



## The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Ireland

### Submission to the Review of the Implementation of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2017

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EAPN Ireland welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection review of the implementation of the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 and the Updated Plan 2015-2017 (NAPinclusion 2007-2017).

Below is our response to the four questions posed in the invitation to make a submission.

#### **1. The extent of progress made on the high-level goals and National Social Target for Poverty Reduction**

The existence of the Poverty Target, high-level goals and specific targets has been extremely important in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. Apart from the maintenance of the Poverty Target there were unfortunately much fewer specific targets in the Updated NAPinclusion. However, the causes of poverty and social exclusion are multidimensional and complex and particularly if the structural causes are to be addressed, it must be ensured that all policy supports their reduction and eradication.

In relation to progress, the most important issue for the period of the Plan was that when the economic crisis hit, the focus was on resolving the fiscal crisis, with little consideration of the social and poverty impact, including the goals and actions of the NAPinclusion and the overall poverty reduction target.

Despite the Government highlighting that the vulnerable were being protected, there was no poverty impact assessment of the short-term or long-term impact of policy and austerity measures e.g. cuts or changes to income supports or services or in the quality of jobs being created under the National Action Plan for Jobs. This completely undermined the NAPinclusion which was abandoned and reflects a moment in time while the world around it changed and the lives of those it was meant to improve, seriously deteriorated.

The Updated NAPinclusion put the emphasis on labour market solutions to address poverty. This has already been the focus during the crisis. A balanced and integrated approach is needed if poverty is to be addressed including measures to ensure adequate income and access for all to quality services and quality jobs. It must also ensure that adequate resources are available to deliver the measures and they do not remain at the level of strategies or plans.

Poverty increased across all measurements over the ten-year period. The target is to reduce Consistent Poverty to 2% or less by 2020. However, it increased from a low of 4.2% in 2008 to a high of 9.1% in 2013 before reducing to 6.7% in 2017. It is also extremely important to highlight that poverty levels are particularly high for some groups in society. The Survey of Income and Living Conditions highlights the levels for some groups, such as children, those who are unemployed, those living in lone parent households and those not at work due to illness or a disability. However other groups such as Travellers and Roma, migrants, ethnic minorities and those who are homeless are not captured in this survey but have higher levels of poverty. It is important to have specific targets for these groups. There

is a specific target to reduce child poverty but targets are also needed for other groups in society with the necessary policy measures to achieve it.

The Government reports on progress on the high-level goals in the Social Inclusion Reports. These reports are very important. Because of how the report is presented it is sometimes difficult however, to determine whether progress is being made against the targets. This requires clear targets, which can be revised over time, and clear reporting on progress. This can be followed by the detailing of the measures.

## **2. The extent of implementation of the actions underpinning the high-level goals in NAPinclusion**

Many of the issues raised in relation to question 1 above apply to the implementation of actions.

It is difficult to reply to this question in any detail unless a thorough assessment is carried out. It is also important to recognise that many of the actions in the NAPinclusion 2007-2016 were short-term, with the expectation that these would be updated over the period of the Plan. Some actions were in relation to strategies which were to be developed or implemented. The test would be to see how these were progressed.

It must be noted that particular policy concerns have emerged since 2007 which have undermined the ability to progress many of the actions within the high-level goals for implementation as part of the plan. The ongoing housing crisis indicates that the goal re social housing provision is some way from being met and directly undermines many of the actions for vulnerable groups within the strategy, such as community care for older people, migrant integration, labour market activation. The lack of investment in service provision for example in adequate public housing programme, meaningful interventions for affordable childcare provision, has had a negative impact on the ability to implement many of the actions underpinning the high-level goals in NAP inclusion. As stated above an official assessment needs to be carried out re the progress of agreed actions to ensure a detailed evaluation rather than a speculative response to the extent of implementation.

## **3. The relevance and comprehensiveness of the monitoring and governance structures underpinning NAPinclusion**

The NAPinclusion is presented as an **integrated cross-Government strategy**. However, the capacity of the Government to deliver on this strategy has been undermined by changes and cuts to Government and community infrastructure. In 2007 the monitoring of the Plan lay with the Office for Social Inclusion, which included staff with a long history of working on issues related to poverty and social exclusion. Their work was supported by the expertise and research of the independent Combat Poverty Agency. There was also an infrastructure of autonomous national and local community development organisations which could link people from communities and groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion to the strategy.

The closing of the Combat Poverty Agency immediately resulted in a major loss of capacity to support delivery on the new NAP Inclusion. When the staff from the Combat Poverty Agency were brought into the Department and integrated with staff from the Office for Social Inclusion to form the Social Inclusion Division there were approximately 24 staff, many with a high level of expertise. In the past 10 years this capacity and expertise has been eroded. The Social Inclusion Division in the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection now has approximately 7 staff, the majority of which are less than 2 years in the Division. This Division is now located under the activation section of the Department.

