

Consultation Paper on the new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

This paper provides some background information on the current national anti-poverty strategy, the national social targets and their governance structures. The timeframe for the current strategy, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion), ends in 2017. The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to developing a new National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. This consultation paper will be used to inform discussions at the Social Inclusion Forum 2017 and the preparatory meetings held with civil society groups and people experiencing poverty in advance of the Forum. The Department of Social Protection is also instigating an independent review of NAPinclusion to inform this work. The new Plan will be prepared by the year-end.

1) National Action Plan for Social Inclusion¹

Since 1997 Ireland has developed national anti-poverty strategies to provide a strategic framework in which to tackle poverty and social exclusion. The current strategy, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016 (NAPinclusion), identifies a wide range of targeted actions and interventions to support the overall objective of achieving the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR). The Plan adopts a life-cycle approach with goals set for each group: children; people of working age; older people and communities.

The Plan was recently updated for the period 2015 - 2017 to reflect the current issues and interventions to tackle poverty. There is a greater focus on modernising the social protection system, improving effectiveness and efficiency of social transfers and strengthening active inclusion policies. The Updated Plan contains 14 reformulated goals which include a focus on early childhood development, youth exclusion, access to the labour market including measures for people with disabilities, migrant integration, social housing and affordable energy.

NAPinclusion has a strong governance framework incorporating a range of institutional structures and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. For instance, work is underway to compile the sixth biennial Social Inclusion Report outlining progress from relevant government departments on the implementation of the national policy commitments to tackle poverty and social exclusion over the period from January 2015 to December 2016.

The Technical Advisory Group was established under NAPinclusion to provide support and advice in relation to data, poverty measurement and monitoring. It is composed of specialists in research, data collection and poverty measurement representing government departments, agencies, social partners and research organisations.

The Government engages with a wide range of stakeholders with an interest and involvement in social inclusion through structures such as the Social Inclusion Forum, and supports various social inclusion initiatives, including the UN Day for the Eradication of Poverty and Young Social Innovators. These initiatives involve people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, teenagers from all over the country and those groups that work with them.

2) National Social Target for Poverty Reduction

Ireland has a long history of setting national targets to reduce poverty through policy frameworks such as the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. Following a review of the national poverty target in 2012, a revised National Social Target for

¹ See: www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/NAPinclusionReportPDF.pdf & www.socialinclusion.ie/UpdatedNAPinclusion2015-2017.html

Poverty Reduction was adopted by Government. The overall aim of the target is to reduce consistent poverty² to 4% by 2016 and to 2% or less by 2020, from a baseline rate of 6.3% in 2010. There are two other components of the NSTPR:

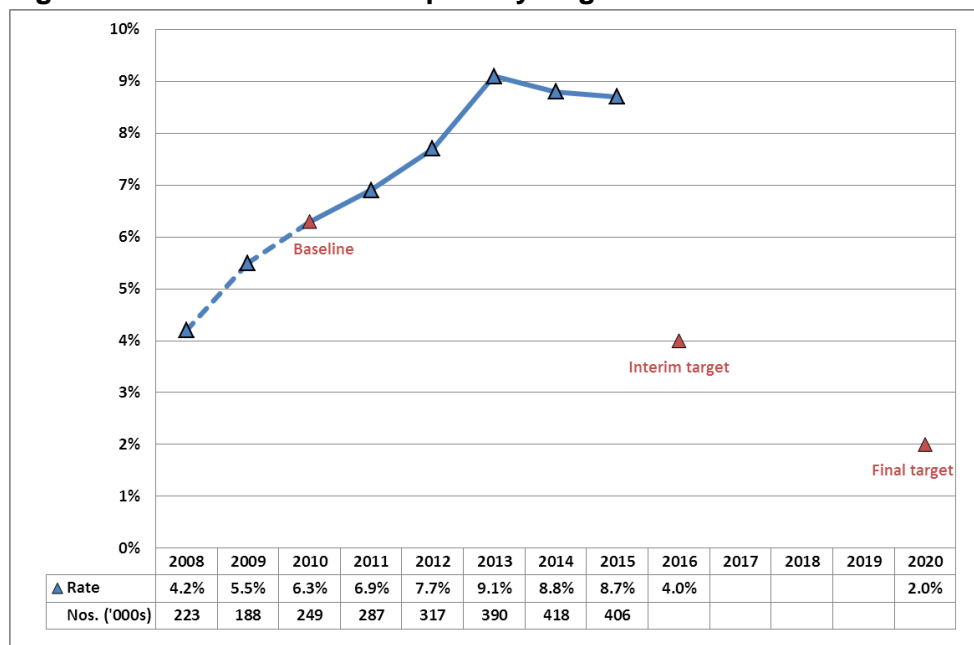
- The Irish contribution to the EU2020 poverty target is to reduce by a minimum of 200,000 the population in combined poverty between 2010 and 2020.³
- The child-specific poverty target is to lift over 70,000 children (aged 0-17 years) out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level.

