding its involvement in the process became quite problematic’ (Interview I, 30/11/2005) and ‘this situation was probably an important factor in determining the dynamics of participation’ (Interview I, 30/11/2005). For some, achieving the principle of participation was the outcome, which led to the view that it was paramount to stay participating, even if there were no tangible benefits. For others, more concerned with achieving practical outcomes, there was a greater inclination to come and go from the process – depending on the degree to which they felt participation was worthwhile (Interview K, 16/02/2006). Over time a stratification of the community and voluntary sector occurred, between the permanent ‘insiders’ and those outside the partnership process. This is implicitly recognised by participants in social partnership as the difference between the community and voluntary *pillar* (the ‘insiders’) and the community and voluntary *sector* (who are outside).<sup>8</sup>

The community and voluntary sector’s inability to agree on the fundamental objectives of social partnership meant that it lacked a ‘sense of shared purpose’ with other social partners and was often unable to ‘acknowledge the necessity of compromise’ within the partnership process – both of which are regarded as key pre-conditions for successful partnership by the traditional social partners (Interview B, 08/02/2006). Union representatives – who would politically have a degree of sympathy with many of the community and voluntary pillar ambitions – referred to their frustrations dealing with the pillar and particularly its inability to strategically prioritise its ambitions, or to acknowledge the *realpolitik* of negotiation. One union official explained: ‘they keep painting a bigger idealistic picture’ and ‘because of the huge range of interests that are in the picture they have to paint, the issues become enormous. We’ve arguments with them over which bits are for real and they find it very hard [to choose] because of their constituent group’ (Interview J, 30/01/2006).

Commenting on the same difficulties, one government official suggested that: ‘we found it hard to integrate [them] and to get a systemic bonus – they haven’t connected if you like with the core business and partnership as well as they might

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<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to John-Mark McCafferty, The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Ireland, for clarifying this issue with me.

have done' (Interview C, 08/02/2006). From the government point of view, the effective participation of the community and voluntary pillar is 'still a work in progress' (Interview C, 08/02/2006).

An additional problem for the community and voluntary pillar's effective engagement is its inability to exercise the same degree of leadership that the other social partners take for granted. Superficially, the community and voluntary pillar looks much the same as the trade union pillar. It comprises a cluster of representative groups bound together by a common interest in social inclusion in what appears to be much the same way as the trade union pillar comprises a cluster of representative groups bound together by a common interest in improved pay and conditions. However, the trade union (and agricultural) partners are organised in a classically hierarchical system, with a few powerful negotiators at the top (Interview E, 16/02/2006). Once these top officials have chosen to agree, their traditional organisational hierarchies assure that (with union ballots etc.) they can deliver to their membership. This is possible, not only because of the trade union pillar's organisational capacity to achieve a mandate for action, but because ultimately the rewards of a successful agreement are worth negotiating. Trade union officials are able to convince their membership to support them because the agreement *will deliver* benefits on tax, pay and conditions.

For the community and voluntary pillar, the opposite is the case (McCashin *et al*, 2002). Despite a variety of configurations, their organisational representation remains contested (Community Workers Cooperative, 2003) and their capacity to deliver support from their constituent groups is limited. This problem is further exacerbated by the absence of universally acknowledged rewards across the community and voluntary pillar when compared to the tangible benefit that trade unions can offer their members in the shape of pay and conditions. In the words of one community and voluntary sector negotiator, the pillar had, 'as a whole, failed to tactically coalesce together in a way that maximised their potential. I still think that. I think more could have been got' (Interview I, 30/11/2005).

Finally, there is a strong sense from many of the community and voluntary pillar members that they are competing unfairly with larger, better resourced interest groups who are well placed to bear the costs of engagement. For many, the time and resources that were invested in negotiations were effectively 'being taken away from

action on the ground’ (Interview H, 19/01/2006). Membership activities, campaign strategies and political lobbying all had to take a back seat to partnership negotiations. ‘What was very difficult, and something that nobody expected, was the practical time it takes to negotiate those agreements. Whoever was mandated to be on those negotiating teams basically had to drop everything else for a few months’ (Interview I, 30/11/2005).

Drafting reports, policy briefs and responses for the negotiations, with minimum organisational support, often became an all-consuming preoccupation for the pillar. For many members of community and voluntary groups on low pay or no pay, the burden of participation was also substantial in personal terms. All in all, a failure to acknowledge these issues regarding community and voluntary sector participation in social partnership meant that instead of being remedied by the NAPS, they have been copied into it (Meade, 2005).

Clearly, the NAPS’ process as it currently stands is designed to *consult* policy stakeholders, but not to *engage* with them on policy specifics. It seems then that the specific policy concerns of the community and voluntary sector, relating to the implementation issues concerning the roll-out of a national ten-year strategy, can be dealt with in a single day, under arrangements guided by the NESF – whilst those of the ‘other’ social partners, relating to employment conditions and pay in the national social pacts, can take up to three or four months under social partnership arrangements guided by the National Economic and Social Council.

This presents a dilemma for the community and voluntary sector. It seems that the ‘meat’ of civil society discussion and engagement is to be found in social partnership structures that contain only very restricted opportunities for discussion of social inclusion and where anti-poverty strategies are not a primary concern. In 2003 the National Women’s Council of Ireland and the Community Platform both publicly withdrew from negotiations for *Sustaining Progress* shortly before its conclusion, arguing that agreements made in the preceding programme remained to be implemented (Community Workers Cooperative, 2003; National Women's Council of Ireland, 2003).

Commenting on their participation in the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, one representative from this section argued: ‘there was no real negotiation with the community and voluntary pillar, there was no opportunity to discuss policy outcomes, to discuss things that could actually deliver for people, so it was a sham’ (Interview G, 19/02/2006). Despite this, their return to the social partnership process as part of a restructured community and voluntary pillar in the latter part of 2006 is noteworthy, demonstrating perhaps the continual tension and contradiction between community and voluntary sector desires to be represented in predominantly macro-economically oriented social partnership negotiations, whilst at the same time challenging the orientation and focus of these negotiations.

## 6 NAPS' Impact on Policy Implementation

Since its debut in 1997, it seems that the NAPS has suffered from a subsequent weakening of political support. Moreover, (possibly as a result of its political origins), the NAPS has not attracted high-level administrative champions at either national or local level. At the time of its introduction, the 'Rainbow' government envisaged the NAPS – along with the SMI and the Better Local Government initiative – as part of a wider package of reforms designed to tackle the modernisation of the public sector and policy processes more generally. Since the Rainbow government's exit from office, however, these 'joined-up' reform initiatives have to a large extent been decoupled. Whilst the Better Local Government initiative has been driven by civil servants in the Department of the Environment and Local Government (DoELG) (Keoghan, 2003), there has not been the same impetus behind the NAPS initiative.

On the one hand, this may be because, relatively speaking, national-level civil servants were more involved in driving and drafting the Better Local Government initiative than was the case with the NAPS. On the other hand, it could be argued that the Better Local Government initiative focused on one part of government with traditional links to one ministerial Department (the DoELG). The NAPS initiative, by contrast, focused on a range of cross-cutting thematic areas, for which there were no 'obvious' bureaucratic champions. Without this support, and in the absence of a strong political impetus, it is easy to see why such a diffuse project might be harder to push.

In our survey of senior civil servants, whilst a large majority (87.8 per cent) of respondents agreed that social inclusion has an impact on their Department (Table 6.1), over half felt that social inclusion did not have much of an impact on their position (Table 6.2) and less than one tenth (7.6 per cent) felt that social inclusion was an integral part of their policy brief (Table 6.3). The primary responsibility for social inclusion was variously ascribed between a range of government Departments. However, over half of the respondents were unable to answer 'which Department or body has chief responsibility for social inclusion' and less than 1 per cent (2 respondents) thought that this was a shared responsibility between all Departments (Table 6.4).

The majority of respondents (59.5 per cent) were familiar with the NAPS and a further third (33.3 per cent) had a ‘vague knowledge’ of its existence (Table 6.5). Still, the proportions professing some knowledge of the NAPS procedures diminished when more detailed questions were asked in relation to the operational organisation of the NAPS. Less than half (41.8 per cent) were familiar with the OSI, a quarter (24.9 per cent) had a ‘vague knowledge’ of it, and almost a third (30 per cent) did not know about it (Table 6.6). Just under a quarter (24 per cent) were familiar with the SICG, one-fifth had a ‘vague knowledge’ of it (19.8 per cent), and over half did not know of it at all (Table 6.7).

Interestingly, although 84 per cent of senior civil servants recorded that they had not received any training in relation to social inclusion (Table 6.8), almost 64 per cent believed that their Department was adequately prepared to deal with social inclusion (Table nine); and just over half (53.2 per cent) felt adequately prepared in relation to their individual departmental responsibilities (Table 6.10).