At the same time resources to **autonomous community organisations** were greatly reduced, with local organisations being particularly badly impacted. This included the impact of the closure of the Community Development Programme.

If the Government is to commit to delivering on a new all of Government NAP Inclusion it must resource the infrastructure necessary to deliver on it.

There needs to be a greater connection between the poverty reduction target and the policies which impact on its achievement. The target needs to be a driver of policy. In other words, if that is the target, how do we plan to achieve it? An element of this is **poverty-impact assessment** which can help to identify how policies which are being planned or are already in place could reduce poverty, or result in more people experiencing poverty. Over the period of the NAPinclusion 2007-2017 poverty-impact assessment was not been effectively applied either to income and other policy, e.g. tax, education, housing, transport, employment, migration and other policy.

The **Cabinet Committee** on Social inclusion has become a Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Services. While this is not in itself a negative move, it does result in a dilution of the focus of the highest level of Government which has responsibility for the delivery of the NAP Inclusion.

Over the period of the Plan the existence of the network of **social inclusion officers** across different Departments has almost disappeared and importance of the role they play, undermined. This infrastructure needs to be put back in place, with the officials holding a senior role in the Departments.

The **Social Inclusion Forum** plays an important role in bringing different stakeholders, including those with a direct experience of the issues, together to support the monitoring of the implementation of the NAP Inclusion. There is a need to continue to review how the Forum can be improved to better fulfil this role. This includes clear reporting on progress and an opportunity to interrogate specific elements of the NAP Inclusion, to identify how to improve implementation. It can also be used to identify and mitigate measures and policies that undermine the strategy.

#### 4. **Lessons relevant to inform the approach to dealing with social inclusion at a cross-government level.**

The replies to the questions above cover many of the elements of this question.

“Poverty is not an accident. Like slavery and apartheid, it is man-made and can be removed by the actions of human beings.”

This quote from Nelson Mandela is important in understand the responsibility of Government and the role of a NAPinclusion.

It must be accepted at the highest level that poverty is a breach of people’s human rights. The Government is responsible for creating the conditions whereby no-one lives in poverty or experiences social exclusion.

Poverty and social exclusion are multidimensional and have structural causes. This is why a cross-governmental approach is necessary. It must start by looking at the type of society we want, the values that underpin this and how to get there, making sure we leave no-one behind. It must address the need for everyone to have access to an adequate income whether in or out of work, ensure that everyone can access quality services and that those who want to work can access a decent work and the supports necessary to get it. All of these areas are linked and must be understood as such in the

approach that is taken to people's lives. A cross-government strategy should also ensure that the taxation and resources are necessary to deliver it and link across economic, social and environmental policy.

It is essential therefore for a whole of Government Strategy to address poverty and social exclusion to exist that there is a clear ownership of this strategy from the Taoiseach and his Department, right across Government.

Each Department must be provided with the means and resources to enable meaningful reflection upon the reality of poverty and social inclusion as a consideration within the process of their departmental policy development. When gaps or omissions are identified at a departmental level, only then can a progressive approach to social inclusion at a cross government level move forward.

It must link to other supporting strategies in a clear way and be a mechanism for monitoring how these strategies deliver on the overall poverty target, the specific sub targets and measures, but also ensures that the structural causes of poverty and social exclusion are addressed.

There must be a recognition that the economic, social and environmental policies impact on each other and therefore must be consistent and support each other. Poverty and equality impact assessment must be developed in an effective manner with a focus on reducing poverty and social exclusion for all and leaving no-one behind. The Sustainable Development Goals provides an integrated framework for supporting an integrated policy approach.

The office responsible for supporting delivery of this integrated strategy must have the necessary powers and adequately resourced with the necessary expertise to ensure it ensure delivery across Government. There must also be capacity raising within government departments to resource interdepartmental systemic collaborations. This is not just in relation to the NAPinclusion but other cross Governmental and interdepartmental strategies.

These must be a high level of engagement with relevant stakeholders, and in particular with those experiencing poverty and social exclusion and their representative organisations at local and national level. This must involve adequate resourcing for autonomous community development organisations representing these communities at bot local and national level.

There should also be mandatory participation, insofar as is possible, of each relevant government department with the annual Social Inclusion Forum. This would allow for cross Departmental engagement with the community and voluntary sector, as well as people who are experiencing social exclusion. This would be an important development in the whole of Government approach to addressing poverty and social inclusion as well as the implementation of the NAP for social inclusion and should be a consideration for the upcoming Forum in May 2019.

As Ireland is very linked to policy developments in the EU, Ireland must continue to engage with EU policy to ensure it supports the eradication of poverty in Ireland, but also that the Irish Government plays a key leadership role in ensuring that policies and strategies that support the eradication of poverty across the EU are developed and supported. As highlighted above this also involves ensuring consistency across all policy.