

***Poverty Combating Strategies
in Selected Places***

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Executive Summary	
Chapter 1 – Introduction	1
Background	1
Scope of the research	1
Methodology	2
Chapter 2 – The United Kingdom	3
Background	3
Definition and measurement of poverty	3
<i>Performance indicators presented in Opportunity for all</i>	4
<i>Tiered approach proposed in Measuring child poverty</i>	4
<i>Performance indicators reported in National Action Plan on Social Inclusion</i>	5
Setting of anti-poverty targets	6
Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty	7
<i>Central level</i>	7
<i>Local level</i>	7
Anti-poverty strategies	8
<i>Strategy for people of working age</i>	8
<i>Strategy for children and youth</i>	12
<i>Strategy for the elderly</i>	15
Progress in poverty reduction	16
Chapter 3 – Ireland	17
Background	17
Definition and measurement of poverty	17
<i>Relative income poverty</i>	18
<i>Consistent poverty</i>	18
Setting of anti-poverty targets	19
Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty	19
<i>Central level</i>	20
<i>Local level</i>	21
Anti-poverty strategies	22
<i>Strategy for people of working age</i>	22
<i>Strategy for children and youth</i>	27
<i>Strategy for the elderly</i>	30
Progress in poverty reduction	31
<i>Consistent poverty</i>	31
<i>Employment trend</i>	31
<i>Income adequacy</i>	31

Chapter 4 – Singapore	32
Background	32
Definition and measurement of poverty	32
Setting of anti-poverty targets	33
Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty	33
<i>Central level</i>	33
<i>Local level</i>	33
Anti-poverty strategies	34
<i>Strategy for people of working age</i>	35
<i>Strategy for children and youth</i>	37
<i>Strategy for the elderly</i>	39
<i>Setting up of ComCare Fund</i>	40
Progress in poverty reduction	42
Chapter 5 – Analysis	43
<i>Definition and measurement of poverty</i>	43
<i>Setting of anti-poverty targets</i>	44
<i>Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty</i>	44
<i>Involvement of the voluntary and community sector</i>	45
<i>Specific programmes to tackle poverty among different social groups</i>	45
<i>Modernization of the existing social protection system</i>	50
Appendices	51
References	65

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Executive Summary

The United Kingdom

1. While income is considered central to poverty measurement, the United Kingdom (UK) government believes that income alone does not provide a wide enough measure of poverty. It has set out a range of performance indicators to measure progress in tackling the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty according to stages of the lifecycle of an individual.
2. The performance indicators are linked to the targets embodied in the Public Service Agreements negotiated between HM Treasury and other government departments. These agreements contain targets which individual government departments aim at achieving in return for funding from HM Treasury. Many of these Public Service Agreement targets are related to tackling poverty and social exclusion.
3. The UK's anti-poverty strategy is characterized by a firm commitment to a collaborative approach. Institutional arrangements have been developed at the central and local levels to facilitate the participation of all the key stakeholders in the design and implementation of the anti-poverty strategy.
4. The anti-poverty strategy adopted in the UK places a high priority on bringing about maximum participation in the labour market. The employment strategy specifically designed for people of working age has four complementary strands, namely "making work possible", "making work pay", "making work skilled", and a social protection system conducive to participation in employment.
5. Under the life-cycle approach, the anti-poverty strategy retains a focus on children and youth, and the elderly. The anti-poverty strategy for children and youth consists of three major components, namely tackling joblessness, providing financial support for families with low income and investing in early years of children's development and education to break the cycle of disadvantage. One component of the anti-poverty strategy for the elderly is to extend the duration of their working lives.

Ireland

6. In 1997, Ireland developed a major policy initiative – National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) – as a ten-year national strategy for eradicating poverty. NAPS was also conceived out of the need to address the lives of those who had not been benefited from the economic growth.
7. In Ireland, people are considered to be living in poverty if their standard of living is less than the general standard of living. In measuring poverty, relative income poverty and consistent poverty are the two measures adopted.

8. The revised NAPS contains a new global target of reducing the proportion of the population living in consistent poverty below 2% by 2007 and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty. It also sets out 35 poverty reduction targets related to groups vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion across a range of policy areas, such as income adequacy, education, employment, health and housing.
9. In Ireland, comprehensive institutional structures have been specifically established to ensure a coherent and co-ordinated approach in tackling the multi-dimensional nature of poverty.
10. Ireland's anti-poverty strategy focuses on different social groups. People of working age receive work-focused support under the employment strategy featuring "making work possible", "making work pay", and "making work skilled". The anti-poverty strategy for children and youth emphasizes tackling joblessness, providing financial support for families with low income, and addressing educational disadvantage of those from low-income families. The needy elderly benefits from the government's strategy of increasing income support and social welfare pension for the elderly.

Singapore

11. For years, public assistance in Singapore has primarily targeted those people who are least able and without other support. While continuing to uphold this underlying philosophy, the Singaporean government has recently put in place more supportive measures to help needy people amid the growing concern over poverty in the country.
12. Singapore does not have an official poverty line to quantify the extent of poverty, nor is there any definition of poverty. Different income criteria have been used for determining eligibility for social assistance schemes.
13. In Singapore, there is no institutional structure specifically established at the central and local levels for tackling poverty and social exclusion. Instead, the Singaporean government has adopted a "many helping hands" approach in welfare provision. In essence, families and various community groups are involved in providing assistance to needy people, with the government acting as the last resort.
14. Singapore's approach in combating poverty focuses on providing education, training and employment opportunities to the needy people of working age to lift them out of poverty and improve their future well-being.
15. The Singaporean government has also put in place programmes to overcome the adversities of children and youth, and the elderly. These programmes include investing in early years of children's education, providing income support for children from low-income families, and passing the Maintenance of Parents Act to protect interest of the elderly. In addition, an endowment fund – the ComCare Fund – is set up to consolidate social assistance schemes available, in an effort to deliver these schemes in a more efficient way.

Poverty Combating Strategies in Selected Places

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 At the meeting of the Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty (Subcommittee) held on 14 January 2005, Members requested the Research and Library Services Division to study the impact of economic changes and policies on the problem of poverty.

1.1.2 There have been policy initiatives proposed by governments around the world to reduce or eradicate poverty and enhance social protection for the poor. This is particularly the case recently in Asia, where high unemployment caused by economic restructuring and repercussions of the Asian financial crisis has precipitated a more pro-active approach in combating poverty.

1.1.3 Against the above background, this research studies the poverty combating strategies adopted in selected places, including the anti-poverty measures implemented to cope with the impact of economic restructuring.

1.2 Scope of research

1.2.1 The scope of research covers the following aspects of the poverty combating strategies adopted by the United Kingdom, Ireland and Singapore¹:

- (a) socio-economic background to the implementation of the anti-poverty strategy;
- (b) definition and measurement of poverty;
- (c) setting of anti-poverty targets;
- (d) institutional arrangements to tackle poverty;
- (e) key measures implemented to tackle poverty among people of different social groups; and
- (f) progress in poverty reduction.

¹ This research report originally intended to include the anti-poverty strategy adopted by South Korea. However, in order to make available the report for the discussion at the Subcommittee's meeting in mid-May, the experience of South Korea will be provided in a separate information note to be submitted to the Subcommittee later.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 This research adopts a desk research method, which involves Internet research, literature review and correspondence with relevant authorities.

Chapter 2 – The United Kingdom

2.1 Background

2.1.1 In the United Kingdom (UK), the election of the Labour government in 1997 saw the dominance of poverty reduction in the policy agenda of the new administration. The Labour government accepted the concept of poverty as encompassing not only income poverty, but also social exclusion which could trap people in a spiral of disadvantages through multiple deprivations.

2.1.2 In September 1999, the UK government began to set out the national strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion in an annual report entitled *Opportunity for all*.² The annual report summarizes the policies implemented to tackle poverty and social exclusion and provides a set of indicators to monitor progress.

2.1.3 The government's commitment to tackling poverty and social exclusion was precipitated by a number of problems faced by the UK in the mid-1990s. During that period, the UK was faced with a higher child poverty rate than many other developed countries, with one-third of children living in households with incomes below half of the average income. The severity of the child poverty problem reflected the underlying trend of the rising number of working-age workless households in the UK, owing to declining male employment and increasing single-parent households.

2.1.4 The growing number of workless households at that time was also attributable to the insufficient government support to help the unemployed back to work. In particular, the social assistance schemes then concentrated on paying benefits to the unemployed, rather than providing them with work-focused initiatives to get off benefits and return to the labour market.

2.2 Definition and measurement of poverty

2.2.1 The UK does not have an official poverty line to measure poverty, nor is there any single definition of poverty. Instead, poverty is measured in terms of a number of indicators, as categorized by the performance indicators presented in *Opportunity for all* and the tiered approach proposed in a government paper entitled *Measuring child poverty*.³

² The UK government first published *Opportunity for all* in 1999, and the latest annual report was issued in 2004.

³ In December 2003, the Department for Work and Pensions issued a document entitled *Measuring child poverty* which set out the criteria used in measuring progress in eradicating child poverty.

Performance indicators presented in *Opportunity for all*

2.2.2 While income is considered central to poverty measurement, the UK government believes that income alone does not provide a wide enough measure of poverty. As such, it has set out a range of performance indicators in *Opportunity for all* to measure progress in tackling the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty.

2.2.3 In *Opportunity for all: Sixth Annual Report 2004*, 58 indicators are introduced to capture the multi-faceted nature of poverty. These indicators are mainly organized according to stages of the lifecycle of an individual, with different sets of indicators for children and youth, working-age people and the elderly.⁴ Examples of the key performance indicators for different age groups are listed in Appendix I.

2.2.4 The performance indicators in *Opportunity for all* fall into two main categories:

- (a) indicators that focus on the current aspects of poverty and social exclusion, such as indicators for education, health, housing and low income. The low income indicators are based on a range of thresholds in terms of absolute income lines, relative income lines and persistent poverty lines⁵; and
- (b) indicators that capture factors in early stages of the lifecycle that increase the risk of experiencing deprivation in later stages of the lifecycle. Examples in childhood are truancy and exclusion from school, teenage pregnancy and low educational attainment. Examples during working age are employment and contribution to non-state pensions.

Tiered approach proposed in *Measuring child poverty*

2.2.5 In measuring child poverty, the tiered approach measures the number of children living in poor families characterized by:

- (a) absolute low income – households with incomes below a particular threshold which is adjusted for inflation;
- (b) relative low income – households below 60% of the median household income; and

⁴ *Opportunity for all* also includes a set of indicators which monitor the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods and the rest of the country on a particular outcome, such as employment and life expectancy at birth.

⁵ Persistent poverty is defined as having an income below 60% or 70% of the median income for three out of four years. The median income is the amount which divides income distribution into two equal groups: one group having incomes above the median and the other group having incomes below the median.

- (c) material deprivation⁶ and low income combined – households that are both materially deprived (lacking certain essential goods and services) and have an income below 70% of the median household income.

2.2.6 The UK government believes that the use of the material deprivation measure serves to capture the severity and duration of poverty. People who suffer from a longer spell of low income are more likely to lack certain essential items, and they may also suffer more than those who are in poverty for a short period of time.⁷ For example, persistent poverty may lead to and sustain other deprivations, such as educational under-achievement and ill-health.⁸ According to a research study, the identification of the persistently poor should facilitate the design of the anti-poverty strategy, as they may need support measures different from those required by other disadvantaged groups, such as the recurrently poor and the temporarily poor.⁹

2.2.7 In addition, as a member state of the European Union (EU), the UK is required to report on its performance against a number of social indicators in its *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion* submitted to the EU.

Performance indicators reported in *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion*

2.2.8 At the European Council meeting held in 2000, the EU agreed on the need to take steps to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010. As such, starting from 2001 onwards, the EU has required each member state to submit a biennial National Action Plan, which includes poverty trends, as well as the institutional arrangements and specific policy measures adopted to tackle social exclusion.

⁶ A total of 20 questions are used in deriving the material deprivation element of the tiered approach. See Appendix II for details of these questions.

⁷ See Department for Work and Pensions (2003a).

⁸ See Renewal.net (2005).

⁹ As discussed in Des O'Dea (2000), "[i]t is important to distinguish between at least three groups: the persistently poor, the recurrently poor and the temporarily poor. Much current government policy is aimed at getting people who are currently out of work into work. The extent of recurrent poverty ... suggests that policy needs to pay attention not just to the first transition, off benefit and into work. It also needs to focus on subsequent transitions, stopping the same people simply cycling between benefits and work, much of it low paid. Finally, [some people] ...are not only poor, but whose position in the income distribution does not change significantly over a four year period. For many of these – disproportionately low income pensioners and lone parents and their children – it is the level of social security benefits which will have the greatest effect on their standard of living."

2.2.9 In the National Action Plan, each EU member state is also required to report on its performance against a set of commonly agreed EU-wide social indicators. These indicators include measures of low income, employment, educational attainment and health outcomes.¹⁰ The purpose of developing the EU-wide social indicators is to monitor the progress in tackling poverty and social exclusion in each member state, and facilitate international comparison across the EU. Examples of the key performance indicators reported in the *UK National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2003-2005* are listed in Appendix III.