**Table 6.1:  
Is Social Inclusion something that has much impact on your Department?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	12	5.1	5.1	5.1
	Yes	208	87.8	87.8	92.8
	No answer	17	7.2	7.2	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.2:  
Is Social Inclusion something that has much impact on your position?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	122	51.5	51.5	51.5
	Yes	102	43.0	43.0	94.5
	No Answer	13	5.5	5.5	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.3: Explain how Social Inclusion impacts on your position**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not applicable	138	58.2	58.2	58.2
	Integral component of policy	18	7.6	7.6	65.8
	Key dimension of policy at national and eu level	9	3.8	3.8	69.6
	Poverty Proof Policy	7	3.0	3.0	72.6
	Indirectly	35	14.8	14.8	87.3
	Central component of individual workload	30	12.7	12.7	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.4: Which Department (s) body has chief responsibility for Social Inclusion?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No answer	135	57.0	57.0	57.0
	Office for Social Inclusion	9	3.8	3.8	60.8
	All Departments	2	.8	.8	61.6
	Dept Social and Family Affairs	34	14.3	14.3	75.9
	Dept Taoiseach	14	5.9	5.9	81.9
	Dept Finance	2	.8	.8	82.7
	Dept Education	11	4.6	4.6	87.3
	6 key depts mentioned	1	.4	.4	87.8
	Dept Health & Children	11	4.6	4.6	92.4
	Enterprise, Trade & Employment	2	.8	.8	93.2
	Environment, Heritage & LG	1	.4	.4	93.7
	Justice, Equality & Law Reform	8	3.4	3.4	97.0
	Community Rural & Gaeltacht	7	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.5: Are you familiar with the National Anti-Poverty Strategy?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	10	4.2	4.2	4.2
	Vague Knowledge	79	33.3	33.3	37.6
	Yes	105	44.3	44.3	81.9
	Very Familiar	36	15.2	15.2	97.0
	No Answer	7	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.6: Are you familiar with the National Office for Social Inclusion?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	71	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Vague Knowledge	59	24.9	24.9	54.9
	Yes	73	30.8	30.8	85.7
	Very Familiar	26	11.0	11.0	96.6
	No Answer	8	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.7: Are you familiar with the Social Inclusion Consultative Group?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	126	53.2	53.2	53.2
	Vague Knowledge	47	19.8	19.8	73.0
	Yes	42	17.7	17.7	90.7
	Very Familiar	15	6.3	6.3	97.0
	No Answer	7	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.8: Have you received any training in relation to social inclusion?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	199	84.0	84.0	84.0
	Yes	28	11.8	11.8	95.8
	No answer	10	4.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.9: Is your Department adequately prepared to deal with social inclusion?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	33	13.9	13.9	13.9
	Vague Knowledge	23	9.7	9.7	23.6
	Yes	136	57.4	57.4	81.0
	Very Familiar	15	6.3	6.3	87.3
	No Answer	30	12.7	12.7	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

**Table 6.10: In relation to your position do you feel adequately prepared re social inclusion?**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	46	19.4	19.4	19.4
	Vague Knowledge	38	16.0	16.0	35.4
	Yes	113	47.7	47.7	83.1
	Very Familiar	13	5.5	5.5	88.6
	No Answer	27	11.4	11.4	100.0
	Total	237	100.0	100.0	

These findings are borne out by follow-up case studies (see Table 6.10) and interviews in individual Departments. Overall, there is a strong sense that awareness of the NAPS amongst civil servants is largely confined to those personnel working in units and/or Departments that have an explicit NAPS-related responsibility. Even for this group, however, most training in relation to social inclusion is ‘on the job’ and experiential. One senior official in the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG), which has quite strong NAPS-related responsibilities, suggested that the absence of initial and ongoing training for those with strategic responsibilities regarding social inclusion objectives was a concern:

It is something that I find I still need and I would like to have some sort of training in social inclusion policies. One of my first jobs when I arrived was to start work on the NAP s/inc. Coming from a different Department altogether doing different work straight into a new Department knowing nobody and this new batch of work and having no experience of social inclusion policy at all I found it extremely difficult. After a year ok you learn what the connections are

and the synergies but at the start it was very difficult. I suppose I'd like to see some sort of a formal training schedule of training regime (Interview T, 09/09/2007).

NAPS awareness outside of such direct departmental remits is either absent or abstract in the extreme. Another official in the same Department suggested that in relation to either the NAPS or the NAP s/inc, awareness amongst senior civil servants was limited:

A lot of people I find even in this Department aren't aware of it. How useful it is outside the social inclusion area I'm not sure. ... When it's something you're working on day to day you couldn't imagine not having it. I often mention it to people and they just would have no idea at all, what it is, that it exists, they wouldn't even be familiar with the Office of Social Inclusion in fact ... and these would be senior civil servants you know. Their work is completely removed from any social inclusion activities. It goes back to the whole issue of mainstreaming social inclusion. Making people more aware (Interview O, 09/09/2007).

This theme is echoed in the most recent NAP s/inc (Office for Social Inclusion, 2007: 79), which suggests that whilst '[social inclusion] now features very strongly on the Government's policy agenda at national and local level', there is a continuing need to raise awareness around both the NAP s/inc and social inclusion issues more generally. Significantly, however, the main thrust of this promotion is largely external to government in terms of raising public awareness, so as 'to communicate the social inclusion message more effectively to those experiencing poverty and exclusion and to the public generally (Office for Social Inclusion, 2007: 79). It would seem, however, that alongside any 'external' promotion, an 'internal' one may also be needed. This view is also borne out by examination of the NAPS implementation at local level.

### **6.1 NAPS' implementation at local level**

The NAPS clearly spelled out that local government/ governance should play an increasing role in addressing social exclusion. This was highlighted in the NAPS' review and was substantially incorporated in the 2002 *Building an Inclusive Society*

document. The *Better Local Government White Paper*, produced in 1996, also identified the role of the local authority in promoting social inclusion, a role elaborated upon in subsequent guiding documents.<sup>9</sup>

At implementation level, County/City Development Boards (CDBs) were designed to widen the influence of local government within the local development process by more closely integrating them with pre-existing development agencies and actors.

Membership of the CDBs is drawn from state agencies, including local government, and from civil society. The automatic allocation of the chairperson function to an elected representative enhanced the role of the local authority in facilitating local governance processes. In addition, many of the existing partnership structures, and indeed some independent civil society organisations, were now expected to present work plans for 'endorsement' to the CDBs.

One of the key functions of this structure was to enhance co-ordination, co-operation and integration of effort amongst existing bodies, largely through the production of a ten-year development strategy and effectively assuming the functions of the County Strategy Groups established during the 1994–1995 National Development Plan. In setting objectives for this strategy, local authorities were 'to take account of the principles, targets and objectives set out in the NAPS, and over time local authorities will develop appropriate social inclusion strategies at local level which will underpin and strengthen the national actions taken' (Government of Ireland, 2002).

Experiences to date within the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and CDBs present a mixed picture of how social inclusion concerns have been addressed. In relation to SPCs it would seem to be too early to make any conclusive judgement on their role in addressing social exclusion. The SPCs have been established in line with the principal service areas of the local authority, but do not operate specific social inclusion indicators. Interestingly the review of the SPCs, carried out by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), contains only one reference to social exclusion or inclusion, noting the establishment of the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network (Institute of Public Administration, 2004). This either indicates the low level

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<sup>9</sup> These included (Office for Social Inclusion, 2002; Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, 1999; Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, 2000).

of attention paid to social exclusion concerns at local authority level or reflects the limited interest of the IPA in the issue.

Regarding the CDBs, clearly a central element to the reforms was their requirement to produce a ten-year strategy document. An evaluation of the social inclusion co-ordination mechanisms established within this process concluded that it 'has not, thus far, led to greater co-ordination and integration in the delivery of NDP social inclusion measures' (NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit, 2003: 64). The report is also critical of many CDBs' social inclusion mapping exercises, suggesting that they were uneven in quality, time-consuming and characterised by 'a lack of co-operation from government Departments and agencies' (NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit, 2003: ii). The evaluation concludes that without 'significant change in direction and practice' the process was unlikely to achieve any success during the lifetime of the National Development Plan (NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit, 2003: 64), though it does accept that the task of co-ordination and integration may have been something of a poisoned chalice in the first instance.

On the one hand, it can be said that the post-1996 local governance processes have created useful participation opportunities for civil society organisations. In particular the allocation of spaces on the SPCs to 'relevant local interests', achieved despite some resistance from party political actors, for the first time opened up a previously closed local authority committee system to outside scrutiny. Additionally, the creation of CDBs, and civil society involvement in them, can be seen as signalling a commitment to active civil society engagement. For the community and voluntary sector component of civil society in particular, national-level resources were provided to enable the creation of structures to facilitate participation, feedback and accountability. In most cases these are known as community fora and draw participants from a wide variety of community and voluntary sector organisations. In a small number of instances specific community platforms have been established with a distinct social inclusion focus (Harvey, 2002).