Progress towards the NSTPR is reported annually in the Social Inclusion Monitor.⁴ The Monitor will be published in advance of the 2017 Social Inclusion Forum. The latest results from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions for 2015 shows improvements in living conditions and some progress towards the national social targets.

Consistent poverty was effectively unchanged at 8.7% in 2015. Consistent poverty among children fell by 13,000 in 2015. The Irish contribution to the EU poverty target also improved, with ‘combined poverty’ falling by 162,000 people in 2015. Given the continuing economic recovery throughout 2016 and measures introduced in Budgets 2016 and 2017, it is reasonable to expect future figures to show further improvement.

However, there is a long way to go to achieve the national social targets. Consistent poverty was at a low of 4.2% in 2008 during the height of the boom. It subsequently increased with the economic crisis. With the years lost between 2009 and 2012 reducing it now by over 75% is very ambitious and unlikely to be achieved.

Figure 1: Headline consistent poverty target



Source: CSO SILC, various years

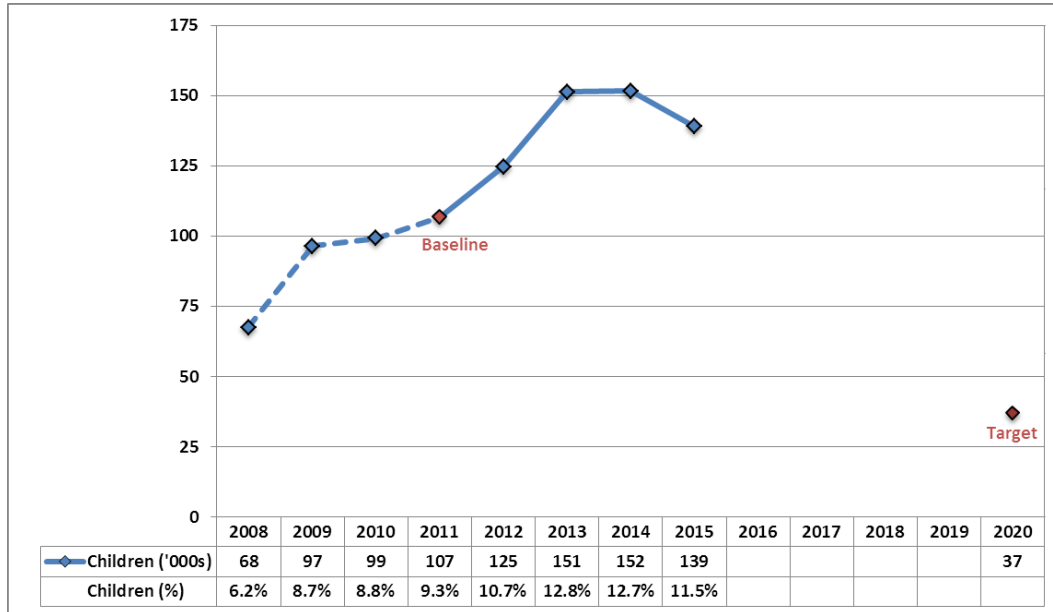
² The official measure of poverty in Ireland is consistent poverty. People are in consistent poverty if their income is below 60% of the median income and they are deprived of 2 or more of the 11 basic deprivation items because they could not afford them.

³ Combined poverty is the combination of at-risk-of-poverty and/or basic deprivation.

⁴ See: www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/Social-Inclusion-Monitor.aspx

Similarly, at the height of the boom, in 2008, consistent poverty among children was its lowest at 68,000 children. Since 2008, consistent poverty among children has risen. In order to meet the child-specific poverty target 102,000 children will have to be lifted out of consistent poverty by 2020. While child poverty is reducing, achieving a reduction of over 60% is very challenging and seems unlikely to be reached.