2.3 Setting of anti-poverty targets

2.3.1 In general, the performance indicators presented in *Opportunity for all* are linked to the targets embodied in the Public Service Agreements negotiated between HM Treasury and other government departments.¹¹ These agreements contain targets which individual government departments aim at achieving within a specified time period in return for funding from HM Treasury. Many of these Public Service Agreement targets are related to tackling poverty and social exclusion, such as reducing the number of children living in poverty, increasing the standards in education and improving health.

2.3.2 For example, *Opportunity for all: Sixth Annual Report 2004* contains an indicator related to a reduction in the proportion of children living in households with relatively low income. This indicator is linked to a Public Service Agreement target set by the Department for Work and Pensions to halve the number of children in relatively low-income households between 1998/1999 and 2010/2011, on the way to eradicating child poverty by 2020.

2.3.3 According to some academics¹², the setting of anti-poverty targets should provide increased transparency in monitoring the effectiveness of the government's strategy for combating poverty. In particular, the act of target setting facilitates informed public debates and scrutiny of important policy issues and programme development. Target setting should also hold the government accountable for the progress of the measures it implements to tackle poverty.

¹⁰ The performance indicators reported in the National Action Plan can be categorized into three levels. Primary indicators consist of a restricted number of lead indicators. Secondary indicators support the lead indicators and describe other dimensions. Both primary and secondary indicators are common to all EU member states and encompass different measures of low income, employment, educational attainment and health outcomes. A third level of indicators is selected by member states themselves to support the primary and secondary indicators or highlight progress in particular aspects of tackling poverty and social exclusion.

¹¹ There are other performance indicators linked to the targets set out by individual government departments in their policy papers.

¹² See Maxwell & Kenway (2000), Oatway (2001) and Nolan (2002).

2.4 Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty

2.4.1 According to the UK government, the multi-dimensional nature of poverty requires the involvement of the widest possible range of participants in combating poverty and social exclusion.¹³ As such, the UK's anti-poverty strategy is characterized by a firm commitment to a collaborative approach instead of input from the government alone. In line with this approach, institutional arrangements have been developed at the central and local levels to facilitate the participation of all the key stakeholders in the design and implementation of the anti-poverty strategy.

Central level

2.4.2 At the central level, government departments, such as the Social Exclusion Unit, HM Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions, play a major role in formulating and implementing the poverty reduction policies. The Social Exclusion Unit, under the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, was set up in 1999 to co-ordinate policy making on specified topics of poverty and social exclusion, such as school exclusion and truancy, rough sleeping, teenage pregnancy, youth at risk and deprived neighbourhoods. HM Treasury works on combating poverty through the design of an efficient tax and benefit system to boost family income and incentives to work. As for the Department for Work and Pensions, it provides financial assistance and other support to people of working age, low-income families, disabled people and other disadvantaged groups.

Local level

2.4.3 At the local level, the UK government draws on the expertise available in the academic world, and builds up dialogue with individuals who have direct experience of poverty. It also works with local authorities and representatives of the voluntary and community sector on poverty reduction.

Local Strategic Partnership

2.4.4 The UK government encourages each local authority area to establish a multi-sectoral partnership body – the Local Strategic Partnership – to help deliver the social inclusion agenda. The Local Strategic Partnership brings together, at a local level, representatives from the government, businesses, and the voluntary and community sector so that different initiatives and services work together and support each other.

¹³ See Department for Work and Pensions (2004a).

Voluntary and community sector

2.4.5 The UK government also involves voluntary and community organizations in the delivery of public services, since their close understanding of the local communities and of the needs of particular groups of the population should facilitate the delivery of more responsive and personalized public services. For example, the UK government operates the Parenting Fund through the voluntary sector to provide parenting support for families experiencing difficulties.

2.4.6 In addition, the Department for Work and Pensions has established the Participation Working Group, with the aim of feeding the views of those experiencing poverty into the preparation of the National Action Plan. The Group is chaired by a senior officer with the Department for Work and Pensions and comprises mainly grassroots participants and representatives from the voluntary and community sector.

2.5 Anti-poverty strategies

2.5.1 In the UK, the anti-poverty strategy is characterized by the life-cycle approach targeting intervention at key stages in people's lives. In other words, children and youth, people of working age and the elderly are the focal groups in the UK's anti-poverty strategy. Such an approach recognizes that people are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion in different ways at different points in their lives.

2.5.2 The strategy adopted by the UK for tackling poverty and social exclusion places a high priority on bringing about maximum participation in the labour market. The UK government has recognized the importance of work in getting people of working age out of poverty, and in providing the best safeguard against subsequent poverty in old age.

Strategy for people of working age

2.5.3 In the UK, the employment strategy specifically designed for people of working age has four complementary strands, namely:

- (a) "making work possible" through the welfare-to-work policy;
- (b) "making work pay" through the national minimum wage and Working Tax Credit;
- (c) "making work skilled"; and
- (d) a social protection system conducive to participation in employment.

Making work possible

2.5.4 The UK government has sought to make work possible through the welfare-to-work policy, which aims at assisting the unemployed and economically inactive people to move from welfare to work as soon as possible. The welfare-to-work policy features the implementation of New Deal programmes, the establishment of Jobcentre Plus and measures easing the transition from welfare to work.

New Deal programmes

2.5.5 In the UK, a range of New Deal programmes has been implemented to help disadvantaged groups obtain jobs via one-to-one support, improved access to basic skill training and other specialized support. In 1998, the UK government launched the first New Deal programme – New Deal for Young People (NDYP) – to tackle long-term youth unemployment.

2.5.6 NDYP targets young people aged 18-24 who have been unemployed and on Jobseeker's Allowance¹⁴ for at least six months. NDYP contains a "gateway" period of four months, during which the participants are offered job search, career advice and guidance, and assistance in addressing the basic skills gap. Any NDYP participants who do not move into work at the end of the gateway period are required to take one of the following four options: a subsidized job/self employment, full-time education and training, environmental work¹⁵ or a place with a voluntary sector employer. These options last for about 6-12 months during which the participants receive allowances and grants for engaging in such activities. If a NDYP participant completes an option and cannot find a job, he or she may claim Jobseeker's Allowance again.

2.5.7 The success of NDYP in reducing long-term youth unemployment¹⁶ has prompted the UK government to widen the scope of the New Deal programmes to other social groups. At present, long-term unemployed, people aged 50 plus, single parents and dependent partners of benefit claimants are all provided with work-focused support under different New Deal programmes.¹⁷

¹⁴ Jobseeker's Allowance is the income support provided by the Department for Work and Pensions to unemployed people who are actively looking for work.

¹⁵ Environmental work involves working for a period of up to six months on a project to improve the community's physical environment.

¹⁶ A quarter of a million young people moved off benefit and into jobs within two and a half years since the launch of NDYP. See *The Economist* (2000).

¹⁷ The New Deal programmes are voluntary for people aged 50 plus, single parents and dependent partners of benefit claimants. However, a person who is aged 25 and over and has been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for more than 18 months must join the mandatory New Deal for Long-Term Unemployed programme. Under this New Deal programme, unemployed people aged 25-49 are required to engage in about three to six months of full-time activities, such as subsidized employment, self-employment and/or work-based training, depending on their needs and job goals. Those who do not find work after that period may claim Jobseeker's Allowance again.

Jobcentre Plus

2.5.8 Jobcentre Plus was established in 2001 to assist in promoting the welfare-to-work policy. As an agency of the Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus provides integrated services of finding jobs and paying benefits to people of working age. These two functions were formerly handled by two separate government departments, namely the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency.

2.5.9 Jobcentre Plus advisers assess the eligibility for Jobseeker's Allowance and provide advice to benefit claimants about jobs, training and self-employment opportunities. To receive the allowance, an unemployed person has to complete a Jobseeker's Agreement, which sets out, among other things, his or her availability for work and the types of job that are being looked for. This process ensures that all working-age benefit claimants are aware of the work-related support available to them, so that they do not become detached from the labour market.

Measures easing the transition from welfare to work

2.5.10 The UK government encourages the unemployed and economically inactive people to take up full-time work by developing a package of work incentives to smooth the transition from receiving benefits into employment. For example, Job Grant provides cash payments to help the recipients meet immediate costs associated with starting work, such as travel expenses, and expenditure on clothing, toiletries, childcare and the like. Job Grant pays £100 (HK\$1,495)¹⁸ to single people and couples without children, and £250 (HK\$3,738) to single parents and couples with children.

2.5.11 There are additional income support for single parents moving from welfare to work. Two pilot programmes – Work Search Premium and In-Work Credit – have been introduced in several areas, starting from October 2004 for two years. Single parents in these piloted areas are entitled to receiving £20 (HK\$299) a week for up to 26 weeks of job search, and then £40 (HK\$598) a week for a year if they get a job.

Making work pay

2.5.12 The objective of "making work pay" is to ensure that people are better off in work than on benefits, through promoting financial incentives to work and reforming the tax and benefit system. The related government measures involve the introduction of a national minimum wage and Working Tax Credit to guarantee at least a minimum income for those on low earnings.

¹⁸ The calculation was based on the exchange rate of HK\$14.95 per British pound on 20 April 2005.

National minimum wage

2.5.13 The UK introduced a statutory national minimum wage in April 1999, which has been increased on several occasions since then. At present, the national minimum wage rates are £4.85 (HK\$72.5) an hour for workers aged 22 and over, £4.1 (HK\$61.3) an hour for workers aged 18-21, and £3 (HK\$44.9) an hour for workers who are under 18 and above school-leaving age.

Working Tax Credit

2.5.14 Working Tax Credit is a payment to top up earnings of low-income working households, including those that do not have children. The purpose of the benefit is to improve work incentives by boosting in-work income and hence the financial returns from working.

2.5.15 For families with dependent children to be eligible for Working Tax Credit, at least one adult must work at least 16 hours per week. The tax credit is also available to families without children where at least one adult must work 30 hours per week or more and is aged 25 or above.

2.5.16 In addition to the basic credit, there are additional benefits for single parents and couples, and people who are aged 50 or over who are returning to work after a period on benefit. Working Tax Credit also subsidizes eligible childcare, covering 70% of childcare costs up to a maximum of £135 (HK\$2,018) per week for one child and £200 (HK\$2,990) for two or more.

Making work skilled

2.5.17 In the UK, the objective of "making work skilled" is to provide people with a wide range of opportunities to learn and train throughout their lives, and to ensure that people possess the skills that can meet the needs of their employers.¹⁹ In March 2002, a national strategy – Skills for Life – was implemented to encourage people aged 16 or above to improve their literacy, language and numeracy skills. This strategy aims at creating a society where adults have the basic skills to find and keep jobs, and participate fully in the community.

2.5.18 Skills for Life consists of specific programmes to support people in low-paid jobs and those without work to gain new skills. For example, the New Deal for Skills programme provides support for the low-skilled people to acquire basic qualifications, and offers financial assistance to those who require training as a route for moving back into work.

¹⁹ See Department for Work and Pensions (2002).

Social protection system

2.5.19 In the UK, the welfare-to-work policy and work-related benefits (e.g. Working Tax Credit) have been introduced to boost the incentives to work (see paragraphs 2.5.13-2.5.16). This reflects a fundamental overhaul of the UK's social protection system from a passive benefit payment machine to an active system that can both tackle poverty and help people become self-sufficient and independent.

Strategy for children and youth

2.5.20 Under the life-cycle approach, the poverty combating strategy in the UK retains a focus on children and youth, and the elderly. The anti-poverty strategy for children and youth consists of three major components, namely:

- (a) tackling joblessness, particularly encouraging female participation in the labour market;
- (b) providing financial support for families with low income; and
- (c) investing in early years of children's development and education to break the cycle of disadvantage.

Tackling joblessness

2.5.21 In the UK, children living in workless households are more likely to be living in poverty. As such, a main theme for tackling child poverty is to make work pay through financial incentives such as Working Tax Credit and the national minimum wage, thereby reducing the number of workless households and hence incidence of child poverty. Families with children, particularly single-parent households, are also supported by work-focused assistance through Jobcentre Plus and the New Deal programmes. In particular, New Deal for Lone Parents²⁰ is available for all single parents who are not in work or work less than 16 hours per week, and whose youngest child aged below 16.

²⁰ New Deal for Lone Parents is a voluntary, comprehensive programme providing work-focused support for single parents, including access to a personal adviser, help with training, education and childcare, and advice with respect to application for benefits and in-work financial support. In addition, participants are not required to engage in a period of full-time activity, unlike the New Deal programmes for jobless young people and the long-term unemployed.

2.5.22 Parents are more likely to return to work if they can do so in such a way that enables them to balance their work and family lives. In this connection, the UK government has sought to increase the availability of affordable childcare services to help single parents move into paid work and lift their families out of poverty.²¹

2.5.23 The UK government believes that flexible working patterns are important in helping children out of poverty, particularly for those in single-parent families.²² As such, it introduced the Work-Life Balance Campaign in 2000 to promote awareness and take-up of flexible working practices across all businesses in the public, private and voluntary sectors. In addition, it introduced a new flexible working law in April 2003 to give parents of children under six and parents of disable children under 18 the right to request a flexible working environment. Employers have a statutory duty to consider such applications and may only refuse on business grounds.