On the other hand, it could be argued that the focus of civil society participation has been heavily on the creation of participation *opportunities*, but only marginally concerned with participation *outcomes*, particularly for those groups that experience social exclusion. Some national-level resources have been provided to support the

establishment of community fora, but the limited level of such funding virtually guarantees that these fora only ever operate at little more than a basic level.<sup>10</sup> In many instances the fora remains closely bonded to the CDBs, with CDBs often controlling and managing all resources. This makes access to funds for legitimate expenses more difficult (Harvey, 2002) and ensures that the potential for strong, independent, local structures is not realised. More generally, there is limited information available on the depth and quality of participation. The available research, allied with anecdotal evidence, appears to indicate that participation outcomes have been mixed in quality; are situation dependent; and, in many instances, personality driven.

Notwithstanding their problems, the CDBs have offered a more positive environment for participation by representatives of the community and voluntary sector (Harvey, 2002). The fact that dedicated appointments were made to staff CDBs, many from outside the local authority system, may have contributed to this. In general terms the more positive reaction to participation in the CDBs and related structures seems to be associated with factors such as the length of meetings; the opportunity to seriously contribute to policy-making; and the possibility of civil society representatives taking on a chairing role in subgroups. By contrast, the SPC's process is seen as difficult, with some reports of confrontation, excessive bureaucracy, insufficient time to review policy matters in advance of meetings, a sense that many meetings are simply rubber-stamping exercises, and a palpable clash of organisational cultures.

Some 'community, voluntary and/or disadvantaged' participants referred to their involvement as 'intimidating, bureaucratic, mechanistic and a destructive experience' (Harvey, 2002). There was also a realisation that the balance of power remained firmly with the local authority, by virtue of the automatic majority of councillors on the committees and the need for all SPC's recommendations to be referred to the full council for decision. Nevertheless, there is some acknowledgement that the processes are at an early stage and may improve over time (Harvey, 2002: 29-31; Institute of Public Administration, 2004: 8-35).

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<sup>10</sup> According to the website of the DoEHLG €1.34m will be divided between 34 local fora in 2006.

## 7 NAPS Case Studies

### 7.1 Introduction

The following short case studies attempt to provide some concrete evidence of the NAPS' impact on policy procedures and/or outcomes, with a view to finding out:

- how visible is the NAPS within the work of the department
- whether or not any specific departmental policy process/outcomes can be linked to the NAPS
- whether the NAPS has engendered any new institutional arrangements (either formal mechanisms or informal ways of doing business)
- the extent to which the NAPS' targets are being addressed
- the depth of interest or commitment to the NAPS

In all cases, the Departments were contacted (by telephone, email and/or letter, and interviews were carried out with relevant individuals) and asked whether they would be willing to supply details about their departmental activities and the NAPS. What follows is not a comprehensive departmental review, but rather a snap-shot of departmental activities and attitudes as revealed to us in our interviews and correspondence.

Four case studies are provided from: the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR); the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC), Department of Health and Children; the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG); and Galway County Council. These were chosen because the policy fields that each represents deal with a different dimension of social exclusion – the DJELR, through its broader legislative actions on inequality; the OMC, through its impact on women and children (both identified as vulnerable groups 'at risk of poverty'); the DoEHLG, because it is centrally involved in the organisation and administration of local social inclusion measures, and Galway County Council because it provides an illuminating case of the impact of these measures at local level.

## **7.2 Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR)**

### **7.2.1 Introduction**

The broad remit of the DJELR's responsibilities include: Crime, Security and Northern Ireland; An Garda Síochána; Prisons, probation and welfare; Criminal law reform and human rights; International policy; Asylum, immigration and citizenship; Reception and integration agency; Youth justice. The DJELR (and its agencies/ related bodies) also holds responsibility for Civil Law Reform, Equality, Disability and Courts Policy – a remit that includes the Gender Equality Unit, the Diversity Equality Unit, and the Disability Equality Unit. The sections dealing with Law Reform, Equality and Disability, along with the Assistant Secretary for Civil Law Reform, Courts Policy, Equality and Disability, were each contacted for this case study.

Nearly all enquiries about the NAPS and the DJELR were stone-walled. With the exception of the Disability Equality Unit, no one from the DJELR was available or willing to respond or to conduct an interview. Most responses referred instead to either the websites of the DJELR or the OSI:

I have examined the questionnaire attached to your letter and while I am unable to provide specific responses to your questions and therefore, am not in a position to participate in the interviewing process, please see the following information from our website ([www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie)) which I hope may be of use to you in your research (Interview Communication U, Disability Equality Unit, Department of Justice, 08/09/2007).

No replies were received from the Assistant Secretary for Civil Law Reform, Courts Policy, Equality and Disability or the Gender Equality Unit. The Diversity Equality Unit forwarded our requests directly to the OSI.

### **7.2.2 NAPS visibility within the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform**

In the annual report of the OSI on National Anti-Poverty Strategies (Office for Social Inclusion, 2005a) the only NAPS/Inclusion target outlined for 2003–2004 for the DJELR was: 'To increase employment rate of women to an average of more than 60

per cent by 2010, as envisaged in the National Employment Action Plan, 2001' (Office for Social Inclusion, 2005a: 38).

The report noted that this target is being achieved through the introduction of the Maternity Protection (Amendment) Act 2004 and the Adoptive Leave Bill 2004. The report also noted that within the DJELR there had been an increase in funding towards child care, the introduction of the National Disability Strategy (NDS), and a reduction in processing time for asylum applications.

There is no clear outline of the NAPS to be found anywhere on the DJELR website. When using the quick search option on the website for 'NAPS' one link comes up to a press release from March 2006.<sup>11</sup> When using the search for 'National Anti-Poverty Strategies' two links come up, again to press releases.<sup>12</sup> The DJELR does have on its website a section on social inclusion that purports to 'ensure an ongoing concerted effort to inform and enhance this concept, to effectively co-ordinate the production of all programmes and projects and to present these matters effectively to the public.'<sup>13</sup>

Following referrals to the OSI from the DJELR, a civil servant in the OSI suggested that 'on social inclusion plans and reports, we don't generally liaise directly with sections within that Department and the Equality Authority' (Interview V, 06/07/2007).

### **7.2.3 Specific NAPS-related departmental policy processes or outcomes**

Within the DJELR, the Disability Equality Unit, together with the National Disability Authority (NDA) who receive core-funding from the Department, regard the NDS as 'the single most important intervention aimed at addressing social exclusion of people with disabilities' (Interview W, 20/09/2007). Although representatives of the NDA did not make explicit references to links between the NAPS and the NDS, they are obviously keenly aware of the NAPS' aims and ambitions and in this regard

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<sup>11</sup> *Government approves report of High Level Group on Travellers (27/03/2006)*  
<http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR07000893>

<sup>12</sup> *1-Government approves report of High Level Group on Travellers 27/03/2006; 2-2.8 billion Euro allocation under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 for Justice and Equality Programmes 23/01/2007*-<http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/qsearch>

<sup>13</sup> DJELR's section on Social Inclusion: [http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Social\\_inclusion](http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/Social_inclusion)

suggested that the NDA's main concern with the NAPS has been to address the social exclusion of people with disabilities.<sup>14</sup>

Prior to its 2006 submission to the OSI, the NDA held a round table discussion with the OSI and various other stakeholders to present the background to their submission.<sup>15</sup> The submission was informed by NDA's research on poverty and social exclusion among people with disabilities, in particular by research from Gannon and Nolan (2005).<sup>16</sup> Although it is not clear whether or not the NDS would have been formulated were the NAPS not in existence, the balance of probability suggests that it would.

#### 7.2.4 New institutional arrangements

From the NDA's point of view, overall responsibility – subject to Ministerial and Government sign-off – for developing the NAPS rests with the OSI. Responsibility for delivery on individual NAPS commitments rests with the relevant Department or agency, with the OSI overseeing delivery on targets and conducting periodic reviews of progress, reporting to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. The NDA works closely with its parent Department, DJELR, which has the co-ordinating role relating to disability policy; and with the Department of the Taoiseach, which chairs the Senior Officials Group on Disability and the NDS Stakeholder Monitoring Group.

- Senior Officials Group on Disability

Progress on the implementation of the NDS is monitored by the Senior Officials Group on Disability, which reports to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Social Inclusion.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See the NDA's report (2005) *How far towards equality? Measuring how equally people with disabilities are included in Irish Society* for a cataloguing of the degree to which people with disabilities are socially excluded compared with non-disabled people.

<sup>15</sup>The round table participants included: OSI; FÁS; Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Department of Education and Science; Department of Health and Children; DoEHLG; Department of Transport and the social partners.

<sup>16</sup>B. Gannon and B. Nolan (2005) *Disability and Social Inclusion in Ireland* (Dublin, Equality Authority and the National Disability Authority).

