

Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) [extract]

Framework Document

November 2001

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(Full paper downloadable at http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/upload/publications/1322.pdf)

7. Mobilising All Relevant Bodies

7.1 Introduction

A strategy for implementation of the revised NAPS is required to ensure that the necessary structures and mechanisms are set in place to achieve the agreed objectives, and also to ensure that progress in achieving these can be effectively monitored and evaluated.

As referred to in Section 1, recent assessments of the NAPS process have concluded that while substantial progress has been made, there are a number of areas where the implementation procedures require some strengthening. In general terms, there was concern that:

- the NAPS process has not fully bedded down in Government Departments, so that the impacts on the policies of those Departments have not been fully realised;
- the institutional structures, notably the NAPS unit and the Departmental Liaison Officers, required better resourcing;
- the involvement of the social partners needed to be enhanced through the development of appropriate consultative and participatory structures; and
- there was a need to incorporate the strategy at local level.

Given the revised strategy that is now emerging, other issues have emerged:

- the need to put in place a strategy to ensure that data for indicator and target setting and monitoring become available; and
- the need for an ongoing programme of research, incorporating existing research, embracing both existing and new thematic areas that have emerged, and focusing in particular on the development of baseline data.

Successful implementation of the NAPS strategy requires that the structures and other implementation mechanisms:

- facilitate strong political leadership and control of the process;
- encourage ownership of and commitment to the process on the part of those charged with its implementation;
- deal successfully with the cross-cutting nature of the process, including the need to incorporate a geographical dimension to the analysis;
- conform with the principles of good governance as enunciated in *Delivering Better Government*;
- have a strong consultative element so that the major stakeholders can influence the process; and
- encourage participation of all relevant bodies, including those who have a direct

experience of poverty and also the private sector.

In relation to NAPS, the prime elements of an effective implementation process are:

- *The partnership approach*
- *The institutional structures;*
- *Poverty proofing;*
- *Data and research;*
- *Monitoring and evaluation*
- *Communications; and*
- *Resources.*

7.2 Social Partnership and the NAPS

A distinctive feature of the Irish political landscape since 1987 is the existence of national social partnership agreements, whereby a shared understanding of the challenges to be faced is built and a broad consensus is adopted. The ten-year NAPS was developed following wide-ranging consultation with the Social Partners and launched by the Government in 1997. The NAPS principles include ensuring equal access and encouraging participation for all, and the development of the partnership approach building on national and local partnership processes. The Social Partners have an ongoing role in relation to the monitoring of the NAPS.

7.3 Institutional Structures

The current structures for NAPS comprise the following elements:

- A Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach [Premier];
- A Senior Officials Group to support the Cabinet-Committee;
- An Inter-Departmental Policy Committee to drive the Strategy;
- A NAPS Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs;
- NAPS liaison officers in Government Departments;
- The CPA in a supportive monitoring and evaluation role; and
- The NESF, in its role of monitoring the social inclusion element of Partnership 2000.

A number of these structures, such as the Cabinet Committee and the Senior Officials Group have a wider brief than NAPS.

These institutional structures, and particularly the involvement of the Taoiseach, promote strong political oversight of the process. This will be further strengthened by the direct involvement of the Oireachtas [parliament]. This could in turn be facilitated by the presentation of regular progress reports by the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs and occasional reports to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs. The Senior Officials Group will continue to support the Cabinet Committee, and deal with NAPS affairs as they arise.

The NAPS Steering Group has worked successfully in steering the review of the NAPS. This Group includes the social partners and anti-poverty experts, as well as key Departmental representatives. It is proposed to continue the involvement of these actors

through the establishment of a **NAPS Consultative Group**, in which other relevant bodies will be invited to participate. The NAPS Consultative Group will meet twice a year to offer its advice and observations on the process as it develops. This will strengthen the involvement of the social partners. However, it is also considered vital that individual members and representatives of the community and voluntary sector have an opportunity to contribute to the process. Accordingly, it is proposed to convene an annual **Social Inclusion Forum**. Progress in relation to NAPS will be reported to this Forum.

The **Inter-Departmental Policy Committee**, the NAPS unit and the NAPS liaison officers form the core of the NAPS delivery process. The demands put on these institutional elements will be much greater than heretofore because of the:

- extension of the NAPS to cover the additional themes of health and housing and accommodation and the new cross-cutting area of racism;
- greater complexity of the strategy as it is emerging; and the
- need to ensure that the administrative impediments occasioned by the cross-cutting nature of the process are overcome.

It is considered that these institutional elements need considerable strengthening. It is proposed therefore that consideration be given to establishing a **National Office for Social Inclusion**, reporting to the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs. This will take over the functions of the NAPS unit. The Director of the Office will be a high level appointment and it will be staffed by experts seconded from relevant Departments and agencies, as well as by specialist staff. The work of the National Office would be overseen by a management group of Assistant Secretaries drawn from the relevant Departments. The involvement of Departmental officials at the highest level should ensure that relevant departments and agencies buy-in fully to the Strategy. These institutional arrangements will take over the roles previously undertaken by the NAPS unit and the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee. The Department of the Taoiseach will be represented on the management group.

The bedding-down of the NAPS in relevant Departments should be further strengthened by the establishment, where they do not already exist, of **Social Inclusion Units** in the Departments that have prime responsibility for implementing the actions now being adopted by NAPS. **NAPS Liaison Officers** would continue to operate in other Departments. NAPS liaison officers will be offered training support to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to fulfil their briefs.