Providing financial support

2.5.24 Apart from tackling joblessness, providing financial support for low-income families with children serves as another means of tackling child poverty in the UK. While the UK government is committed to offering universal or non-means tested support for families with children, it complements this approach with targeted initiatives for those living on low income.²³ Accordingly, along with the successive increases on the non-means tested Child Benefit²⁴, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit have been introduced to boost the income of low-income families with children.

2.5.25 Working Tax Credit, as described in paragraphs 2.5.14-2.5.16, is a payment to top up earnings of low-income working households both with and without children. Meanwhile, Child Tax Credit is a means-tested payment given to people who are responsible for taking care of a child or a young person who is receiving education. This tax credit aims at providing a stable and secure source of income for the main carer of a family. The amount of Child Tax Credit payable depends on income and the number of children.

Investing in early years of children's development and education

2.5.26 Investing in early years of children's development and education is crucial to the future well-being of today's younger generation. In addition, providing support to young people in their transition to adult life also serves as a preventive measure against poverty in later life. As such, the UK government provides funding for implementing relevant programmes and services, such as Sure Start, Education Maintenance Allowance and Connexions.

²¹ See Department for Work and Pensions (2004a).

²² Ibid.

²³ See Department for Work and Pensions (2004b).

²⁴ Child Benefit is a non-means-tested weekly payment received by all people who are bringing up children. It was increased by over 25% in real terms during 1997-2003.

Sure Start

2.5.27 The UK has implemented Sure Start to provide a number of programmes to assist children and parents. In addition to offering a programme to increase the availability of affordable childcare services²⁵, Sure Start contains other programmes to promote the physical, intellectual and emotional developments of children from conception to age 14. In particular, Sure Start provides universal, free part-time early education for children aged 3-4, whereby children from low-income families can access early childhood development programmes. The UK government believes that education is one of the most important routes through which childhood experiences feed through to adult circumstances.²⁶ As such, the universal early education programme offered by Sure Start is expected to help foster a level playing field for children of different social backgrounds.

2.5.28 Sure Start also supports the development of local projects for children and their families in the disadvantaged areas characterized by a high proportion of children living in poverty. These locally based projects – Sure Start Local Programmes – aim at improving children's life through better access to a co-ordinated set of services including family support, advice on nurturing, health services, early learning and home visits. In particular, Children's Centres have been established in the most disadvantaged areas to provide integrated services to children and their families in terms of childcare, early education, family and health services, training and employment advice.

2.5.29 About 520 Sure Start Local Programmes are operational in the UK, helping up to 400 000 children living in the disadvantaged areas. In general, a Sure Start Local Programme is delivered by a partnership consisting of statutory agencies (including health and education professionals), childcare professionals, voluntary and community groups and parents in the disadvantaged area concerned. These parties work together to develop an integrated approach in setting out specific services and programmes to meet the local needs identified.

Education Maintenance Allowance

2.5.30 In September 2004, the UK government introduced the Education Maintenance Allowance to enable young people from poor families to pursue education beyond the age of 16. The allowance helps overcome the financial barriers, which may prevent some young people from continuing education. All young people aged 16 from households with income less than £30,000 (HK\$448,500) are eligible for the Education Maintenance Allowance, which pays between £10 (HK\$150) and £30 (HK\$449) a week in return for strong attendance and commitment to school or college.

²⁵ For example, the UK government provides start-up grants to childminders, nurseries and out-of-school childcare centres in order to increase the number of part-time and full-time childcare services. As a result of the government's financial support, more than 920 000 new childcare places have been created since 1997, benefiting over 1.6 million children.

²⁶ As discussed in HM Treasury (2001), "[e]vidence shows that up to half of the effects of childhood disadvantage on adult economic and social outcomes may be attributed to education".

Connexions

2.5.31 Connexions provides integrated advice, guidance and access to personal development opportunities for all young people aged 13-19 in England. Although Connexions is a universal service, it gives priority to those most at risk of underachievement and disaffection, providing them with more intensive help for achieving a successful transition into adulthood. In this connection, Connexions aims at increasing the proportion of young people in education, employment or training, and reducing the chances of poverty in later life.²⁷ It supplies a network of personal advisers who can give direct advice and support on various issues, including educational choices and careers, relationship issues, and problems with drugs or bullying. In addition, Connexions provides support through a confidential telephone helpline and an interactive online advice service.

Strategy for the elderly

2.5.32 In the 1990s, early retirement and low employment rates were particularly prevalent among those aged 50 and over in the UK. Many of those who had retired early relied on state benefits as their main source of income, and early exit in this fashion from the labour market onto benefits was believed to contribute significantly to future years in poverty.²⁸ The UK government sought to increase employment opportunities for the elderly against this backdrop with the introduction of the New Deal 50 Plus programme in 2000. This New Deal programme offers a package of personal advice, in-work training and job search support to help older workers back into work. The programme is voluntary and the participants must be unemployed people aged over 50 and have been claiming work-related benefits for at least six months.

2.5.33 According to the UK government, extending the duration of the working life can make a difference to the income an individual expects to receive in retirement. It also simultaneously increases the opportunity to build up savings and reduce the length of time over which these savings are being used to generate income. As such, the Pensions Act 2004 was passed to encourage people to extend their working lives by improving the reward for those who defer taking their State Pension. Under the Act, people can defer taking their State Pension when they reach State Pension age, and get a higher entitlement when they finally start to draw their pensions.

²⁷ HM Treasury (2001).

²⁸ See Huber & Skidmore (2003) and Balls, Grice & O'Donnel (2004).

2.5.34 Tackling pensioner poverty through state pension reform has been another priority in the strategy for tackling poverty among the elderly. The payments for pensioners under the Basic State Pension²⁹ have been raised in real terms since the Labour government came to power in 1997. The State Second Pension was introduced in 2002 to provide an additional pension on top of the Basic State Pension for moderate earners, as well as for certain carers and people with long-term illness or disability. In October 2003, the UK government introduced Pension Credit as a means-tested benefit to top up the weekly income of low-income pensioners aged 60 or over to at least £109.45 (HK\$1,636) for a single person and £167.95 (HK\$2,511) for a couple.

2.6 Progress in poverty reduction

2.6.1 In *Opportunity for all: Sixth Annual Report 2004*, the UK government detailed the progress achieved so far in tackling poverty and social inclusion since 1997 (the baseline year). The quantified results are summarized as follows:

- (a) the number of children in low-income households fell by 600 000 between 1998/1999 and 2002/2003;
- (b) the number of children living in workless households fell by around 300 000 between 1997 and 2004;
- (c) the level of financial support for families with children increased significantly as a result of the tax and benefit reforms, with the poorest category of families with children on average £3,000 (HK\$44,850) a year better off in real terms;
- (d) an increase of approximately 1.9 million people in employment between 1997 and 2004;
- (e) an increase in the employment rate of single parents from 45.3% in 1997 to 54.3% in 2004;
- (f) a reduction in the number of long-term unemployed adults by some three-quarters between 1997 and 2004; and
- (g) the number of pensioners living in absolute low income fell by 1.8 million between 1996/1997 and 2002/2003.

²⁹ The Basic State Pension is a taxable weekly benefit payable, if the contribution conditions have been met, to women from the age of 60 and men from the age of 65.

Chapter 3 – Ireland

3.1 Background

3.1.1 Ireland developed a major policy initiative – National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) – in 1997 to place poverty reduction at the top of the national agenda. The implementation of NAPS, a 10-year national strategy for eradicating poverty, was a follow-up to the commitment made by Ireland at the United Nations World Summit for Social Development convened in Copenhagen in 1995. At the meeting, Ireland and other participating countries endorsed a programme of action for reducing poverty, expanding employment opportunities and enhancing social integration.

3.1.2 NAPS was also conceived out of the need to address the lives of those who had been excluded from the benefits and opportunities brought by the economic growth in the mid-1990s. While the Irish economy grew briskly in the mid-1990s, Ireland was faced with the problems of high unemployment and deteriorating relative poverty. In fact, the unemployment rate stood at 12.3% in 1995, despite a 9.8% increase in the real gross domestic product during the year.

3.1.3 The findings of the *1994 Living in Ireland Survey* conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute³⁰ also underpinned the trend of deteriorating relative income poverty since 1987. According to the *1994 Living in Ireland Survey*, the proportion of households below the 50% poverty line (i.e. having an income of less than half of the average household income) increased from 16.3% in 1987 to 18.5% in 1994. Among the vulnerable groups, households headed by an unemployed person experienced the highest risk of poverty. Further, households with children faced a significantly higher risk of poverty than those without children.

3.2 Definition and measurement of poverty

3.2.1 In Ireland, people are considered to be living in poverty if their standard of living is less than the general standard of living. This is reflected in the following definition of poverty set out in NAPS:

"People are living in poverty, if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources, people may be excluded and marginalized from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society."

³⁰ The Economic and Social Research Institute is a non-profit research organization founded in Ireland in 1960. The researches conducted by the institute have been a vital constituent in the national debate on economic and social issues in Ireland. See Office for Social Inclusion (2001).

3.2.2 The Irish government employed the same definition of poverty when it revised NAPS in 2002 and published a revised strategy with a five-year timeframe from 2002 to 2007.³¹

3.2.3 In measuring poverty, relative income poverty and consistent poverty are the two measures adopted in Ireland.

Relative income poverty

3.2.4 In Ireland, relative poverty lines are set at 40%, 50%, 60% and 70% of the median income to reflect the different degrees of poverty. In other words, a person is considered living in relative income poverty if his or her income is below one of these relative poverty lines.

Consistent poverty

3.2.5 Consistent poverty is another measure of poverty in Ireland. People are considered consistently poor if they suffer from both relative income poverty and material deprivation. A person is classified as materially deprived if he or she is living without one of the following eight basic items:

- (a) a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day;
- (b) a warm, waterproof overcoat;
- (c) two pairs of shoes;
- (d) a roast joint of meat or its equivalent once a week;
- (e) new, not second-hand clothes;
- (f) a substantial meal in the past two weeks;
- (g) heating; and
- (h) not being in debt/arrears to meet ordinary living expenses.³²

³¹ The review in 2002 sought to (i) address identified weaknesses in the original NAPS by updating NAPS in consultation with the key stakeholders, (ii) revise the targets, (iii) consider new targets in the areas of child poverty, women's poverty, health, the elderly and housing/accommodation, and (iv) address emerging causes of poverty such as racism.

³² The Economic and Social Research Institute has developed another related measure of consistent poverty. A person is considered as "potentially poor" if he or she is living below 60% of the mean income and not having one of the following five items: central heating, a telephone, a car, a colour television and presents for family and friends at least once a year.

3.2.6 Consistent poverty was adopted as a measure of poverty in the original NAPS, in which the Irish government set a global poverty target of reducing the proportion of population living in consistent poverty from 9%-15% to 5%-10% during 1997-2007. Indeed, Ireland is the first European Union country to formally adopt an official global poverty target.

3.2.7 The revised NAPS also sets out a target for reducing consistent poverty. Nevertheless, it goes beyond consistent poverty and extends to other key areas, such as income adequacy³³, unemployment, educational disadvantage, housing, rural poverty and disadvantaged urban areas. This is in line with the concept behind the definition of poverty stated in NAPS, such that poverty encompasses not only income poverty, but also inadequate access to the resources and services required to meet basic human needs. The multi-faceted nature of poverty is also reflected in the biennial National Action Plan submitted by Ireland to the EU. Same as other EU countries, Ireland reports in the National Action Plan its performance against a set of social indicators, which are developed to chart the progress of the country in tackling poverty in various aspects.

3.3 Setting of anti-poverty targets

3.3.1 The revised NAPS contains a revised global target of reducing the proportion of the population living in consistent poverty below 2% by 2007 and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty. It also sets out 35 poverty reduction targets related to groups vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion across a range of policy areas, such as income adequacy, education, employment, health and housing. Examples of key targets set out in the revised NAPS are listed in Appendix IV.

3.3.2 As stated in Ireland's National Action Plan³⁴, "*[t]arget setting is very important at political level, since by setting such targets, the [g]overnment acknowledges responsibility for reducing the overall extent of poverty. This is arguably the single most important element of the NAPS, as in aiming to meet these targets, the [g]overnment ensures that the policy framework and specific policies are adapted accordingly*".

3.4 Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty

3.4.1 In Ireland, institutional arrangements have been developed at the central and local levels to facilitate the participation of all the key stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of the anti-poverty strategy.

³³ Income adequacy is related to the question of whether income support (e.g. employment, tax, social welfare and pensions) provides sufficient income for a person to move out of poverty and live in a manner compatible with dignity.

³⁴ See Office for Social Inclusion (2001).

Central level

3.4.2 At the central level, the Department of Social and Family Affairs formulates the relevant social protection policies, and administers the delivery of the social insurance and social assistance schemes. Another relevant government agency is the Department of Finance which works on combating poverty through the design of an efficient tax and benefit system to boost family income and provide incentives to work.

3.4.3 In addition, specific institutional structures have been established to ensure a coherent and co-ordinated approach in tackling the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. These structures include:

- (a) Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach³⁵ and including all ministers responsible for handling poverty and/or social inclusion;
- (b) Senior Officials Group, comprising high-level civil servants from relevant departments to support the Cabinet Committee;
- (c) Office for Social Inclusion, based in the Department of Social and Family Affairs and tasked with co-ordinating the preparation and implementation of NAPS and the National Action Plan;
- (d) Social Inclusion Units, established in key government departments to co-ordinate the departments' contribution to the preparation and implementation of NAPS; and
- (e) Combat Poverty Agency, a statutory public body working on the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion through developing anti-poverty measures, examining the causes of poverty, and promoting a greater public understanding of poverty and social exclusion.