<sup>17</sup> This group comprises officials representing the six Government departments responsible for implementing the sectoral plans as well as the Department of the Taoiseach, the DJELR the Department of Finance and the Department of Education and Science.

- NDS Stakeholder Monitoring Group

The most recent Social Partnership Agreement *Towards 2016* commits to maintaining a constructive relationship with stakeholders in relation to progress on the NDS. Under the agreement, a NDS Stakeholder Monitoring Group has been established to monitor progress on the overall implementation of the strategy. The group is made up of: the Senior Officials Group on Disability, a number of stakeholder groups, and the NDA.

The most recent meeting of the group took place on 2 July 2007, and the group will meet again before the end of the year.

- Disability sectoral plans

The NDS builds on existing policy and legislation including the policy of mainstreaming public services for people with disabilities and anti-discrimination legislation. A significant example of the Government's mainstreaming policy is the publication of sectoral service delivery plans prepared by six Government Departments under the Disability Act 2005 in key sectors, including transport, built infrastructure, housing, training and employment, health and social welfare provision. The plans, published in December 2006, set out programmes for action to improve service provision and access to infrastructure for people with disabilities. People with disabilities, their families, carers, advocates and service providers were consulted on the plans before these were finalised for submission to the Oireachtas; a mainstreaming approach to policy (which permeates the NDS) facilitates both broad consultation (i.e. general public etc.) and cross-departmental communication.

### **7.2.5 Achieving NAPS targets**

From the point of view of advocacy groups working with or for people who have physical and sensory disabilities, there still seems to be a significant degree of scepticism about the impact of the NAPS on social exclusion. One advocacy officer had difficulty rationalising whether action taken had occurred because of the NAPS, or whether it might have occurred anyway:

I remember the first launch of it and the huge amount of stuff that was going to happen that everything was going to be poverty proofed and then equality

proofed. In all the organisations I was involved after it I have never had contact by anybody who was doing anything to advance it. What organisations? Disability groups and in terms of the lesbian and gay sector there would have been stuff that GLEN<sup>18</sup> would have been involved and pushed for. We would see stuff happening and the NAPS thing would be thrown in so that it would make it happen but it wouldn't be happening because of NAPS (Interview X, 26/09/2007).

In relation to Poverty Impact Assessments (PIAs) in particular, one disability advocacy officer suggested that there seemed to be some talk about measuring inclusion in terms of 'personal outcomes measures' and 'holistic approaches', but little concrete evidence that policy makers really understand 'the individual issues that affect people with disabilities' (Interview Y, 26/09/2007). Thus, for example, whilst the NDA outlines employment as the main route out of poverty, the system is currently failing people with disabilities who graduate from university but are unable to access employment without a personal assistant (PA):

Support does not transfer to the workplace. When it comes to the reality they can't go to work. Because (a) they cannot get a job or (b) getting to work is not going to be as easy as getting to college was. There aren't services there and the waiting list is huge for a PA service. FÁS don't provide PAs and the attitudes of some in the HSE is that people in work should not have PA services and should be means tested (Interview Y, 26/09/2007).

This kind of attitude, it was argued, perfectly illustrates the lack of awareness amongst policy makers about the actual costs of disability:

There hasn't been much done in terms of NAPS and disability and even if you look at the Social inclusion document on the section on income generation that really hit out to me. They do address that they are going to ... going to address the cost of disability in the following manner but there is nothing that really addresses the cost of disability. One of the things around how we can address poverty and disability is to look at the cost of it. If you look at the ESRI research on disability and poverty they look at the cost of disability around

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<sup>18</sup> GLEN – Gay and Lesbian Equality Network

heating, home help, food, extra costs people have around because of their disability. The government never seem to address that. Their way to address it is to get more people with disabilities into work that doesn't look at the extra costs. The poverty trap is the lack of awareness of the cost of disability (Interview Y, 26/09/2007).

### **7.2.6 Commitment**

This cursory examination of one Department's commitment of the NAPS reveals three very different perspectives. On a departmental level no reference is made to the NAPS in any correspondence and no one was willing to hold an interview and discuss the visibility of NAPS within the DJELR. However, there are pockets of interest within the DJELR. The NDA, which receives its core funding from the DJELR, has used both research and consultation for its NAPS submission – though its prioritising of the NDS as 'the single most important intervention for people with disabilities' does make it hard to argue for a distinct and distinguishable NAPS impact over and above those policy efforts that were clearly already in train. For those at the receiving end of disability policy, many hold strongly to the view that the NAPS has had little impact at all.

## **7.3 Office of the Minister for Children (OMC), Department of Health and Children**

### **7.3.1 Introduction**

The OMC was established in December 2005 to coincide with the appointment of the first Minister of State for Children who also sits at the Cabinet table. Taking responsibility for a combination of briefs in a number of units, offices, and advisory councils, across the three Departments of Health, Education, and Justice, the creation of the OMC is a new development that may be interpreted as an attempt to co-ordinate what had been a disjointed approach to policy development and service delivery in the past. According to the OMC website, the OMC is responsible for developing policy within its expertise, managing the implementation of the National Childcare Investment Plan (NCIP), and implementing legislative commitments embodied in the Children's Act 2000, the social partnership agreement *Towards 2016* (see Appendix 2) and the National Childcare Strategy (2000).

### **7.3.2 NAPS visibility within the Office of the Minister for Children**

In relation to the NAPS, an underlying expectation contained within the strategy's targets is that all children should be in receipt of quality services and that vulnerable children should be supported in accessing social services. These ambitions are encapsulated in the National Children's Strategy (2000). Written prior to the development of the OMC, by a Government cross-departmental team comprising 10 Departments that had involvement in the sector, with a non-governmental organisation advisory panel, a research and information advisory panel, international experts, and members of a Health Board liaison Group, the broad thrust of the National Children's Strategy sets out a series of principles that are designed to guide children's policy over a ten-year period.

The strategy highlights the importance of quality provision of services for children and training of staff. These are to be achieved through locally based formal structures that were seen as a vital part of policy development. Much of the thrust of this document is concerned with philosophical concepts and objectives such as 'the whole child' and 'seeking children's views' (National Children's Strategy, 2000) without clear commitments to direct investment in the Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) sector that would bring about the fair employment structures envisaged for the sector.

Still, it is not clear that the genesis of these ambitions lies with the NAPS. As far back as 1996 Ireland agreed to recommendations made by the European Commission Network on Childcare and other measures to reconcile Employment and Family Responsibility, which argued for the establishment of a pay scale for child-care workers, and also acknowledged the importance of a graduate-led workforce in 'Quality Targets in Services for Young Children' (European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996).

### **7.3.3 Specific NAPS-related policy processes or outcomes**

Acknowledging that 'policy choices are closely linked to national welfare regimes, with their particular values and objective', a report by the National Women's Council of Ireland (2005) pointed to the difficulties that exist, even on a practical level, in attempting to infuse quality standards into a 'child-care sector' that is itself only recently conceived of as such and only relatively recently established. Judging the

impact of the NAPS in this area then is particularly difficult and – in the urgent political desire to make some advances on provision of ECCE – it seems that the NAPS' targets have been collapsed into the NCIP. However, it can be seen that the impetus for these changes was politically driven – as a response to the costs of child care becoming a significant electoral issue in advance of the 2007 elections; as a means of expanding the labour force and achieving flexibility within it; and as a consequence of other European imperatives. A recognisable anti-poverty thrust, or 'NAPS influence', is hard to identify.

### **7.3.4 New institutional arrangements**

Arguably, the institutional arrangements underpinning the NCIP in ECCE are still in the process of evolution. Whilst at national level it seems that regular reporting requirements to government have improved with the inclusion of the Department of Health's Social Inclusion unit in the Senior Officials Group and at the Cabinet committee on social inclusion, at local level the picture seems to be one of increasing organisational complexity.

The NCIP is delivered through the local voluntary county child-care committees funded by a state agency, Pobal, via a programme that offers capital funding to build ECCE facilities, either to private sector or to voluntary/community based groups who have formed a legal entity. In this regard, the private sector is seen as having the ability to build quickly and thus provide the much needed places as quickly as possible (Interview Z, 27/08/2007). Within two years of publication of the National Childcare Strategy, formal institutions became embodied in the form of County Childcare Committees with a mandate to implement policy and oversee the development of child-care services locally. It is through these committees that applications to develop child-care services are managed and subsequently funded by the NCIP. The committees are also involved in providing training and support for the child-care sector.

Subsequent to their rollout, however, the OMC now reports the need to develop new committees to include *all* statutory provision,<sup>19</sup> as it finds that money may be going in streams to certain areas, but that services in these areas are not integrated because

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<sup>19</sup> A specific requirement for the private sector is that the facility be used for a certain number of years specifically in the care of children.

they are being delivered by a plethora of new voluntary organisations. This situation is perhaps best illustrated by the example of parents being offered three different types of parenting courses by local voluntary organisations, none of which are integrated into an overall pedagogical framework (Interview D, 20/08/2007).