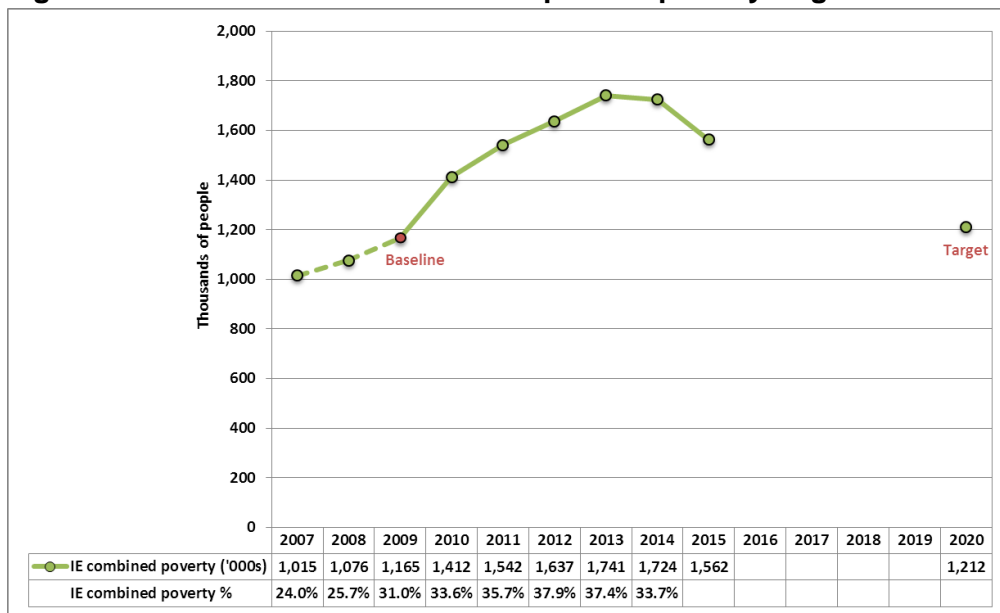
Figure 2: Child-specific poverty target



Source: CSO SILC, various years

Finally, ‘combined poverty’ was at its lowest in 2007 at 1,015,000 people. With the onset of the recession ‘combined poverty’ rose to 1,741,000 people. Since 2014, there has been progress in reducing the number of people in ‘combined poverty’. However, meeting the Irish contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target means lifting 350,000 people out of ‘combined poverty’ by 2020.

Figure 3: Irish contribution to the Europe 2020 poverty target



Source: CSO SILC, various years

There is a risk that the current national social targets would be seen to be unrealistic or unachievable and create a demotivating environment for supporting actions. As such, it is timely to review the NSTPR in 2017 alongside the consultation process for the new National Action Plan.

3) New National Action Plan for Social Inclusion

The Programme for a Partnership Government commits to developing a new social inclusion strategy to tackle poverty as an integrated plan across government departments. The Plan should represent a whole-of-government approach to improve outcomes for vulnerable and marginalised groups, while recognizing a shared responsibility to implement actions to achieve the revised National Social Target for Poverty Reduction.

The independent review of NAPinclusion and discussions at the Social Inclusion Forum 2017 on the lessons learned from the current Plan and ideas on high-level goals, actions, targets and governance structures will inform the new Plan.

Another aspect will be a review of the wide range of commitments set out in existing Government strategies and plans, many of which are already being implemented. A full list of these supporting actions is currently being compiled. Furthermore, all relevant stakeholders will be consulted with a view to identifying any additional actions that will contribute to the achievement of the new Plan and associated poverty targets. It will also be informed by international developments through the European Commission and other bodies (e.g. UN Sustainable Development Goals).

It is proposed to structure the new Plan around an active inclusion approach. Active inclusion means enabling every citizen, notably the most disadvantaged, to fully participate in society, including having a job. It has three main components, which all the relevant goals and actions would be categorised under: (i) adequate minimum income; (ii) inclusive labour markets; and (iii) access to quality services.

It is anticipated that the timeframe for the new Plan be consistent with that of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Programme for a Partnership Government. It is expected that poverty data for 2020 will be available from the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions in late 2021. So, a four-year timeframe 2018-2021 is proposed. This will allow any future strategy to be informed by progress towards the national poverty targets at that time.

It is anticipated that similar governance structures will apply to the new Plan, with the Social Inclusion Division in the Department co-ordinating the development of a detailed implementation plan monitoring and evaluating progress on the high-level goals, actions and national social targets. This will be done in conjunction with the structures and support of the Senior Officials Group on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform. Periodic progress reports on the implementation plan will be submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Sector Reform. Stakeholder engagement will continue to be an important aspect of the National Action Plan. It has a strong footing in the Department, reflected in the strategic objective of putting the client at the centre of services and policies.

The Department looks forward to hearing your views on the new national anti-poverty strategy.

Department of Social Protection
18th April, 2017