3.4.4 "Poverty proofing" was introduced in 1998 as another institutional arrangement to sensitize policy makers to the poverty dimensions of government policies. "Poverty proofing" is a process through which government departments, local authorities and state agencies must assess their policies and programmes at the design and review stages in relation to the likely impact on poverty and inequalities with a view to poverty reduction.

³⁵ In Ireland, the Taoiseach is the head of the government and the leader of the cabinet. The Taoiseach is appointed by the President upon the nomination of Dáil Éireann (the lower house of the Irish parliament). See Wikipedia (2005).

Local level

3.4.5 In combating poverty, Ireland has long recognized the utmost importance of building a shared understanding of the challenges involved and achieving a broad consensus on the strategies to be adopted. As such, consultation with and the involvement of the voluntary and community sector and those with direct experience of poverty have been the central features of the preparation and development of the anti-poverty strategy in Ireland.

3.4.6 In Ireland, the voluntary and community sector is involved in tackling poverty and social exclusion through its participation in the Social Inclusion Consultative Group and the Social Inclusion Forum. The Social Inclusion Consultative Group comprises representatives of the relevant government departments, non-governmental organizations and statutory agencies (e.g. the Combat Poverty Agency and the Equality Authority). It meets twice a year to offer advice and observations on the implementation of NAPS and the National Action Plan. Meanwhile, the Social Inclusion Forum is convened once a year³⁶ to provide an avenue for involving people suffering from social exclusion and members of the voluntary and community groups to review NAPS.

3.4.7 The experience and perspectives of the voluntary and community sector are considered by the government in formulating the social partnership agreements. These agreements map out the national action plans for economic and social developments in Ireland, based on the negotiations between the government and its social partners.³⁷

3.4.8 The latest social partnership agreement – *Sustaining Progress* – was concluded in 2003, with a full chapter devoted to the objective of delivering a fair and inclusive society.³⁸ To meet this objective, *Sustaining Progress* emphasizes the need to focus on the achievement of the targets set out in the revised NAPS. It also proposes policy initiatives which should be undertaken to monitor and support the delivery of the programmes and actions designed to create an inclusive society.³⁹

³⁶ The Social Inclusion Forum is convened by a representative body of social partners, the National Economic and Social Forum, which comprises members of parliament, employers, trade unions and farmer organizations, and the voluntary and community sector. The National Economic and Social Forum focuses on evaluating the implementation of government policies dealing with equality and social inclusion issues.

³⁷ Since 1987, the government, trade unions and the employers have embarked on signing of a series of three-year social partnership agreements. Under these agreements, the trade unions accept relatively modest wage increases in return for the government's promise to reduce tax burden and increase the spending on social welfare benefits. See Legislative Council Secretariat (2005).

³⁸ Since 1987, Ireland has concluded six social partnership agreements.

³⁹ These policy initiatives include the provision of better data and information, and the development of tools to monitor and evaluate the progress of the anti-poverty strategy.

3.5 Anti-poverty strategies

3.5.1 Same as the UK, Ireland has also recognized the fundamental importance of work as the means to protect against poverty and social exclusion.⁴⁰ As such, Ireland's anti-poverty strategy focuses heavily on the implementation of active labour market programmes to bring about maximum participation in employment.

3.5.2 While targeting employment for people of working age as a major route out of poverty, Ireland's anti-poverty strategy does not ignore the needs of vulnerable groups, such as children and youth, and the elderly. For example, adequate income support is expected to be provided to vulnerable groups, as stipulated under the theme of income adequacy in the revised NAPS.

3.5.3 In Ireland, income support for needy people is provided mainly in the form of social welfare payments. As such, a key component of the Irish anti-poverty strategy is to increase social welfare payments as resources permit, so that needy people would have an income level to sustain an acceptable standard of living.⁴¹ Accordingly, it has developed benchmarks for adequacy of adult and child social welfare payments. For example, the revised NAPS sets out a target of increasing the lowest rates of social welfare to €150 (HK\$1,530)⁴² per week by 2007. In addition, basic child income support is set to rise to 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate over the same period.

Strategy for people of working age

3.5.4 In Ireland, the employment strategy adopted for people of working age is characterized by:

- (a) "making work possible";
- (b) "making work pay"; and
- (c) "making work skilled".

Making work possible

3.5.5 The key labour programmes designed to make work possible are the Early Intervention Process, the Social Economy Programme, the Community Employment Scheme, the High Support Process and the Pathways Programme.

⁴⁰ See Office for Social Inclusion (2001).

⁴¹ See Office for Social Inclusion (2002).

⁴² The calculation was based on the exchange rate of HK\$10.2 per Euro on 20 April 2005.

Early Intervention Process

3.5.6 Ireland has embarked on a preventive strategy – the Early Intervention Process – to engage systematically with people at an early stage of unemployment, in order to prevent the drift to long-term unemployment. An unemployed young person is offered a new start in the form of counselling, career guidance, referral to suitable education or employment opportunities, and/or participation in the programmes run by FAS (the national training and employment authority) before reaching six months of unemployment. Unemployed adults are also offered a fresh start through the same programmes provided to young people before reaching nine months of unemployment.

Social Economy Programme

3.5.7 The Social Economy Programme was introduced in September 2000 to support the development of social economy enterprises by providing them with technical support and financial grants such as start-up capital. A social economy enterprise generates profit in support of social and community objectives, such as providing employment opportunities for the long-term unemployed or other disadvantaged groups, rather than being driven by the need to maximize profit for shareholders and/or owners.

Community Employment Scheme

3.5.8 The Community Employment Scheme is managed by FAS to help the long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within their communities.

High Support Process

3.5.9 FAS introduced the High Support Process in 2003 as a programme to provide supportive measures to people experiencing personal barriers in progressing from unemployment to work. These measures are tailor-made and arranged in consultation with other relevant government departments so that the specific needs can be addressed to facilitate their entry/re-entry to the labour market.

Pathways Programme

3.5.10 FAS has developed the Pathways Programme to identify the most appropriate development pathway for programme participants, in an effort to assist them to obtain and maintain employment. The programme is delivered on a group basis in order to encourage a dynamic in which participants can support and learn from each other. It also adopts a cognitive-behavioural approach in learning, which aims at changing the attitudes and actions of participants towards employment.

Making job pay

3.5.11 An essential component of Ireland's anti-poverty strategy is to make work pay through the introduction of a national minimum wage for those individuals on low earnings. In addition, the launch of the tax and social benefit reforms have boosted in-work income and hence the incentives for welfare recipients to work. In particular, work-related social benefits have been put in place to encourage the move from welfare to work. These benefits include Family Income Supplement, Back-to-Work Allowance, income disregards and the tax allowance under the Revenue Job Assist Scheme.

National minimum wage

3.5.12 The National Minimum Wage Act 2000 came into effect in April 2000, guaranteeing a national minimum wage for workers aged 18 or above. The national minimum wage rate has been raised four times since then. The latest increase was on 1 May 2005 when the national minimum wage rate was raised from €7 (HK\$71.4) per hour to €7.65 (HK\$78) per hour.

Tax reform

3.5.13 A key aspect of the government's strategy to increase the reward for work is to reduce the burden of personal taxation and exempt those earning low income from the tax net. In recent years, the Irish government has increased the amount of tax allowances so that low-income households can escape from the tax net. For example, the employee tax credit was raised in the 2004 Budget from €800 (HK\$8,160) per annum to €1,040 (HK\$10,608) per annum.

Family Income Supplement

3.5.14 Family Income Supplement is a weekly payment to top up earnings of those low-income households with children. This income support is designed to preserve the incentive to take up or remain in employment in such circumstances where those on low pay might only be marginally better off than if they were unemployed and claiming social welfare payments.

3.5.15 To qualify for Family Income Supplement, an applicant must be in full-time employment which is expected to last for at least three months, and have at least one child who is living with and being supported by the applicant. Further, the claimant cannot earn more than the amount specified by the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

Back-to-Work Allowance

3.5.16 The objective of the Back-to-Work Allowance scheme is to encourage the long-term welfare dependents to take up employment opportunities by allowing them to retain a reducing proportion of their social welfare payment over the first three years of re-entering the job market. The Back-to-Work Allowance is paid on a diminishing scale over the three-year period, i.e. 75% of a person's social welfare payment in the first year, 50% in the second year and 25% in the third year.

Income disregards

3.5.17 Income disregards for social assistance recipients have been introduced to remove disincentives to taking up jobs and remaining in employment. For example, 40% of the earnings from part-time work are disregarded in the calculation of total income when assessing the amount payable to an unemployment assistance claimant.

Revenue Job Assist Scheme

3.5.18 The Revenue Job Assist Scheme provides financial incentives to people who return to work after being unemployed for 12 months or more. Under the scheme, an eligible applicant can, on top of his or her normal tax credits, claim an additional tax allowance for three years after taking up a qualifying employment.

Making work skilled

3.5.19 In addition to "making work possible" and "making work pay", Ireland's employment strategy also features a range of learning options specifically designed to assist disadvantaged workers.

3.5.20 FAS provides training courses designed to equip participants with skills that will enhance their prospects of securing employment. For example, FAS operates the Competency Development Programme to provide training subsidies for individuals employed in the most vulnerable sectors of the economy to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills necessary to cope with the rapidly changing economic environment.

3.5.21 FAS also provides training courses which focus particularly on early intervention for the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups. For example, it operates Community Training to provide a progression option for people recently made redundant, new entrants to the labour market, and people with low skills/education. Community Training is primarily a work-based training programme with on-the-job training opportunities provided by those local communities with development projects on infrastructures and/or the services sector. Participants of Community Training are expected to develop more in-depth job skills, especially in construction and office administration.

3.5.22 Apart from FAS's job training programmes, the Back-to-Education Initiative introduced in April 2002 provides another platform for people with little schoolings and those in the workplace who wish to upgrade their skills to receive education/training. The initiative emphasizes part-time learning options to allow people to combine education/training with work and family responsibilities. Furthermore, the unemployed, single parents and the disabled in receipt of social welfare payments can claim a weekly payment – Back-to-Education Allowance – for enrolling in the approved education and learning programmes/courses.

3.5.23 The Back-to-Education Initiative provides learning options ranging from basic to advanced courses. Under the Initiative, existing programmes, such as Youthreach, the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and Post Leaving Certificate Courses, are expanded.

Youthreach

3.5.24 The Youthreach programme provides education, training and job placement opportunities to young people aged 15-20 with no formal education or training qualifications. Trainees are provided with training allowance, career guidance, counselling and childcare support for attending Youthreach.

Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

3.5.25 The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme provides for unemployed adults aged 21 or above to receive education without losing their social welfare benefits. Single parents, dependant spouses and people with disabilities are also eligible. The scheme lasts for one to two years and trainees are provided with training in one or more of the following areas: personal development, job search, and vocational skills in commerce, business, craft and design, electronics, science and tourism.

Post Leaving Certificate Courses

3.5.26 Post Leaving Certificate Courses are provided to young people and adults who have completed upper second level education⁴³, and choose vocational training to enhance their employment prospects. Trainees are provided with general education, a work experience programme and a wide range of vocational options.

Strategy for children and youth

3.5.27 The anti-poverty strategy designed for children and youth has three complementary strands:

- (a) tackling joblessness, particularly encouraging female participation in the labour market;
- (b) providing financial support for low-income families with children; and
- (c) addressing educational disadvantage among children and youth.

Tackling joblessness

3.5.28 According to the Irish government, "*the position of children is normally dependent on circumstances of their parents*".⁴⁴ In this connection, the approach in reducing child poverty focuses, among other things, on the implementation of measures conducive to the transition of workless parents from unemployment to work. Such a strategy has also been endorsed in the National Children's Strategy, which was released at end-2000 as a 10-year action plan for children. The strategy proposes to eliminate child poverty through the provision of targeted education and employment programmes for single parents and the long-term unemployed.

3.5.29 As discussed in paragraph 3.5.4, a three-pronged employment strategy has been implemented to bring about maximum participation in the labour market. The Irish government has also embarked on specific measures to boost female participation through balancing work and family responsibilities and providing childcare support.

⁴³ The education system in Ireland is divided into three basis levels: primary level (eight years), secondary level (five or six years), and third level (including vocational/technical training and degree courses). Second level education consists of a three-year junior cycle (lower secondary), followed by a two- or three-year senior cycle (upper secondary).

⁴⁴ See Office for Social Inclusion (2003).

Balancing work and family responsibilities

3.5.30 The Irish government has implemented measures to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. For example, the duration of maternity leave and adoptive leave has been increased. The passage of the Carer's Leave Act 2001 also allows an employee to take unpaid leave for a period of up to 65 weeks to provide full-time care and attention for an incapacitated person. In addition, the Carer's Benefit Scheme provides income support for people who must leave the workforce temporarily to care for someone in need of full-time care.

3.5.31 The National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance Policies⁴⁵ is set up to promote family-friendly working arrangements at the enterprise level. The committee encourages the adoption of measures, such as job sharing, job splitting, flexitime, part-time work and e-working, for workers to better organize their work and family life.