### **7.3.5 Achieving NAPS targets**

Whilst recent developments, such as the increase in maternity leave and child benefit, are universal measures that increase the option for all parents to purchase child care, these are not exclusively targeted towards the poor and there is still a sense that measures designed to provide ECCE are not calibrated to best meet the needs of disadvantaged children. Moreover, at a practical level, there are clearly differences in the arrangements governing private-sector and community-based child-care schemes.

In the private sector, the management, maintenance and staffing of child-care services are not monitored by the OMC. There seems to be no expectation that children experiencing exclusion or disadvantage will avail of a place in this setting and so social inclusion measures are not a feature of the funding regime. As a result, children whose parents can afford to pay full fees are left to avail of private care with no state arrangements regarding appropriate pedagogical values or agreement on how the service is managed.

By contrast, in community-based child-care centres, whilst staffing is the responsibility of a voluntary group (usually made up of parents and volunteers), in some instances 'a contribution towards staffing' (made by Pobal through the County Childcare Committees) is paid to the local voluntary groups in *designated disadvantaged areas*, 'where the poorest children are to be found' (Interview D, 20/08/2007). This 'contribution towards a staffing grant' is made only in respect of those who work directly with children. No funding is available to voluntary groups for any type of work such as accounting, management, research, family support, cleaning etc. As a result, all the support services that would develop an ECCE setting into a centre of excellence must be undertaken by parents or volunteers.

From January 2008, a subvention towards staffing will be paid on a sliding scale for the children of parents in receipt of social welfare or family income supplement.

Currently, children meeting these criteria are funded by the local Health Service Executive (HSE) and this may lead to double funding (an indication of how policy is not integrated at national level?). This poses a problem for ECCE providers, who must now screen parents' personal circumstances and begin to determine the children whose families are 'payers' and those who are 'non-payers' (Interview D, 20/08/2007). There are concerns that inevitably 'the payers' will have to pay more to support staffing costs, with the by-product that 'some children will be seen as being more valuable to the finance of the crèche than others'. 'While the OMC will point to initiatives such as Dormant accounts in rural community and family affairs, as possible supports, this in effect puts a huge strain on volunteers to target, and draw down "scheme type" funding on a once-off basis. It also kills and buries the great work that has been done by volunteers over the years in developing good ECCE services that are accessible to all' (Interview D, 20/08/2007).

### 7.3.6 Commitment

In summation, the NCIP is in the process of developing an infrastructure of child-care buildings through both the community and the private sector. Contributions towards staffing grants, with no commitment to roll-over the contributions from year to year, are made in certain disadvantaged areas. There is a variety of means by which disadvantage is designated: funding via the Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development Programme (RAPID),<sup>20</sup> Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais (CLÁR),<sup>21</sup> or Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)<sup>22</sup> has been available since 2000. The result is that in the development of ECCE services location matters. Nevertheless, the latest research regarding the effect of pre-schooling on vulnerable children suggests that a mixed system of care similar to the conventional primary intake class, rather than grouping disadvantaged children together, leads to more favourable outcomes for children. 'Where children from disadvantaged backgrounds attend services that include children from mixed social backgrounds they showed further benefits than if they attended centres containing predominantly disadvantaged children' (Silva, 2004: 56).

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<sup>20</sup> The Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development Programme (RAPID) is a national initiative led by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs to target the 46 disadvantaged areas in the country.

<sup>21</sup> Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais (CLÁR) . The CLÁR programme assists rural development project promoters within designated Areas of rural disadvantage

<sup>22</sup> Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS). The Breaking the Cycle of Educational Disadvantage Project was launched in 1996. It sought to discriminate positively in favour of schools in selected

Contributions have been paid towards staffing grants in community-based groups if the group can prove that the provision of ECCE will impact on disadvantage. In this regard, a directive from the OMC in July 2007 sought to clarify that children who attend services that benefit from the staffing grant must be children whose parents are social welfare recipients. For many working in ECCE, this is viewed as a very narrow gauge by which to measure poverty (Interview D, 20/08/2007).

## **7.4 Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG)**

### **7.4.1 Introduction**

According to its website, the DoEHLG aims to 'promote the protection of our environment and heritage; provide an effective response to the global challenge posed by climate change; address housing needs in a strategic manner focused on building sustainable communities; provide for good quality planning and balanced regional development and enable active citizen participation through strong, participatory local government'.

To do this the DoEHLG organises itself into a number of distinct divisions taking responsibility for:

- Housing, looking at housing policy and supply; affordable housing; social housing management; social inclusion; voluntary and co-operative housing, including Traveller accommodation; social housing (procurement and construction) and private sector housing
- Local Government, including Local Government policy; Local Government project development; Local Government personnel; Local Government finance; franchise; fire service and emergency planning and local services
- Heritage and Planning, including building standards; planning; spatial policy; urban and village development; heritage policy, architectural protection and national monuments
- Corporate Services, including Departmental finance and accounts; personnel; organisation; public/private partnership and corporate development

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urban and rural areas which have high concentrations of children who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the education system because of their socio-economic backgrounds

- Environment, including environmental policy; environment international and sustainable development; air quality and climate change; waste infrastructure and regulation; waste prevention and recovery unit; nuclear safety; and environment and heritage awareness
- Water and Natural Heritage, including water quality; water services investment programme; water services policy; National Parks and Wildlife (NPW) (science and bio-diversity); NPW (designated areas and legislation); NPW (regional management, parks and finance)
- Local Government Audit Service and
- Met Éireann (Dept of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2007).

Clearly the DoEHLG's responsibility covers a wide range of functions, accounting for current voted expenditure of just over €801m in 2006 and voted capital expenditure of approximately €1.88bn, the largest capital expenditure of any government Department in that year.<sup>23</sup>

#### **7.4.2 NAPS visibility within the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government**

The various NAPS and NAP s/inc documents published since 1997 have largely delineated the engagement of the DoEHLG with social inclusion efforts to initiatives relating to housing, disability, homelessness, local government and, more recently, drugs.

The original NAPS, published in 1997, gave little by way of specific indication of how Departments such as the DoEHLG would be expected to contribute to the NAPS. In the 2001–2003 NAP s/inc it was envisaged that the DoEHLG would contribute in relation to housing and homelessness, including Traveller accommodation. Interestingly, this document notes the inclusion of housing in the then National Development Plan (its first such appearance). Around the same time, the 2001 review of the NAPS emphasised the importance of accommodation provision in efforts to address social exclusion and also noted the role of local authorities and CDBs as central to the local response to tackling exclusion (Government of Ireland, 2002).

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<sup>23</sup> FINANCE ACCOUNTS: Audited Financial Statements of the Exchequer for the Financial Year 1 January 2006 to 31 December 2006.

The 2003–2005 NAP s/inc again identified housing and accommodation provision (Office for Social Inclusion, 2002),<sup>24</sup> and set a series of targets, largely drawn from the National Development Plan, covering the provision of housing units and of affordable housing. The NAP s/inc also articulated its commitment to a series of interventions to address the issue of homelessness and the provision of play amenities at local level for children. The NAP s/inc highlighted the role of local authorities in addressing social exclusion, particularly through the CDBs and identified the importance of the pilot social inclusion units established in nine local authorities as well as initiatives supported by the Combat Poverty Agency, namely the Local Government Work Programme and the Anti-Poverty Learning Network (Office for Social Inclusion, 2002). Total expenditure on social inclusion measures for the DoEHLG during this period was broken down as follows:

**Table 7.1: Social Inclusion related expenditure 2004– 2005**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Outturn 2004 €000</b>	<b>Estimate 2005 €000</b>
<b>Environment, Heritage &amp; Local Government (Vote 25)</b>	Exchequer Capital Expenditure on Social & Affordable Housing Programmes	972,131	1,190,160
	Exchequer Current Expenditure on Social & Affordable Housing Programmes	77,996	89,494
	Non Voted Expenditure on Social Inclusion Programmes -Housing	495,304	752,119
	Social Inclusion Non-Housing Expenditure	4,860	5,139
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>1,550,291</b>	<b>2,036,912</b>

Source: Office for Social Inclusion, 2005b

Clearly then, of the 2005 estimate of expenditure of over €2bn, all but €5.1 million was spent on housing-related issues.

<sup>24</sup> Accommodation was also a Special Initiative under the *Sustaining Progress* National Agreement.

### 7.4.3 Specific NAPS-related departmental policy processes or outcomes

Whilst the most recent NAP s/inc (which parallels the *Towards 2016* national agreement) contains a number of commitments that involve the DoEHLG – as the figures above suggest – most of these relate almost exclusively to the twin areas of accommodation and local government.