Providing childcare support

3.5.32 According to the Irish government⁴⁶, increased childcare provision helps workless parents participate in the labour force. As such, the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme 2000-2006, a seven-year development strategy for childcare, has been implemented with a target of increasing by half the number of non-profit childcare places, with priority being set on the development of childcare services in the disadvantaged areas.

Providing financial support

3.5.33 Apart from work-focused support, providing financial support for families with children serves as another means of tackling child poverty in Ireland. While the Irish government has adopted the approach of offering non-means tested support for all families with children, it complements this approach with targeted initiatives for those living on low income. Accordingly, along with the non-means tested Child Benefit, Child Dependent Allowances and One-Parent Family Payment have been introduced to boost the income of needy families with children.

⁴⁵ The committee comprises representatives from the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, the Equality Authority, and a number of government departments including the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Social and Family Affairs, and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

⁴⁶ See Goodbody Economic Consultants (2001)

Child Benefit

3.5.34 Child Benefit is a non-means tested weekly payment paid to the parents or guardians of a child who is aged under 16 (or under 19 if studying full-time).

Child Dependent Allowance

3.5.35 A recipient of social welfare payments can also receive Child Dependent Allowance for his or her child up to the age of 18.

One-Parent Family Payment

3.5.36 One-Parent Family Payment is a means-tested payment granted to a person who, for a variety of reasons, is bringing up his or her child without the support of a partner.

Addressing educational disadvantage

3.5.37 According to the National Action Plan, educational disadvantage is a significant component of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. In particular, children and young people experiencing poverty are more likely to leave school early. As such, social welfare support has been provided to help low-income families meet the costs of schooling, such as the School Books Scheme and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance. The School Books Scheme is available for primary and post-primary school students to pay for the cost of school books, whereas the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance is designed to help students meet the cost of uniforms and footwear for attending school.

3.5.38 The Department of Education and Science has established the Educational Disadvantage Committee to tackle educational disadvantage among children and youth. It has also implemented preventive programmes to address pre-school education and early school leaving, such as the Early Start Programme, the School Completion Programme and the Giving Children an Even Break Scheme.

Educational Disadvantage Committee

3.5.39 The Educational Disadvantage Committee was established by the Minister for Education and Science in March 2002. The committee is responsible for advising the Minister on policies and strategies related to the tackling of educational disadvantage. The membership of the committee includes people from the voluntary and professional bodies who possess particular insights and experience in the area of tackling educational disadvantage.

Early Start Programme

3.5.40 The Early Start Programme is a one-year pre-school scheme offered to selected schools in designated disadvantaged areas across Ireland. The programme tackles educational disadvantage by targeting children aged 3-4 who are at risk of not reaching their potential within the school system.

3.5.41 Under the Early Start Programme, government funding is provided to each participating school to operate an Early Start Centre for teaching pre-school children in a curriculum focusing on language, cognition, and social and personal developments. Additional government grants are also provided to foster parental involvement in the centres' activities.

School Completion Programme

3.5.42 The School Completion Programme has been launched as part of the government's strategy to encourage the completion of schooling for children and youth at risk of early school leaving or experiencing educational disadvantage. Under the programme, measures are implemented in selected schools in the disadvantaged areas to support the retention of children and young people in education, thereby combating early school leaving. Participating schools are organized into clusters and each cluster will receive government funding based on their retention plans.

Giving Children an Even Break Scheme

3.5.43 The Giving Children an Even Break Scheme tackles educational disadvantage in primary schools. Under the scheme, participating schools are provided with extra teaching and financial resources so that their pupils can take advantage of quality education regardless of their social background. The amount of additional resources allocated to each school is related to the level of concentration of pupils whose background characteristics are associated with educational disadvantage and early school leaving.

Strategy for the elderly

3.5.44 The Irish government has set out a target of increasing the weekly social welfare pension to €200 (HK\$2,040) or 34% of the average industrial earnings by 2007. In addition, it has sought to improve the access of the elderly to public services, with special attention being given to those living alone. For example, the National Health Strategy provides for improvement in health and community services for the elderly over the period 2000-2006. An example of such improvement is to provide funding to community groups to facilitate volunteers in providing support services, such as shopping, visiting and transport for the elderly.

3.5.45 The Irish government is conducting a review on ways in which the elderly can be encouraged, where they so wish, to extend their working lives. One proposal is to allow people to defer claiming the social welfare pension and receive a higher rate when they start to draw the pension.

3.6 Progress in poverty reduction

3.6.1 According to the Irish government, Ireland has made progress on several fronts of its anti-poverty strategy, namely consistent poverty, unemployment, and income adequacy.

Consistent poverty

3.6.2 In the original NAPS, the global target was to reduce the percentage of the population classified as consistently poor from 9%-15% to 5%-10% during 1997-2007. By 2001, it became apparent that Ireland had already achieved the 5%-10% consistent poverty target. According to the *2001 Living in Ireland Survey*, only 4.9% of the population lived in consistent poverty in 2001, compared with 14.5% in 1994. In addition, consistent poverty among children decreased from 15.3% in 1997 to 6.5% in 2001. As such, the revised NAPS sets out a new global target of reducing the percentage of the consistently poor to less than 2% by 2007 and if possible, eradicating consistent poverty.

Employment trend

3.6.3 In the original NAPS, the targets for unemployment were to reduce the overall unemployed rate from 11.9% in 1996 to 6% in 2007, and to bring the long-term unemployment rate down from 7% to 3.5% over the same period. Owing to improvement in the job market, the overall unemployment rate stood at 4.6% and long-term unemployment rate at 1.4% at end-2003. The decrease in unemployment rate reflected the increase in both male and female employment over the period. During 1998-2003, male employment increased by an annual average rate of 2.9% compared with 5.2% for women.

Income adequacy

3.6.4 Under the theme of income adequacy, the Irish government has sought to increase social welfare payments in order to provide an income level for needy people to sustain an acceptable standard of living. As such, both social welfare payments and pensions have been on the increase during recent years. For example, the lowest social assistance payments were raised by 24.4% in real terms during 1994-2002. The higher rates of payment, mainly pensions under the social insurance scheme, were lifted by 32.3% in real terms over the same period.

Chapter 4 – Singapore

4.1 Background

4.1.1 For years, public assistance in Singapore has primarily targeted those people who are least able and without other support.⁴⁷ This approach reflects the government's concern over possible abuse and over-dependence on welfare if it is too readily available.⁴⁸ While continuing to uphold this underlying philosophy, the Singaporean government has recently put in place more supportive measures to help needy people amid the growing concern over poverty in the country. For example, the 2005 Budget Speech delivered by the Minister for Finance has devoted a chapter to building a caring and inclusive society in Singapore, where new government measures will come on stream to increase the support for needy families and vulnerable groups such as the unemployed and the elderly.

4.1.2 The Singaporean government's new anti-poverty measures aim at, among other things, coping with the restructuring of Singapore towards a knowledge-based economy. According to the government, some Singaporeans have been left behind amid the economic restructuring, as evidenced by the increase in the unemployment rate from 2.5% in 1998 to 3.7% in 2004. In addition, job seekers who were unemployed for at least 25 weeks represented 1.2% of the total labour force at end-December 2004, well above the average of 0.4% in the early 1990s.

4.2 Definition and measurement of poverty

4.2.1 Singapore does not have an official poverty line to quantify the extent of poverty, nor is there any definition of poverty. Different income criteria have been used for determining eligibility for social assistance schemes. In particular, the Singaporean government tends to focus on families at the bottom 20% of the household income distribution in identifying disadvantaged groups that may require assistance.

⁴⁷ According to Ramesh (2004), "[p]ublic assistance in Singapore is available only to those who are unable to work for a justifiable reason – age, illness, disability or unfavourable family circumstances – and have no means of subsistence and no one to depend on. In other words, assistance is available only to "deserving" cases living in abject poverty and with no family member who may provide financial support".

⁴⁸ See Yap (2003).

4.3 Setting of anti-poverty targets

4.3.1 The Singaporean government has not set out any explicit targets for poverty reduction.

4.4 Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty

4.4.1 In Singapore, there is no institutional structure specifically established at the central and local levels for tackling poverty and social exclusion. Instead, the Singaporean government has adopted a "many helping hands" approach in welfare provision. In essence, families and various community groups are involved in providing assistance to needy people, with the government acting as the last resort.

Central level

4.4.2 In Singapore, the government is responsible for providing the infrastructures and resources for the provision of social services, formulating policies on social welfare, and setting and monitoring service standards. Social welfare schemes are set out by several government ministries to help disadvantaged people and needy families. For example, the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) oversees social assistance policies and programmes for low-income families in Singapore. The Ministry of Education provides waiver of school fees, free textbooks and bursaries for children from needy families, whereas the Ministry of Health provides free medical services and supplements healthcare costs for eligible patients.

Local level

4.4.3 Under the "many helping hands" approach, family has been identified as the first line of support for individuals in need of assistance and, where needed, additional support is provided by community-based organizations such as the Community Development Councils (CDCs), voluntary welfare organizations, and grassroots and religious groups. Rather than government agencies, CDCs are the key service providers in delivering social services to the needy.

Community Development Council

4.4.4 Singapore has established five CDCs as the local centres for administration, each of them being responsible for initiating, planning and managing community programmes to promote community bonding and social cohesion within its district. CDCs are also responsible for the administration of the community and social assistance services delegated from MCYS in April 2001.⁴⁹ In essence, Singaporeans in need of social assistance must apply through CDCs. As CDCs are closer to the residents in the community, they are expected to be more attuned and responsive to the specific needs of their districts.

4.4.5 Each CDC is managed by a Council comprising the mayor of the district and members appointed by the Chairman or Deputy Chairman of the People's Association.⁵⁰ Many of the appointed members are professionals from the public and private sectors. CDCs derive their funding from the following major sources:

- (a) annual resident grant – each CDC is provided with an annual grant of S\$1 (HK\$4.7)⁵¹ per resident living within its district as seed money for its programmes;
- (b) donated funds – each CDC can raise funds for its programmes; and
- (c) matching grant from the government – for every S\$1 (HK\$4.7) of donated funds, the government will match it with S\$3 (HK\$14.1).

4.5 Anti-poverty strategies

4.5.1 Singapore's approach in combating poverty focuses on providing a supportive network of resources and services that the poor can draw on to become self-reliant. As such, education, training and employment opportunities are provided to the needy people of working age to lift them out of poverty and improve their future well-being.

4.5.2 Apart from targeting people of working age, the Singaporean government has also put in place programmes to overcome the adversities of children and youth, and the elderly. In addition, it has set up a government endowment fund – the ComCare Fund – to consolidate all the social assistance schemes currently available, in an effort to deliver these schemes in a more efficient way.

⁴⁹ While relinquishing its role as a direct provider of the community and social assistance services, MCYS concentrates instead on regulatory and financial support roles.

⁵⁰ The People's Association is the leading government agency that promotes social cohesion, racial harmony and government-to-people connectivity. It does so through a network of grassroots organizations, CDCs, the National Youth Council, the National Community Leadership Institute, Outward Bound Singapore and the Social Development Service.

⁵¹ The calculation was based on the exchange rate of HK\$4.7 per Singaporean dollar on 20 April 2005.

Strategy for people of working age

4.5.3 The government's anti-poverty strategy for people of working age is to increase the employability of those who can work through education/training programmes, such as the Lifelong Learning Fund, the Skills Development Fund, the Re-employment Assistance Programme (REAP) and the Skills Redevelopment Programme. Nevertheless, those who cannot work can temporarily fall back on social assistance schemes, such as the Work Assistance Programme and the Self-reliance Programme.

Lifelong Learning Fund

4.5.4 The Lifelong Learning Fund was launched in March 2001 with an initial government contribution of S\$500 million (HK\$2.4 billion). The fund has been topped up to the current S\$2 billion (HK\$9.4 billion). The Singapore Workforce Development Agency⁵² is responsible for administering the fund to finance programmes providing learning opportunities for Singaporeans, particularly in courses that certify workers for enhanced employability.

Skills Development Fund

4.5.5 In Singapore, employers are provided with financial incentives to upgrade the skills of their workers who are earning not more than S\$1,800 (HK\$8,460) and/or have A-Level qualifications or below. They can obtain reimbursement from the Skills Development Fund for the expenditure incurred in manpower training and skills development programmes. Unlike the Lifelong Learning Fund, the Skills Development Fund is financed by the private sector through the Skills Development Levy imposed on employers with workers earning S\$1,800 (HK\$8,460) or less a month.

Re-employment Assistance Programme

4.5.6 REAP is a programme launched jointly by the Singapore Workforce Development Agency and the National Trades Union Congress⁵³ in January 2005. The programme is a national initiative aiming at helping people of low skills/education, especially those at risk of structural unemployment, to find and stay on at new jobs. REAP has two components, namely the Job Re-creation Programme and the Re-employment Support Scheme.

⁵² The Singapore Workforce Development Agency was established on 1 September 2003 as a statutory board under the Ministry of Manpower. The agency leads and promotes workforce development in Singapore, particularly enhancing the employability and competitiveness of both employees and job seekers.

⁵³ The National Trades Union Congress was founded in 1961 as a national federation of trade unions of workers in the industrial, service and public sectors.