Within the accommodation area the main targets identified include:

- Housing, including the development of a national housing strategy for people with disabilities and a commitment to address the accommodation needs of 60,000 new households between 2007 to 2009, with a total of 140,000 households catered for by 2013, full implementation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) by 2009 and a survey of local authority housing by 2008
- Homelessness, including the production of a revised strategy on homelessness; the elimination of long-term occupancy of emergency homeless accommodation by 2010
- Traveller accommodation, including the provision of funding to support local-authority provision of Traveller accommodation, the target being to produce 2000 units of standard and Traveller-specific units
- Improvements in the Disabled Persons, Essential Repairs and Special Housing Aid for the Elderly grant schemes
- Continued provision of support for the installation of central heating systems in all local authority dwellings by the end of 2008.

As well as its role in accommodation provision, local government is also responsible for the following NAPS-related processes:

- The provision of sports and leisure facilities
- A range of actions in relation to disability, including the undertaking of access audits to buildings and infrastructure
- Increased provision of library services (Government of Ireland, 2007).

#### **7.4.4 New institutional arrangements**

In terms of the NAPS' implementation structures, the DoEHLG participates in the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion. It also hosts a social inclusion unit within the housing directorate, overseen by a Principal Officer. The functions of this unit largely relate to housing and accommodation issues, disability and drugs. It also plays a role in supporting the operationalisation of PIAs, though the use of this administrative instrument has been limited to date.

The DoEHLG and local authorities are also seen as important elements within the institutional structures that are required to underpin the implementation of the NAP s/inc targets.

Local-level implementation of the NAPS is supported by the Local Government Policy section. The section participates, alongside a variety of other actors, in the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group. This was originally an initiative sponsored by the Combat Poverty Agency and is now mainstreamed and supported by the IPA. It is not the intention of this case study to elaborate further on the variety of mechanisms to support local level engagement as these have already been detailed in a number of previous reports.<sup>25</sup>

At the local level, delivery of the NAPS is heavily reliant on the effective function of the CDBs and, in particular, the Social Inclusion Monitoring Committees within them. In some instances the social inclusion agenda is supported by the creation of social inclusion units, of which there will be 17 by the end of 2008. Staffing of these units varies between local authorities, with 50 per cent of funding being provided by the DoEHLG. In some cases single social inclusion officers/analysts are appointed at local authority grades 5 or 6, though in some cases, e.g. Dublin City Council, the appointment is at the more senior grade 8 level. Other local authorities have employed, or plan to employ, two staff members to support the unit.

PIA guidelines are also being piloted for use at local level by the Combat Poverty Agency.

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<sup>25</sup> Combat Poverty Agency, 2000a; Combat Poverty Agency, 2007; Combat Poverty Agency, 2004; Fitzpatrick Associates, 2004; O'Riordain, 2006.

### **7.4.5 Achieving NAPS targets**

The work of the NAP s/inc during this period was the subject of an implementation and progress review published in mid-2005. This review usefully identified, for all relevant Departments, the progress achieved in achieving the NAPS targets. Within the then DoELG, targets for this period relating to the provision of emergency accommodation for the homeless were achieved. Amongst the target areas described as 'in progress' were the alignment of housing supply with demand; delivery of 41,500 housing starts between 2000 and 2006; delivery of an appropriate mix of social and affordable housing and analysis of future housing need. The report described limited progress in the provision of accommodation for all Traveller families 'identified in the local authority five-year Traveller accommodation programme process as being in need of accommodation'. This final target was to be achieved by the end of 2004, but by mid-2005 still had not been met (Office for Social Inclusion, 2005a).

### **7.4.6 Commitment**

At national level it is important to acknowledge the centrality of the DoEHLG role in addressing the strategic social inclusion area of housing and accommodation, as well as its role in stimulating local government to play a more active role. However, questions remain regarding the 'added value' that the NAPS has brought. An examination of the 1998 DoELG Annual Report, the first following the publication of the NAPS, shows that the DoELG already had an extensive role in the housing and accommodation area, one that was likely to evolve further. Whether or not the NAPS added anything was questioned by one official who suggested: 'In this Department we wouldn't have been doing anything different. Our commitments under NAPS are commitments we've made already and are implementing' (Interview O, 09/09/2007).

In summary, then, whilst the NAPS may function well as a means of co-ordinating social inclusion efforts, it is less easy to conclude that it has in itself been responsible for stimulating a deeper level of engagement at national or local level. This view is highlighted by the fact that in the DoEHLG only two sections are seen as having a defined role in relation to the NAPS, implying that other areas have little to contribute. This would appear to contradict the somewhat belated realisation in the OSI's Annual report in 2005 which suggests that:

It is becoming increasingly evident that promoting social inclusion is not just a matter for those Departments and agencies responsible for employment and social policies. Other apparently unrelated policies can also have an impact, positive or negative. (Office for Social Inclusion, 2006)

## **7.5 NAPS at local government level – the Galway example**

To understand the role of local government in addressing social inclusion, the work undertaken by Galway County Council is explored here.

### **7.5.1 NAPS visibility within Galway County Council**

Galway County Council is one of a number of local authorities that has developed social inclusion strategies. In understanding what stimulated and enabled the Council to take on the preparation and completion of a Social Inclusion Strategy, a number of factors emerge:

- The provision of financial support was important, even the lower level made available in the Galway case.
- It was also important that there was a dedicated staff member with responsibility to oversee the strategy production and that this staff member was at a reasonable level of seniority.
- The allocated staff member brought a number of different experiences, having worked within the community and voluntary sector, within a local development company and within another local authority. This mix of experiences and mindsets, it is suggested, added to the strategy's development.
- Clearly the specialist support provided by the Combat Poverty Agency was crucial, lending both credibility and expertise to the exercise.

### **7.5.2 Specific NAPS-related departmental policy processes or outcomes**

The development of the initiative was supported by the Combat Poverty Agency, not as part of the main funding given to Westmeath, Cork and Donegal County Councils, but in the form of smaller grants schemes for social inclusion projects. Galway County Council applied jointly with Galway Rural Development for such support and received €10,000 to develop a Social Inclusion Strategy. As part of this initiative Galway County Council also produced a poverty profile, the completion of which was contracted out to a locally based consultant. By contrast, the content of the Social

Inclusion Strategy was produced in-house by a staff member in the Community and Enterprise section.

Referring to the Combat Poverty Agency's support received by the authority at the initial stages of establishing a social inclusion strategy, one local official argued that the support was 'crucial at that stage' because it was the council's first attempt at developing a Social Inclusion Strategy. Moreover, it was suggested that the ability to name the Combat Poverty Agency's involvement enhanced the credibility of the initiative within the Galway County Council, as well as imposing 'a discipline' on its construction (Interview P, 17/09/2007).

### **7.5.3 New institutional arrangements**

In order to support the development of a Social Inclusion Strategy, the seminars organised through the Local Anti-Poverty Learning Network were seen as hugely beneficial. Commenting on the seminars, a local official noted: 'every time I left one I had two or three strategies in my head,' enhancing the value in learning from and being supported by others (Interview P, 17/09/2007). The Combat Poverty Agency also organised a specific series of seminars for local authorities that had commenced preparation of a social inclusion strategy. Groups of five or six local authorities met and exchanged experience and best practice. According to the same local official in Galway, the provision of the Combat Poverty Agency's support meant that the strategy was in place one-and-a-half to two years before it might otherwise have been.

In addition to the provision of a training programme, the Galway County Council's strategy was supplemented by the development of an internal anti-poverty learning network to mirror the national one, local authorities having been encouraged to follow this path by the Combat Poverty Agency. However, as this network was being set up, it emerged that a variety of thematic groups existed within the Galway County Council, one focusing on disability; one on the 'Scéim Teanga'; one on customer services; and another on a health and safety group. These eventually merged into one group as they were generally observed to involve all the same people.

In the case of Galway County Council the Strategy was completed without an external consultation – it was seen as largely an internal document. The final draft

document was presented to the relevant SPCs and to the full Galway County Council for ratification.

#### **7.5.4 Commitment**

The Galway Social Inclusion Strategy began to be developed in early 2004 and was finalised in 2005. In the early stages of the process the support of senior management was obtained following a presentation on the concept of the Social Inclusion Strategy, including an outline of the different stages of the plan's development. While the process of writing the strategy was largely completed by one person, this was accompanied by the provision of a series of five or six training events covering different themes over an initial 5-6 month period, e.g. disability, elderly, Travellers (involving some Traveller organisations). It was considered that training linked to a specific issue or service was more useful than a more broadly focused package. While the reaction to the training offered was reasonably positive, there is a sense that some staff considered that outside trainers/groups were telling staff what to do and that in reality this was going to have little impact on how functions would be delivered.

In this regard the impediment of existing organisational culture at local level has been acknowledged. The review of NAP s/inc 2003–2005 (Office for Social Inclusion, 2005b) concluded that despite 'significant interest in and commitment to the work of the Learning Network', it should be acknowledged that 'embedding anti-poverty practice across local authorities is a slow task and will take time to achieve given the current organisational culture in local authorities'. The experience of Galway's access to extra support via the Combat Poverty Agency's grant would seem to suggest that – given the relatively low levels of social inclusion expenditure in local government on areas that are not housing related – a significant amount of training is necessary to even begin the process of 'changing organisational mindsets'. One might conclude that rather than expecting organisational culture to change without intervention, higher levels of supported changes may need to be encouraged and/or induced.

## **8 Conclusions – What can we learn from NAPS?**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The NAPS' objectives were three-fold: to achieve greater integration in policy initiatives by identifying cross-cutting themes across government Departments; to establish 'poverty proofing' of all government initiatives and key policy areas; and to develop the participation of people living in poverty. These objectives have been only partially achieved. So far there has been significant resistance to the operationalisation of all three themes and the civil service as a whole has been slow to develop inter-agency work, or to use the tools offered in poverty proofing or gender mainstreaming (NESC, 2001; EAPN, 2003; McGuaran, 2005). Moreover, the dilution of the mechanism to enable participation means that there is little direct participation of people living in poverty and that the transformative potential of the NAPS is weakened. Why this is so is discussed below.

### **8.2 Assessing institutional development**

In attempting to assess the institutional evolution and adaptation of the NAPS, the picture is mixed. At national level, while some new governance structures have been created, these are frequently populated by existing state-sector actors, with a relatively limited role for non-state actors. The limited co-ordination mechanisms (political and administrative) weaken the central capacity to more forcibly drive the initiative forward. In consequence, state actors undoubtedly retain their dominant positions, and the potential for the exercise of greater deliberation and bargaining on social inclusion priorities remains largely unrealised.

There has been limited follow-through on key elements such as the strategic deployment of dedicated personnel, the widespread and effective use of poverty proofing, and the integration of the NAPS with processes such as the SMI. In this respect, re-locating the OSI to the Department of the Taoiseach could re-assert the political drive behind social inclusion initiatives and underpin the view that effective tackling of social inclusion is a task for all Departments. It is as yet unclear whether the recent strengthening of the OSI will enable it to take a more directive role in the promotion of the NAPS.

At local level the involvement of CDBs may be viewed as an attempt to develop more inclusive policy fora. However, the degree to which mainstream institutions of government at local level have embraced the NAPS is open to question, as is the view that the NAPS' policy architecture represents something substantially different from that which preceded it. The key question is whether the participation opportunities provided by the NAPS' policy architecture (at central and local levels) advance a social inclusion agenda and, most especially, whether opportunities are created for the involvement of those most strongly articulating social inclusion priorities.

The challenge of 'moving the super tanker' was raised in a variety of guises by participants throughout the research – the 'super tanker' in this case being the institutions of state at either central department or local government level. The super tanker analogy raises debate as to the nature, and mechanics, of institutional change and the degree of investment made to support it within the NAPS process. For some, a slow and gradual incremental change is the most realistic path. Others may support the type of accelerated change that arises from duties imposed by legislation (most notably highlighted in the case studies by the constant reference to obligations in the area of disability).

However, in virtually all the NAPS' since 1997 there is a distinct lack of concern with institutional change. And while many institutional mechanisms have been established, little attention has been paid to changing the path of the super tanker. Referring to the creation of new institutions, participatory fora and policy processes at both national and local levels, one interviewee suggested that the all-consuming 'preoccupation with partnerships and networks' has become such that we are in danger of creating a 'governance mire' which of itself may prevent effective prioritisation of policy objectives (Interview J, 30/01/2006).

### **8.3 Supporting organisational change**

As the discussion thus far has shown, the presence of a strong state engagement (by both politicians and bureaucrats) within the NAPS initiative is pivotal to its success. Equally, it may be argued that the declining state commitment to the NAPS has considerably weakened its potential impact on combating social exclusion. In addition to the political and administrative support necessary to push the NAPS beyond policy

ambitions into concrete policy measures, a number of practical measures designed to support organisational change might also be considered.

- Legislative endorsement

The case studies highlighted the use and role of a number of social inclusion policy measures, be they legislative (as in the case of the Disability Act), or administrative (as in the case of PIAs). At both national and local levels, however, it seems clear that where a legislative obligation exists, efforts will be made to meet it. By contrast, administrative tools such as the PIAs appear to remain largely optional and little used. In some cases, attitudes towards PIAs were clearly negative, conjuring images of ‘wads of paper and ticking boxes’ (Interview P, 17/09/2007). One senior official observed that PIAs have been ‘slow enough getting off the ground’ (Interview O, 09/09/2007), despite the fact that the preceding poverty-proofing guidelines have been in place since the early years of the NAPS.

Moreover, in a situation where some inclusion measures are legislated for and others are not, it was suggested that this led inevitably to an implicit hierarchy in terms of implementation. It is, for example, also worth considering whether some issues, such as disability, which are driven by legislative obligation, ironically result in other social inclusion issues not similarly reinforced being sidelined, simply because there is no sanction regarding failure to address them and little prospect that anyone will follow it up.

- The need for social inclusion training

The survey and case studies highlighted the paucity of social inclusion training available to the civil service and other key policy actors, but also the prevalent attitude that such training is not perceived to be a necessary part of broader staff complements. The dominant view was that whilst value is placed on issue-specific training, in some cases more generalised training is seen as less attractive. This ‘pigeon-holing’ of social inclusion knowledge and training goes against the spirit and intention of the NAPS. In the words of one senior official:

If it [social inclusion] is seen as part of their training but not with a label hanging out of it ... I think it's more effective. I know from dealing with people in other areas [-] the problem with putting a label of Social Inclusion on

something [is that], with the best will in the world, [it] can act as a switch off ... Because maybe and I'm speculating, maybe there's a touchy feely to it; maybe it induces, by its very name, a glazed approach (Interview Q, 09/09/2007).

The problem, of course, with issue- or function-specific training is that it rarely offers the opportunity for staff to reflect on broader issues of how social exclusion might be produced in the first instance and the possible role of national- and local-level state institutions within this.

- Specialised support

Apart from the training and awareness-raising dimensions already mentioned, an obvious part of the process of organisational change is the introduction of additional specialised staff into the civil service and local authority structures. In the Galway case study, for example, the process of developing the social inclusion strategy in the county, as well as the role of the community and enterprise section more generally, was seen as having been greatly enriched by the presence of new staff with specialist knowledge of, and training in, the areas of social inclusion and community development (Interview R, 28/09/2007). In this case in particular, specialist staff with non-local authority backgrounds were seen as providing an important supplement to those with skills in local authority functions and practice. The facility to enable the continued recruitment of such specialists is essential.

The value of networking amongst these and other staff with a dedicated social inclusion responsibility has been highlighted by the Galway case study. However, the absence of networking opportunities for those involved in social inclusion units, especially at national level, would appear to be an obvious gap and is one that could be addressed relatively quickly.

Such specialist support may, however, be provided by a variety of means. In the discussions held with both the DoEHLG and Galway County Council, the significance of the specialised support provided by the Combat Poverty Agency was highlighted. Its importance is manifold as a means of: sourcing funding for social inclusion initiatives; sourcing information and support for those pursuing social inclusion strategies; and facilitating useful networks for information exchange and ideas.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the presence of an organisation such as the Combat Poverty Agency provides a stimulus to promote the type of organisational change the NAPS itself recognises as being necessary. Without the push of ‘institutional tugs’ like the Combat Poverty Agency, institutional ‘super tankers’, such as the DoEHLG and local government, may find it more difficult to change direction, no matter how much they may wish to.

#### **8.4 Providing effective participation opportunities**

From a social inclusion perspective a key question is whether the participation opportunities provided advance a social inclusion agenda and, most especially, whether opportunities are created for the involvement of those most strongly articulating social inclusion priorities. Social inclusion advocacy has been assumed most prominently by a small number of organisations from within the community and voluntary sector(s) though it is by no means the case that all organisations within this sector share such a perspective.<sup>26</sup> At both national and local level, there has been a tendency to homogenise the community and voluntary sector, thereby ignoring the wide range of interests, backgrounds and realities faced by different organisations and their members.

Compared to the other social partners, the composition of the community and voluntary sector remains expansive, fluid and diverse – a feature that prevents it from coalescing easily with the other social partners, or even within its own ranks. This has significant consequences for the pursuit of social inclusion objectives. First and foremost, the sector as a whole is unable to act strategically. This inability to prioritise action areas often means that, in practical terms, the sector is unable to punch its collective representative weight. As a result, despite the range of participation opportunities, its opportunities to influence policy are limited.