4.5.7 The National Trades Union Congress leads the nationwide Job Re-creation Programme to improve the image and working conditions of existing jobs to make them more attractive to Singaporeans. The programme also redesigns jobs in various sectors to create more employment opportunities for local people and retrain them for these jobs.

4.5.8 The Re-employment Support Scheme is administered by CDCs and the National Trades Union Congress. The scheme includes a job placement assistance component, and financial incentives granted to job seekers who make an effort to stay on at their new jobs and adapt to the new working environment.

Skills Redevelopment Programme

4.5.9 The Skills Redevelopment Programme was launched in 1996 to encourage employers to send their employees, particularly the lower skilled and matured workers, to take up training/retraining and upgrading opportunities. Participating employers are provided with course fee support and absentee payroll subsidy if they send their employees to attend training during office hours.

4.5.10 Originally targeting company-sponsored workers, the Skills Redevelopment Programme has been extended to unemployed and retrenched workers under the Surrogate Employer Scheme.⁵⁴ The unemployed/retrenched workers have an additional option of participating in the Skills Training and Employability Enhancement for Retrenched and Unemployed Workers (STEER) programme. The STEER programme is an extension of the Skills Redevelopment Programme which links full-time training to job placement. Employers who hire workers under the STEER programme can enjoy course fee support, absentee payroll subsidy and wage support.⁵⁵

Work Assistance Programme

4.5.11 The Work Assistance Programme provides employment and financial assistance to unemployed Singaporeans who are medically fit to work and have a monthly household income of less than S\$1,500 (HK\$7,050). Additional support, such as educational assistance and grants for settling utility charges, may also be given based on the family's needs.

4.5.12 People participating in the Work Assistance Programme have an obligation to actively seek jobs while receiving the unemployment assistance. They are required to attend all job interviews, undergo the appropriate training or retraining courses to acquire new skills, and attend job counselling sessions when required. In addition, they must be prepared to take job offers as the offers come along.

⁵⁴ The Surrogate Employer Scheme came into force in October 2001. It serves as a funding mechanism under which CDCs, the National Trades Union Congress and some ethnic self-help groups assist unemployed Singaporeans to attend approved courses by acting as their surrogate employers to sponsor them for training.

⁵⁵ For each worker employed under the STEER programme, a participating employer can receive for a period of three months a wage subsidy amounting to 50% of the employee's monthly salary or S\$1,000 (HK\$4,700), whichever is lower.

Self-reliance Programme

4.5.13 The Self-reliance Programme provides short-term assistance to a low-income family, whose main breadwinner or other adult members are unable to seek job immediately due to reasons such as temporary illness or care-giving responsibility. The family must also satisfy the eligibility requirement of having a weak support network and little savings. In addition, programme participants must attend counselling and casework sessions with a social service agency arranged by CDCs. An eligible family receives a package of assistance tailored to its needs and circumstances. The package may include grants for settling utility charges, a cash allowance for daily expenses, and educational assistance for school-going children. In addition, the Self-reliance Programme also helps families sort out family issues and become self-sufficient.

Strategy for children and youth

4.5.14 In Singapore, the major social assistance schemes for children and youth are: (i) the Centre-based Financial Assistance Scheme for Child Care, (ii) the Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme, (iii) the Fee Assistance for Student Care Scheme and (iv) the Home Ownership Plus Education (HOPE) Scheme. In addition, the Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy has been established to help working parents balance their family and work responsibilities.

Centre-based Financial Assistance Scheme for Child Care

4.5.15 Low-income families can apply for the Centre-based Financial Assistance Scheme for Child Care to place their young children aged below seven in childcare programmes. The scheme provides a monthly subsidy on top of the government's childcare subsidy⁵⁶, making childcare services more affordable to low-income families. A one-off grant is also provided to low-income families to pay start-up costs such as uniforms and other miscellaneous expenses.

4.5.16 Under the scheme, children from low-income families can participate in early childhood development programmes to build up the foundation for the subsequent formal schooling. The scheme also facilitates working parents, especially mothers from disadvantaged families, to remain in the labour force.

Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme

4.5.17 The Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme helps low-income parents pay for their children's kindergarten fees. Parents who qualify for the scheme get a fee subsidy every month. The purpose of this subsidy is to ensure that children from needy families can have access to quality kindergarten programmes, which are important for their early childhood development.

⁵⁶ Childcare subsidy is a non-means tested payment received by all working and non-working mothers and single fathers whose children are currently enrolled in licensed childcare centres.

Fee Assistance for Student Care Scheme

4.5.18 Low-income working parents can obtain financial assistance under the Fee Assistance for Student Care Scheme to place their children aged 7-14 in non-profit or school-based student care centres. Student care centres provide homework guidance, and organize recreational and social activities for school-age children before or after school to enhance their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and moral developments. The financial assistance received by eligible working parents is provided on a sliding scale, based on the family's total monthly income and the type of student care centre enrolled in.

Home Ownership Plus Education Scheme

4.5.19 The HOPE Scheme was implemented in 2004 to help young low-income families earning a monthly household income of S\$1,500 (HK\$7,050) or below out of poverty trap. The scheme features the provision of a comprehensive package of social assistance to encourage low-income couples to keep the size of their families small and upgrade themselves through education.

4.5.20 A low-income family with no more than two children and the age of the mother at 35 or below can apply for the HOPE Scheme. Each HOPE-eligible family is provided with the following benefits:

- (a) educational bursaries for children from pre-school to university-level education;
- (b) a housing grant of S\$50,000 (HK\$235,000) payable in annual instalments to the mother;
- (c) a training grant of up to S\$10,000 (HK\$47,000) per family over a 10-year period to enable the parents to attend skills training. The grant is divided equally between the parents to encourage the mother to acquire new skills and enhance her employability;
- (d) a one-off cash grant of S\$1,000 (HK\$4,700) to help the family settle utility bills;
- (e) mentoring support to guide the family and help it resolve any problems; and
- (f) a cash grant of S\$6,000 (HK\$28,200)-S\$9,000 (HK\$42,300) to help the couples acquire family life education, family planning and parenting skills.

In total, a HOPE-eligible family can receive bursaries/grants of up to S\$100,000 (HK\$470,000) for housing, children's education, training and payment of utility bills.

Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy

4.5.21 In September 2000, MCYS established the Tripartite Committee on Work-Life Strategy. The membership of the committee comprises representatives from the government ministries (MCYS and the Ministry of Manpower), the National Trades Union Congress and the Singapore National Employers Federation. The Tripartite Committee has issued a set of guidelines to which employers can refer for the implementation of measures to assist their employees in balancing their work and family life. These measures include family care leave, flexible working arrangements (e.g. part-time work and flexitime) and employee support schemes.⁵⁷

4.5.22 In Singapore, there are also policy initiatives focusing on early intervention for vulnerable youths who need more support. These initiatives are developed by MCYS and include the School Social Work to Empower Pupils to Utilize Potential (STEP-UP) Programme and Youth Inc.

School Social Work to Empower Pupils to Utilize Potential Programme

4.5.23 The STEP-UP Programme aims at strengthening students' social and emotional resilience, as well as helping parents and teachers better manage and support the students. The STEP-UP Programme is a school-based social work initiative where schools in co-operation with voluntary welfare organizations run various types of programmes, including counselling, family education and life-skills training.

Youth Inc.

4.5.24 Youth Inc. is an initiative developed to support voluntary welfare organizations reaching out to out-of-school youths. In particular, it provides funding to those organizations to run programmes for out-of-school youths with respect to life skills, group work, and hands-on vocational training in retailing and real estate.

Strategy for the elderly

4.5.25 The Singaporean government passed the Maintenance of Parents Act in 1995 to safeguard the interests of the elderly. The Act gives a parent who is aged 60 or above and cannot support himself/herself the legal means to claim maintenance from his or her children. The parent can apply to the Tribunal for Maintenance of Parents for an order that one or more of his or her children pay him/her a monthly allowance or a lump sum for his or her maintenance.

⁵⁷ Employee support schemes refer to the educational and financial assistance provided by an employer that can help his or her employees effectively manage their work and family responsibilities. The assistance comprises childcare centres, family life education, health programmes and scholarships or educational assistance for employees and their dependents.

4.5.26 Job creation and retention are other priorities in the anti-poverty strategy for the elderly. A tripartite committee comprising the Ministry of Manpower, the Singapore National Employers Federation and the National Trades Union Congress has been formed to examine the employability issues of older workers, particularly extending their working lives. The Tripartite Committee focuses on two specific study areas:

- (a) Employment practices, wage and benefit structure. The key issues for study include (i) measures to enhance the competitiveness of older workers, and (ii) employment and workplace practices to enable employers to attract/retain experienced older workers and to motivate them to continue to make their contributions; and
- (b) Employment opportunities and employability. The key issues for study cover (i) measures to positively shape perceptions of both employers and employees on training, employment and employability of older workers, and (ii) barriers to the re-employment and retention of older workers.

Setting up of ComCare Fund

4.5.27 The Singaporean government has recently set up a government endowment fund – the ComCare Fund – that will grow from the initial S\$500 million (HK\$2.4 billion) to S\$1 billion (HK\$4.7 billion) over time. The establishment of the ComCare Fund is to implement new social assistance schemes and streamline existing ones under the three key components of the fund, namely ComCare SelfReliance, ComCare Grow and ComCare EnAble. The objective of the fund is to facilitate the government to take a focused and co-ordinated approach in assisting needy Singaporeans, who are often confused by the eligibility criteria under different social assistance schemes.⁵⁸ In addition, the government also aims at making use of the income generated by the ComCare Fund to finance various social assistance programmes provided for the needy.

ComCare SelfReliance

4.5.28 ComCare SelfReliance focuses on those people who need temporary assistance in order to return to self-reliance. Programmes under this component target Singaporeans who are out of work or face temporary financial difficulties. Existing programmes, such as the Work Assistance Programme and the Self-reliance Programme, are grouped under ComCare SelfReliance. In addition, ComCare SelfReliance finances new programmes and projects, such as the development of social economy enterprises to provide employment opportunities for needy Singaporeans.

⁵⁸ There are cases where recipients have registered for short-term assistance schemes when they actually need longer-term assistance. See Feedback Group (2005).

ComCare Grow

4.5.29 ComCare Grow aims at providing support for children from low-income families to develop their potential and break out of the poverty cycle. In particular, ComCare Grow provides financial assistance to needy children for accessing early childhood development programmes. Existing programmes, such as the Centre-based Financial Assistance Scheme for Child Care, the Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme, and the Fee Assistance for Student Care Scheme, are covered under the ComCare Grow umbrella.

4.5.30 Children from "at-risk" families receive support from ComCare Grow through the Healthy Start Programme. The Healthy Start Programme is a holistic early intervention programme to help low-income families improve their parenting skills and to provide subsidies for pre-school supports. The objective of the subsidies is to make pre-school education affordable for children from financially-strapped families, so that they are on a level playing field with their counterparts when they go to primary school, and avoid being trapped in a cycle of poverty.

ComCare EnAble

4.5.31 ComCare EnAble focuses on the needy elderly, as well as those who need long-term assistance in order to integrate into the community. ComCare EnAble covers (i) the existing social assistance schemes, such as the Public Assistance and Special Grant Schemes⁵⁹, (ii) programmes that reach out to the elderly living alone, and (iii) means-tested programmes to support families that have to take care of those frail elderly.

4.5.32 The ComCare Fund is administered by CDCs which are closer to the residents in their respective districts and have better understanding of the circumstances of needy families. Hence, CDCs are expected to be able to customize the social assistance schemes according to the needs of the residents living in their districts. For example, CDCs can take a holistic approach in helping those needy families facing multiple problems.

4.5.33 CDCs are provided with flexibility in the administration of the social assistance schemes under the ComCare Fund. They have the discretion to provide support to those who truly need assistance but may not fit the eligibility requirements of the existing social assistance schemes.

⁵⁹ The Public Assistance and Special Grant Schemes provide assistance to Singaporeans who, because of old age, ill health, disability or unfavourable family circumstances, are unable to work and have no means of subsistence and have no one to depend on. A monthly grant is provided for their daily expenses.

Progress in poverty reduction

4.5.34 According to MCYS, the number of existing cases under the Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme amounted to 9 083 at end-March 2005, serving the largest number of Singaporeans among the social welfare schemes. The corresponding number of existing cases under the other major social welfare schemes were: the Centre-based Financial Assistance Scheme for Child Care (4 412 cases), the Fee Assistance for Student Care Scheme (3 690 cases), the Public Assistance Scheme (2 720), the Work Assistance Scheme (1 416 cases), the Self-reliance Scheme (852 cases), the Home Ownership Plus Education Scheme (459 cases) and the Special Grant Scheme (190 cases).

Chapter 5 – Analysis

5.1.1 The poverty combating measures implemented by the United Kingdom (UK), Ireland and Singapore are summarized in Appendix V. Based on the findings in this study, the following issues are highlighted for Members' consideration when deliberating the strategy for combating poverty in Hong Kong:

- (a) definition and measurement of poverty;
- (b) setting of anti-poverty targets;
- (c) institutional arrangements to tackle poverty;
- (d) involvement of the voluntary and community sector;
- (e) specific programmes to tackle poverty among different social groups; and
- (f) modernization of the existing social protection system.