At national level, the participation opportunities for social inclusion advocacy groups suggest that the community and voluntary sector effectively occupies a secondary status and function within the national social partnership framework. The key economic actors, most especially the trade unions and the employer organisations, which clearly dominate the process, are able to negotiate in a far more coherent and

strategic manner than the community and voluntary pillar, which has to contend with a larger, more unwieldy membership comprising radically diversified interests and presenting something of a challenge to established arrangements (Meade, 2005).

Moreover, since the resources of the community and voluntary pillar are extremely variable, this often results not only in uneven representative capacities, but also in uneven negotiation aims and ambitions. Some try to prioritise structural aspects of social exclusion, whilst others attempt to prioritise specific action on concrete issues. The predominant perception of most, however, is that social inclusion issues in any shape or form are largely ‘supplementary’ to the main business of the social partnership agenda. The recent addition of ‘social inclusion’ to the Social Partnership Steering Committee’s remit goes some way to acknowledging this.

At local level, the principal mechanism for communication with the community and voluntary sector dimension of civil society is the community and voluntary fora. And while the full title of these fora should properly include the term ‘disadvantaged’ it is far from clear that these generalised fora adequately attempt to include social inclusion interests or to address social inclusion issues, a fact acknowledge by one representative of the forum in County Galway (Interview S, 05/10/2007). Whether they should is raised by the comment of one official:

If one looks at society as a whole, one has to take a view that most of society is not so [-] socially excluded and, if you have a forum which by definition and by requirement has to be open to [everybody] you are going to [find that] in many places the overwhelming majority of groups have to come from the wider community, not those representing the disadvantaged (Interview Q, 09/09/2007).

The implication of this suggests that participative democratic processes will tend inevitably to replicate representative democratic patterns and may not, in and of themselves, do anything to address the democratic deficits identified in the recent audit of democracy in Ireland (Hughes *et al*, 2007). This is because, as it stands, the potential for elite capture of participation opportunities is considerable, as has been

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<sup>26</sup> Vague guidelines for the establishment of community fora were contained in the report of the Task Force on the Integration of Local Government and Local Development Systems, 1999.

documented in global experiences of decentralisation processes (Crook *et al*, 2001). This is matched by the tendency for broadly based representative structures to be less likely to prioritise social inclusion issues, particularly where those issues require wider societal prejudices to be overcome.

In consequence, if participation opportunities are to be meaningful, then thought needs to be given to providing adequate supports for effective participation.

### **8. 5 NAPS as new governance?**

It is possible to argue that the Irish NAPS can be described as a form of new governance, but only in as much as it has become part of the extended model of social partnership in Ireland. Despite the addition of a community and voluntary pillar in 1997, social partnership continues to be dominated by the country's principal economic actors – the state, trade unions and business organisations. Aside from the governance networks offered by social partnership processes, where social inclusion is frequently the poor relation, the social inclusion agenda of the NAPS has been largely implemented within traditional government institutions and administrative systems. At local level, it has had to rely on evolving but relatively minimalist local government/ local development reform processes that offer the promise of participation, but in most cases fail to deliver in any progressive sense. Clearly, for a variety of reasons, the governance mechanisms in which the NAPS now sits accord a stronger legitimacy to voices advocating particular economic policies and largely marginalise those seeking to question the impact of these policies on the generation of inequality.

All in all, the NAPS was innovative both in its attempt to achieve *targeted outcomes* in relation to social inclusion indicators and in its desire to *change governance processes*. During the life-time of the NAPS, however, the balance of emphasis between these twin ambitions has shifted. Originally envisaged as a 'mechanism for changing the mindset of decision-makers' (de Rossa, 1997), the NAPS has been contracted into a series of discreet policy initiatives designed to target those at risk of social exclusion (as defined by the EU and NAP s/inc). The results of this research suggest that a re-calibration of this equilibrium might do more to push social inclusion and that pro-poor advocacy groups should re-focus attention on *policy process* if they

are to capitalise on their representative credentials and ‘punch their weight’ in terms of policy influence.

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Interview U (08/09/2007) (email communication) Disability Equality Unit, Department of Justice.

Interview V (06/07/2007) (email communication) HEO officer, Office for Social Inclusion.

Interview W (20/09/2007) (email communication) Policy and Public Affairs Section, National Disability Authority.

Interview X (26/09/2007) Advocacy Officer, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network.

Interview Y (26/09/2007) Disability Advocacy Officer.

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B: <http://eucenter.wisc.edu/OMC/Papers/EUC/Academy2.pdf>

## **Appendix 1: Departmental Questionnaire**

### **Department**

Briefly, what is (are) the chief purpose(s)/function(s) of your dept?

Your Position:

Briefly, what is (are) the chief purpose(s)/function(s) of your position?

Are you familiar with the concept of Social Inclusion?

Yes / No (please circle your answer)

If yes, how would you define it?

Is Social Inclusion something that has much impact on your position?

Yes / No (please circle your answer)

If yes, briefly explain how:

Is Social Inclusion something that has much impact on your department?

Yes / No (please circle your answer)

If yes, briefly explain how:

Which department (s) / body has (have) chief responsibility for Social Inclusion?

Do you have any links with above?

Yes / No (please circle your answer)

If yes, briefly explain the nature of these links:

Does your dept have any links with above?

If yes, briefly explain the nature of these links:

	No	Vague knowledge	Yes	Very familiar
Are you familiar with the National Anti-Poverty Strategy?				
Are you familiar with the National Office for Social Inclusion?				
Are you familiar with the Social Inclusion Consultative Group?				
Are you familiar with the Task Force on Integration of Local Government and Local Development?				

	No	Vague knowledge	Yes	Very familiar
Are any targets set for monitoring social inclusion in relation to the work of your department?				
Is there a social inclusion procedure in relation to policy <i>making</i> in your department?				
Is there a social inclusion procedure in relation to policy <i>implementation</i> in your department?				
In relation to your position in the department, do you feel adequately prepared to deal with policy issues associated with social inclusion?				
In relation to your department more generally, do you believe that it is adequately prepared to deal with policy issues associated with social inclusion?				

Have you received any kind of training in relation to social inclusion policies and/or practice?

Yes / No (please circle your answer)

If yes, please give details

**Thank you for your time!**

## Appendix 2: The embedding of partnership in Irish public policy approaches

Year	Agreement	Authors	Policy drivers
1987	Programme for National Recovery (1987–1990)	Government (Taoiseach's office) plus employers, trade unions, farming interests (i.e. Social Partners)	FF minority govt. FF/PD coalition (formed July 1989)
1988	National Development Plan 1989–1993	Government (Taoiseach's office) in consultation with Social Partners and 'regional interests'	EU Commission Irish Government (Dept. Finance)
1991	Programme for Economic and Social Progress 1991–1993	Government (Taoiseach's office) and Social Partners	FF/PD coalition FF/Lab coalition (formed Jan 1993)
1993	National Development Plan 1994–1999	Government (Office Taoiseach & Dept. Finance) in consultation with Social Partners and 'sub-national actors'	EU Commission Irish Government
1994	Programme for Competitiveness and Work 1994–1996	Government (Taoiseach's office) plus employers, trade unions, farming interests (i.e. Social Partners)	FF/Lab coalition Rainbow coalition (formed Dec 1994)
December 1996	Better Local Government White Paper	Government (Department of Environment and Local Government)	Rainbow Coalition
April 1997	National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) 1997–2006	Government (Dept Social Welfare) in consultation with Social Partners (now including C+V sector)	Rainbow Coalition
1997	Partnership 2000 1997–2000	Government (Taoiseach's office) and Social Partners	Rainbow coalition FF/PD coalition (formed June 1997)
2000	Programme for Prosperity and Fairness 2000–2002	Government (Taoiseach's office); Social Partners	FF/PD coalition (re-elected 2002)
2000	National Development Plan 2000–2006	Government (Office Taoiseach & Dept. Finance) in consultation with Social Partners and 'sub-national actors'	FF/PD coalition
2001	National Action Plan on Inclusion (NAP s/inc) 2001–2003	Government (Dept. Social, Community and Family Affairs)	EU Commission
2002	Building an Inclusive Society (Review of NAPS)	Government (Dept. SCFA)	Government Social Partners (including C+V sector)
Jan 2003	Report of (first) NAPS Social Inclusion Forum	NESF	EU Commission Government Social Partners
Mar 2003	Programme for Sustaining Progress 2003–2005	Government and Social Partners	FF/PD coalition
2003	NAP s/inc 2003–2005	Government (Office of Social	EU Commission

	(now incorporating NAPS review)	Inclusion, Dept. SCFA)	Government
<b>Jan 2005</b>	Report of (2nd) NAPS Social Inclusion Forum	NESF	EU Commission Government Social Partners
<b>2006</b>	NAP s/inc 2006–2008	Government (Office of Social Inclusion, Dept. SCFA)	EU Commission Government
<b>Feb 2006</b>	Report of the NAPS Social Inclusion Forum	NESF	EU Commission Government Social Partners