Definition and measurement of poverty

5.1.2 In the UK as well as in Ireland, the concept of poverty is accepted as encompassing not only income poverty, but also social exclusion which could trap people in a spiral of disadvantages through multiple deprivations. As such, both the UK and Irish governments do not resort to a single indicator (e.g. a poverty line) in quantifying the extent of poverty. Instead, a range of indicators have been developed to measure the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty. In Hong Kong, the Government is also compiling a set of poverty indicators for different social groups in view of the multi-faceted nature of poverty. In contrast, Singapore has not set out any definition or measurement of poverty.

5.1.3 The poverty indicators being compiled by the Hong Kong Government do not include any measure of material deprivation, unlike the cases in the UK and Ireland. The UK measures poverty in terms of absolute low income, relative low income, as well as material deprivation and relative low income combined. In Ireland, a person is considered living in poverty if he or she suffers from consistent poverty as characterized by a combination of relative income poverty and material deprivation.

5.1.4 The UK government believes that the formulation of the material deprivation measure serves to capture the severity and duration of poverty. People who suffer from a longer spell of low income are more likely to lack certain essential items, and they may also suffer more than those who are in poverty for a short period of time. The identification of the persistently poor should facilitate the design of the anti-poverty strategy, as people suffering from persistent poverty may need different support measures compared to other disadvantaged groups.

Setting of anti-poverty targets

5.1.5 According to some academics, the setting of anti-poverty targets provides increased transparency in monitoring the effectiveness of the government's strategy for combating poverty. In addition, target setting should hold the government accountable for the progress of the measures it implements to reduce poverty.

5.1.6 Both Hong Kong and Singapore do not have any explicit targets for poverty reduction. In contrast, the UK and Ireland have set out poverty reduction targets for different disadvantaged groups and policy areas. These targets have been developed as part of the national strategies adopted by the UK and Ireland for tackling poverty and social exclusion.

5.1.7 In the UK, *Opportunity for all* – an annual government report on tackling poverty and social exclusion – contains a number of anti-poverty targets outlining what the government expects to achieve for different age groups and by when. In Ireland, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) includes targets focusing on groups vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion and across different policy areas, such as education, unemployment and health.

Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty

5.1.8 Ireland has established comprehensive institutional structures specifically for tackling poverty and social exclusion, ranging from the high-level Cabinet Committee to lower-level authorities, such as the Office for Social Inclusion and the Combat Poverty Agency. In addition, the process of "poverty proofing" has been adopted, requiring all government departments to systematically examine the impact of their policies and programmes on poverty and inequality.

5.1.9 The UK government has established the Social Exclusion Unit for co-ordinating policy making on specific issues of poverty and social exclusion. In Hong Kong, the recently formed Commission on Poverty provides a forum for different sectors of the community to work together to study and explore practical ways to help the poor in terms of their financial, employment, education and training needs.

5.1.10 In contrast, Singapore has not established any specific institutional structure for poverty reduction. Instead, social welfare schemes are set out by several government ministries to help disadvantaged groups and needy families.

Involvement of the voluntary and community sector

5.1.11 All the overseas places studied have involved the voluntary and community sector in tackling poverty and social exclusion. In Ireland, the voluntary and community sector has participated in the Social Inclusion Consultative Group, a platform established by the Irish government to facilitate public participation in monitoring NAPS. In addition, the views of the voluntary and community sector have served as inputs to the social partnership agreements negotiated between the government and its social partners, which map out national action plans for the economic and social developments in Ireland.

5.1.12 The UK has made similar arrangements at the local level, under which each local authority area is encouraged to establish a multi-sectoral partnership body to help deliver the social inclusion agenda. Singapore has adopted a "many helping hands" approach which involves families, local communities and the government in the welfare provision. In particular, families and various community groups are involved in providing assistance to needy people, with the government acting as the last resort.

5.1.13 In both the UK and Ireland, the development of anti-poverty strategies involves the establishment of a formal and regular platform for the participation of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion and those who represent them. In the UK, the Department for Work and Pensions has established the Working Participation Group with the aim of feeding the views of those experiencing poverty into the preparation of the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion. The membership of the Working Participation Group comprises mainly grassroots' participants and representatives from the voluntary and community sector. Ireland convenes the Social Inclusion Forum once a year as a vehicle to promote and encourage the participation of people suffering from exclusion in monitoring the progress of NAPS.

5.1.14 In Hong Kong, representatives from the voluntary and community sector are serving on the Commission on Poverty.⁶⁰ In addition, the Hong Kong Government has set up a Community Investment and Inclusion Fund to provide resources for promoting community participation in supporting individuals and families, especially vulnerable groups. The membership of the Fund also includes representatives from the voluntary and community sector.

Specific programmes to tackle poverty among different social groups

5.1.15 All the overseas places studied have implemented measures to tackle poverty among different social groups, namely people of working age, children and youth, and the elderly.

⁶⁰ The Commission on Poverty comprises government officials, Members of the Legislative Council, business people, community leaders, representatives from non-governmental organizations, experts and academics.

People of working age

5.1.16 In all the overseas places studied, a key feature of their anti-poverty measures is the implementation of specific programmes to facilitate participation in the labour market. This trend reflects the underlying importance of work in getting people of working age out of poverty, and in providing the safeguard against subsequent poverty in old age. In Hong Kong, the Government provides work-focused support for vulnerable working-age groups, such as young school leavers and middle-aged unemployed people.

5.1.17 The provision of employment, training and education opportunities for displaced and disadvantaged workers⁶¹ is the key to the work-focused policy initiatives adopted in all the overseas places studied. In addition, these overseas places have implemented welfare-to-work policies to assist the unemployed to move from welfare to work as soon as possible.

Welfare-to-work policy

5.1.18 In Ireland and Singapore, employable social assistance recipients are provided with job training programmes, counselling, career guidance and referral to suitable education or employment opportunities. In the UK, a range of customized New Deal programmes has been implemented for people of different social groups to move from welfare to work via one-to-one support, improved access to job-related training and other specialized support. Jobless young people, long-term unemployed, people aged 50 plus, single parents and dependent partners of benefit claimants are all provided with work-focused support under different New Deal programmes.

5.1.19 Under the UK's New Deal programmes, unemployed people aged 18-49 must engage in full-time activities ranging from subsidized employment to vocational training/education for at least three to six months (depending on whether they are in the 18-24 or the 25-49 age bracket).

5.1.20 The UK has gone further to establish an institutional structure conducive to the implementation of the welfare-to-work policy. The Jobcentre Plus was established in 2001 to provide integrated services of finding jobs and paying benefits to working-age benefit claimants. These two functions are currently handled by separate government departments in Ireland and Singapore.

5.1.21 In Hong Kong, the Social Welfare Department has implemented the Self-reliance Scheme to promote welfare-to-work and self-reliance, with a view to preventing over-reliance on the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme by the employable able-bodied. In addition, non-governmental organizations are commissioned by the Social Welfare Department to carry out the Intensive Employment Assistance Projects, which provide employment-related assistance for able-bodied unemployed CSSA recipients to seek gainful jobs.

⁶¹ The disadvantaged workers include people with low skills/education, young school leavers and older workers.

Making work pay

5.1.22 Ireland and the UK have included another dimension – making work pay – in their employment strategies to help people move from welfare to work. This dimension is not found in Singapore's overall strategy.

5.1.23 Ireland provides a range of work-related benefits to encourage social assistance recipients to find and remain in jobs. These benefits include disregarded earnings, Back-to-Work Allowance, Family Income Supplement and the tax allowance under the Revenue Job Assist Scheme.⁶² Furthermore, low-paid workers in Ireland also enjoy the statutory national minimum wage and the tax reforms that remove them from the tax net. Likewise, the UK has introduced a national minimum wage and Working Tax Credit to boost earnings of people in low-income jobs.

5.1.24 In Hong Kong, the CSSA Scheme allows for disregarded earnings as an incentive to encourage CSSA recipients to find work and continue working. Disregarded earnings refer to the earnings from employment that are disregarded when assessing the amount of assistance payable to a CSSA recipient.

Children and youth

5.1.25 All the overseas places studied have embarked on one or more of the following measures to help needy children and youth:

- (a) tackling joblessness through active labour market programmes;
- (b) providing financial support to children of low-income families; and
- (c) investing in early years of children's development and education to break the cycle of disadvantage.

Tackling joblessness

5.1.26 The active labour market programmes to facilitate participation in employment help improve the financial situation of needy families, thereby indirectly allowing children and youth in those families to escape from the cycle of poverty. Apart from these programmes, childcare services have also been provided to support low-income parents who want to work. The government's support measures are rendered through the provision of affordable childcare services and/or financial assistance to low-income families to place their children in childcare programmes. In Hong Kong, the Government has implemented measures to facilitate participation in employment, including the provision of affordable childcare services for working parents.

⁶² See paragraphs 3.5.14-3.5.18 for details of these benefits/schemes.

5.1.27 In addition to childcare support, the overseas places studied have adopted other supportive measures to facilitate the participation of low-income parents in the labour market. For example, the UK government provides income support to single parents who move from welfare to work.⁶³ In Singapore, the Fee Assistance for Student Care Scheme provides financial assistance to low-income working parents to place their children in student care centres. Hong Kong has implemented a similar scheme – the subsidized After-School-Care Programme – to provide supportive care services for children aged 6-12 whose parents are unable to provide proper care for them after school hours due to work or other reasons.

5.1.28 All the overseas places studied have embarked on national campaigns to promote awareness and take-up of flexible working practices. In Ireland, the objective of the campaign is to help workers balance their work and family life through promoting measures, such as flexitime, part-time arrangements and job sharing. In the UK, a flexible working law enacted in 2003 gives working parents the legal right to request a flexible working environment. The Hong Kong Government has not launched any similar campaigns.

Providing financial support

5.1.29 Both the UK and Ireland provide financial support to children of low-income families. Singapore has recently introduced a wide range of income support measures to help children from low-income families out of poverty. Under the Home Ownership Plus Education Scheme, eligible young low-income families can receive bursaries/grants of up to S\$100,000 (HK\$470,000) for housing, children's education, training and payment of utility bills.

5.1.30 In Hong Kong, children from the needy families are provided with higher standard rates than other able-bodied recipients under the CSSA Scheme.

Investing in early years of children's development and education

5.1.31 All the overseas places studied have programmes and services focusing on the early years of children's development. In particular, the UK has implemented Sure Start as a government-funded initiative to promote the physical, intellectual and emotional development of children from conception through age 14. Sure Start also supports the development of local projects in the disadvantaged areas, providing a set of co-ordinated services to children and their families in terms of childcare, early education, family and health services, home visits, training and employment advice. A Sure Start local project is delivered by a partnership comprising members from the voluntary and community groups and parents in the disadvantaged area concerned.

⁶³ See paragraph 2.5.11 for details of the income support provided.

5.1.32 In Hong Kong, the Government has selected four communities for the implementation of a pilot programme – the Head Start Programme⁶⁴ – targeting children aged five and below and involving inter-sectoral collaboration among the Department of Health, the Hospital Authority, the Social Welfare Department/non-governmental organizations and the Education and Manpower Bureau at the district level. The programme aims at augmenting the existing services offered by the Maternal and Child Health Centre through better alignment of the delivery of healthcare, social and education services, with a view to establishing a mechanism to identify children and their families who might require further attention.

5.1.33 All the overseas places studied, as well as Hong Kong, have provided welfare support to school-age children and youth from low-income families. The relevant measures include financial assistance for payment of school fees and other school-related expenses, such as textbooks, stationery and school uniforms.

5.1.34 In Ireland, apart from welfare support, tackling educational disadvantage is another major component of the anti-poverty strategy for children and youth. As such, the Irish government has implemented programmes to address issues related to pre-school education and early school leaving in the disadvantaged areas, and to provide extra teachers and funding to schools based on concentration of pupils from socio-economically-disadvantaged backgrounds.

The elderly

5.1.35 All the overseas places studied have implemented or studied measures to extend the working life of the elderly. They have also implemented other measures to promote the well-being of the elderly. In the UK, the government has introduced Pension Credit to top up the weekly income of low-income pensioners. Ireland sets a target of increasing income support for the elderly in real terms. In Singapore, the government has passed the Maintenance of Parents Act to give a parent who is aged 60 or above the legal means to claim maintenance from his or her children.

5.1.36 In Hong Kong, the Government has set up elderly centres to cater for the psycho-social and developmental needs of elderly persons and their carers. For those elderly persons who have functional disabilities and require subsidized long-term care services, they are provided with subsidized home-based community care services to facilitate them to stay in the community as long as possible. Furthermore, elderly persons in Hong Kong who have financial difficulty can apply for CSSA.

⁶⁴ The Head Start Programme was discussed at the meeting of the Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty held on 22 March 2005. At the meeting, some Members were concerned that the programme only identified problems of poor families without following up their cases and offering solutions/resources to solve these problems. In addition, they questioned about the relationship between the programme and the Government's pledge to alleviate the inter-generational transmission of poverty. Meanwhile, an academic also considers that "[t]he name of the Head Start [P]rogramme is certainly attractive, but the contents [are] rather empty - it is very little more than pulling together some existing health and educational services provided in the district and repackaging them". See Chiu (2005).

Modernization of the existing social protection system

5.1.37 All the overseas places studied have embarked on social welfare reforms to facilitate the implementation of their anti-poverty strategies. In the UK, the introduction of welfare-to-work policy and work-related benefits serves to institute a social protection system that can both tackle poverty and help people become self-reliant. Ireland has sought to increase the amount of social benefits in real terms as stipulated under the theme of income adequacy in the revised NAPS. Singapore has established a government endowment fund – the ComCare Fund – to consolidate all the existing social assistance schemes. The income generated by the ComCare Fund is used to finance various social assistance schemes for the needy people. Further, the ComCare Fund is administered by the Community Development Councils. As the local centres for administration, the Community Development Councils are in a better position to take a holistic and flexible approach in the delivery of social assistance schemes.

5.1.38 In Hong Kong, the Government is conducting a review of the CSSA Scheme with respect to (i) the Intensive Employment Assistance Projects and (ii) existing CSSA arrangements and related services for single-parent families on CSSA. The findings of the review are expected to be available in mid-2005. In addition, the Government plans to review the provision of disregarded earnings and makes available the findings in late 2005.

Appendix I**Examples of the key performance indicators set out
in the United Kingdom's *Opportunity for all* for different age groups**Children and young people

- A.I.1 A reduction in the proportion of children living in working-age workless households.
- A.I.2 Low-income indicators:
- (a) a reduction in the proportion of children living in households with relative low incomes;
 - (b) a reduction in the proportion of children living in households with low incomes in an absolute sense; and
 - (c) a reduction in the proportion of children living in households with persistent low incomes.
- A.I.3 An increase in the proportion of children (in Sure Start programme areas and Children's Centres) with appropriate levels of development.
- A.I.4 An increase in overall school attendance.
- A.I.5 An improvement in the educational attainment and participation of children looked after by local authorities, including a substantial narrowing of the gap between them and their peers.
- A.I.6 An increase in the proportion of people of 16-18-year-olds in learning.
- A.I.7 A reduction in the rate at which children are admitted into hospital as a result of unintentional injury, resulting in a hospital stay of longer than three days.
- A.I.8 A reduction in smoking rates:
- (a) during pregnancy; and
 - (b) among children.
- A.I.9 A reduction in the rate of obesity in children below 16 years.
- A.I.10 A reduction in the number of families with children in temporary accommodation.

Appendix I (cont'd)

People of working age

- A.I.11 An increase in the proportion of working-age people in employment, over the economic cycle.
- A.I.12 An increase in the employment rates of disadvantaged groups – disabled people, lone parents, ethnic minority people, people aged 50 and over and the lowest qualified – and a reduction in the difference between their employment rates and the overall rate.
- A.I.13 A reduction in the proportion of working-age people living in workless households.
- A.I.14 Low-income indicators:
- (a) a reduction in the proportion of working-age people living in households with relative low incomes;
 - (b) a reduction in the proportion of working-age people living in households with low incomes in an absolute sense; and
 - (c) a reduction in the proportion of working-age people living in households with persistent low incomes.
- A.I.15 A reduction in the death rates from suicide and injury of undetermined intent.
- A.I.16 A reduction in the number of people sleeping rough.

Older people

- A.I.17 Low-income indicators:
- (a) a reduction in the proportion of pensioners living in households with relative low incomes;
 - (b) a reduction in the proportion of pensioners living in households with low incomes in an absolute sense; and
 - (c) a reduction in the proportion of pensioners living in households with persistent low incomes.
- A.I.18 An increase in the proportion of working-age people contributing to a non-state pension.

Appendix I (cont'd)

Older people (cont'd)

- A.I.19 An increase in the amount contributed to non-state pensions.
- A.I.20 An increase in healthy life expectancy at age 65.
- A.I.21 A reduction in the proportion of older people who live in a home that falls below the set standard of decency.
- A.I.22 A reduction in the proportion of older people whose lives are greatly affected by fear of crime.

Appendix II**Questions used in deriving the material deprivation element of the tiered approach proposed in the United Kingdom's *Measuring child poverty***Adult deprivation

- A.II.1 Keep the home adequately warm
- A.II.2 Two pairs of all-weather shoes for each adult
- A.II.3 Enough money to keep the home in a decent state of repair
- A.II.4 A holiday away from home for one week a year, not staying with relatives
- A.II.5 Replace any worn out furniture
- A.II.6 A small amount of money to spend each week on oneself, not on the family
- A.II.7 Regular savings (of £10 a month) for rainy days or retirement
- A.II.8 Insurance of contents of dwelling
- A.II.9 Have friends or family for a drink or meal at least once a month
- A.II.10 A hobby or leisure activity
- A.II.11 Replace or repair broken electrical goods such as refrigerator or washing machine

Child deprivation

- A.II.12 A holiday away from home at least one week a year with his or her family
- A.II.13 Swimming at least once a month
- A.II.14 A hobby or leisure activity
- A.II.15 Friends round for tea or a snack once a fortnight
- A.II.16 Enough bedrooms for every child over 10 of different sex to have his or her own bedroom
- A.II.17 Leisure equipment (for example, sports equipment or a bicycle)

Appendix II (cont'd)

Child deprivation (cont'd)

- A.II.18 Celebrations on special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas or other religious festivals
- A.II.19 Play group/nursery/toddler group at least once a week for children of pre-school age
- A.II.20 Going on a school trip at least once a term for school-aged children

Appendix III

Examples of the key performance indicators in the United Kingdom's *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion 2003-2005*

Primary indicators

- A.III.1 Low income rate after transfers
- A.III.2 Distribution of income
- A.III.3 Persistence of low income
- A.III.4 Relative median low income gap
- A.III.5 Regional cohesion (dispersion of regional employment rates)
- A.III.6 Long-term unemployment rate
- A.III.7 Persons living in jobless households
- A.III.8 Early school leavers not in education or training
- A.III.9 Life expectancy at birth

Secondary indicators

- A.III.10 Dispersion around the low income threshold
- A.III.11 Gini coefficient
- A.III.12 Persistence of low income (below 50% of median income)
- A.III.13 Long-term unemployment share
- A.III.14 Persons with low educational attainment

Tertiary indicators

- A.III.15 Relative low income rate
- A.III.16 Absolute low income rate
- A.III.17 Persistence of low income
- A.III.18 Proportion of people living in workless households
- A.III.19 Employment rates of disadvantaged groups – people with disabilities, lone parents, ethnic minorities and the over 50's

Appendix III (cont'd)

Tertiary indicators (cont'd)

- A.III.20 Difference between employment rates in the most deprived local authority districts and the overall employment rate
- A.III.21 Percentage of people in non-decent housing
- A.III.22 Proportion of people who have accessed the Internet
- A.III.23 Educational achievements of 16-year-olds
- A.III.24 Number of people sleeping rough
- A.III.25 Infant mortality rates by social groups
- A.III.26 Proportion of people whose lives are greatly affected by fear of crime

Appendix IV

Examples of the key targets set out in Ireland's revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy

Key target

- A.IV.1 To reduce the number of those who are consistently poor below 2% and, if possible, eliminate consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.

Income adequacy

- A.IV.2 To achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare to be met by 2007 and the appropriate equivalence level of basic child income support (i.e. Child Benefit and Child Dependent Allowances combined) to be set at 33%-35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate.

Employment and Unemployment

- A.IV.3 To eliminate long-term unemployment as soon as circumstances permit but in any event not later than 2007.
- A.IV.4 To reduce the level of unemployment experienced by vulnerable groups towards the national average by 2007.

Education

- A.IV.5 To halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006.
- A.IV.6 To reduce the number of young people who leave the school system early, so that the percentage of those who complete upper second level or equivalent will reach 85% by 2003 and 90% by 2006.

Health

- A.IV.7 To reduce the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by at least 10% for circulatory diseases, for cancers and for injuries and poisoning by 2007.

Appendix IV (cont'd)

Housing and accommodation

- A.IV.8 By end 2004, sufficient and appropriate emergency accommodation to be available to rough sleepers, in conjunction with appropriate outreach services to enable them to access it. This target is to apply to each local authority and health board area. At end 2003, progress in meeting the target will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised mechanisms put in place to achieve it.

Children and young people

- A.IV.9 Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the number of children who are consistently poor below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.

Women

- A.IV.10 Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the number of women who are consistently poor below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.
- A.IV.11 The Strategy will aim at increasing the employment participation rate of women to an average of more than 60% in 2010.

Older people

- A.IV.12 Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the number of older people who are consistently poor below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.
- A.IV.13 By end-2007, adequate heating systems will be available in all local authority rented dwellings provided for older people.

Urban Poverty

- A.IV.14 Over the period to 2007, the Strategy will aim at reducing the number of urban dwellers who are consistently poor below 2%, and, if possible, eliminating consistent poverty, under the current definition of consistent poverty.

Appendix V

Key features of the poverty combating strategies adopted by the United Kingdom, Ireland, Singapore and Hong Kong

	The United Kingdom	Ireland	Singapore	Hong Kong
Definition and measurement of poverty				
Definition of poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion from having the standard of living regarded generally acceptable by the Irish society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil
Measurement of poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multiplicity of indicators to measure the multi-dimensional nature of poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multiplicity of indicators to measure the multi-dimensional nature of poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families at the bottom 20% of the household income distribution are identified as requiring assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A multiplicity of indicators to measure the multi-dimensional nature of poverty
Setting of anti-poverty targets				
Target setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil

Appendix V (cont'd)

Key features of the poverty combating strategies adopted by the United Kingdom, Ireland, Singapore and Hong Kong

	The United Kingdom	Ireland	Singapore	Hong Kong
Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty				
Specific institutional structure(s) established at the central level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Exclusion Unit established to co-ordinate policy making on specified topics of poverty and social exclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ranging from the high-level Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion to lower-level government authorities • Process of "poverty proofing" established to require all government authorities to assess the impact of their policies on poverty reduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil, different social welfare schemes being set out by existing government ministries to help the needy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission on Poverty established to provide a forum for different sectors of the community to work together on the ways to help the needy
Consultation with and involvement of the voluntary and community sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Strategic Partnership involving the voluntary and community sector in the delivery of social inclusion agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Inclusion Consultative Group and the formulation of social partnership agreements involving the voluntary and community sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Many helping hands" approach involving families (the first line of support), local communities and the government in welfare provision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission on Poverty comprising representatives from the voluntary and community sector
Regular and formal platform for the participation of those with direct experience of poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Working Participation Group established to reflect the views of those with direct experience of poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Social Inclusion Forum convened once a year to promote the participation of those experiencing poverty in monitoring the anti-poverty strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil

Appendix V (cont'd)

Key features of the poverty combating strategies adopted by the United Kingdom, Ireland, Singapore and Hong Kong

	The United Kingdom	Ireland	Singapore	Hong Kong
Anti-poverty strategies for people of working age				
Provision of employment, training and education opportunities	Applicable to all			
Welfare-to-work policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Deal programmes for different social groups • Jobcentre Plus to provide integrated services of finding jobs and paying benefits for working-age benefit claimants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-focused support provided to employable social assistance recipients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-focused support provided to employable social assistance recipients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reliance Scheme and Intensive Employment Assistance Projects to help recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) move from welfare to work
Making work pay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National minimum wage and Working Tax Credit to top up earnings of low-income families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National minimum wage, disregarded earnings, Back-to-Work Allowance, Family Income Supplement, and tax allowance under Revenue Job Assist Scheme to boost in-work earnings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disregarded earnings

Appendix V (cont'd)

Key features of the poverty combating strategies adopted by the United Kingdom, Ireland, Singapore and Hong Kong

	The United Kingdom	Ireland	Singapore	Hong Kong
Anti-poverty strategy for children and youth				
Early years of children's development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sure Start Programme to promote the physical, intellectual and emotional developments of children from conception through age 14 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Start Programme to tackle educational disadvantage of pre-school children in disadvantaged areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Start Programme to provide pre-school support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head Start Programme to augment the delivery of healthcare, social and education services for children aged five and below
Investing in education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, focusing particularly on tackling educational disadvantage among children and youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes
Income support for children of low-income families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, a wide range of income support measures whereby low-income families with children can receive bursaries/grants of up to S\$100,000 (HK\$470,000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes
Provision of affordable childcare services for working parents	Applicable to all			
Other supportive measures for working parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income support for parents moving from welfare to work • National campaign to promote flexible working practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National campaign to promote flexible working practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee Assistance for Student Care Scheme • National campaign to promote flexible working practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After-School-Care Programme

Appendix V (cont'd)

Key features of the poverty combating strategies adopted by the United Kingdom, Ireland, Singapore and Hong Kong

	The United Kingdom	Ireland	Singapore	Hong Kong
Anti-poverty strategy for the elderly				
Measures proposed/ implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing financial incentives to encourage the elderly to defer taking State Pension so as to extend their working life • Pension Credit to top up earnings of low-income pensioners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying the proposal of extending the working life of the elderly • Setting out a target of increasing the amount of income support received by the elderly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studying the proposal of extending the working life of the elderly • Passage of the Maintenance of Parents Act to protect interest of the elderly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of elderly centres and subsidized home-based community care services • CSSA Scheme to provide income support for the needy elderly
Modernization of the existing social protection system				
Approach adopted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social welfare reform to institute a social protection system that both tackles poverty and helps people become self-reliant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income support for needy people to move out of poverty under the theme of income adequacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of all the social assistance schemes under a government endowment fund, the ComCare Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSSA Scheme under review

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