Report on the Public Consultation for the Review of the National Poverty Target

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Report on the Public Consultation for the Review of the National Poverty Target

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Report on the Public Consultation for the Review of the National Poverty Target is Appendix B to the Report of the Review of the National Poverty Target.

The Policy Briefing on the Review of the National Poverty Target and the supporting documentation are available online at www.socialinclusion.ie and www.welfare.ie or click on individual links below:

Policy Briefing: Irish and English

Report of the Review of the National Poverty Target

Appendix A - Consultation on Review of National Poverty Target

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This is a report on the public consultation process undertaken as part of the review of the national poverty target. The purpose of the review was to enable the Government to adopt appropriate and achievable national poverty targets to meet Ireland's contribution to the *Europe 2020 Strategy* and the commitments in the Programme for Government.

The national poverty target, as set out in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016*, is to reduce the rate of consistent poverty to between 2-4 per cent by 2012 and to eliminate it by 2016, from a baseline rate of 7% in 2005. Based on this target, the national poverty target in the Irish *National Reform Programme* for the *Europe 2020 Strategy* is to lift 186,000 people out of consistent poverty by 2016, taking 2008 as the baseline year.

The Minister for Social Protection launched a public consultation process (see Appendix 1) to be undertaken by her Department as part of the review of the national poverty target in September 2011. A crucial element of the review was to ascertain the views of both local community groups and people experiencing poverty from across the country. In order to do this a series of four local workshops took place where people were able to have their say on the poverty targets and how a new poverty target might be developed. These workshops were organised in conjunction with community organisations in Cork, Monaghan, Dublin and Galway in September 2011. In addition an online survey was carried out in order to ascertain the views of the public on the poverty target and how this target could be strengthened in the future. There were 76 respondents to this survey.

A draft report on the consultation process was presented to the Social Inclusion Forum 2011, on November 9th in the F2 Centre, Fatima, Dublin 8. A workshop on the review was also held as part of the Forum, a summary of which is included in this report. Finally, separate meetings were held with three social partner organisations as part of the review.

Chapter 2: Local Workshops

A series of four consultation workshops were held in various community venues in different areas of the country in order to ascertain the views of people experiencing poverty on the review of the national poverty target. The events were organised by the Social Inclusion Division in conjunction with the Community platform. There were over 60 attendees at the meetings and they included members of local community groups, people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, representatives from national organisations, community workers, and members of the public. See Table 1 below for venues and dates of consultation events.

Table 1: Consultation venues and dates

Venue	Host Group	Date
Galway	Galway Traveller Movement	27/09/2011
Cork	Ballyphehane/Togher CDP	28/09/2011
Dublin	One Parent Exchange and Network (OPEN)	29/09/2011
Monaghan	Teach na Daoine FRC	06/10/2011

The events consisted of an input from the Social Inclusion Division on the background (See Annex 2), the context and the purpose of the review and an input from a member of the local community giving a community perspective on the review. Four key questions were put to the group as a basis for discussion. These questions were as follows:

Is it still relevant to have poverty targets in the current economic climate?
Are you satisfied with the existing target or should it be changed? If so, how?
What policy responses are needed to ensure that the poverty targets are met?
Any other issues or comments?

The responses of participants to these questions provided the most important outputs from the local consultation events and these responses are captured below.

2.1 Is it still relevant to have poverty targets in the current economic climate?

The responses to this question primarily focused on how the National Poverty Target affects people experiencing poverty and social exclusion. All groups felt that it was important to have a national poverty target particularly as a declaration of intent from government. A target also provides a benchmark to measure progress and ensures government is accountable if targets are not met.

In this regard, it was felt that in order for it to be effective, a robust system of monitoring had to be implemented. In addition, strong political will is required to ensure meeting poverty targets is seen as a priority. The groups wanted more accountability from government; the example of the United Kingdom was cited where a child poverty target has been enshrined in legislation (Child Poverty Act 2010). Some felt that the government should face some repercussions should there be a failure to meet the target; this was particularly relevant in relation to the commitments made by Ireland under the *Europe 2020 Strategy*. It was also pointed out that a target can be a useful tool to benchmark ourselves against our European partners as part of this agreed European target.

Other issues emerged with regard to the relevance of the national poverty target. It was recognised that the increase in social transfers until 2008 was the primary driver in lifting people out of consistent poverty. The question was raised as to how a target would be met given the fact that social transfer rates have decreased in the last number of years. It was felt that these decreases for some groups were actually pushing more people into poverty, particularly in disadvantaged communities, and that alternative strategies need to be put in place in order to meet the targets. Suggested responses included the development of effective activation policies. However it was a commonly held view among all groups that the current economic climate made it very difficult to achieve the targets.

The issue of how to make the targets more relevant in people's lives was discussed in a number of workshops. Whilst groups recognised the importance of having a target, many felt that targets were not relevant to the lives of many people experiencing poverty. The point was raised that despite the fact that a poverty target currently exists, cuts in both social transfers and services have taken place in the last number of years, thus leaving people sceptical of the real commitment government has to the national poverty target.

There was also a feeling that the statistical information provided in support of the targets did not capture the reality on the ground and that large groups such as those who find themselves in over indebtedness are not included in the figures used to set the target. Some participants said that one of the key initiatives that could make the target more relevant to people experiencing poverty would be to include them in the formulation and monitoring of any new target that may come out of the review.

This would ensure more robust monitoring and allow those people experiencing poverty to buy in to the process.

2.2 Are you satisfied with the existing target or should it be changed? If so, how?

This question elicited a wide and varied range of responses from workshop participants. While there was a focus in all groups on how we could meet the targets, particularly the Europe 2020 target, many felt the broadening of targets and the indicators used to measure poverty needed to be examined.

A key element of the response was the possibility of introducing a range of targets with multiple indicators to support them. These could be specific to particular sectors such as a child poverty target or a target relating to Travellers. New targets focusing on the cohort of young people who have never worked, and have left school early without training or qualifications, were suggested. Some participants felt that the number of people, particularly young men, falling into this category is on the increase and that they are the cohort most likely to fall into long term unemployment. The idea that targets should be introduced relating to the lifecycle groups highlighted in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007- 2016* was discussed by participants. It was felt that the policy structures around these groups were already in place and that the addition of a poverty target relating to them would strengthen the policy supports for them. A key message was that it was desirable to have a child poverty target and that a number of child specific indicators would have to be used to measure this.

The idea was also raised that a target should be created focusing on the “working poor”. Many felt this is crucial as many people have faced pay cuts and are working on reduced hours and are now facing difficulties. It was felt that this group is not captured by any current measure as they are seen as having jobs and as such not at risk. In this context, many felt that the “Low Work Intensity” indicator used by the European Commission should be introduced in Ireland as it would capture this cohort. It was also pointed out that this cohort was already captured by the at-risk-of-poverty measure which focuses on income, but many felt that this was inadequate at capturing the full extent of in work poverty.

The idea that there should be regional poverty targets was raised in a number of workshops. It was felt that areas such as the border region and rural areas suffered specific types of poverty which were not captured by the current overall target. It was recognised that there would be political difficulties with this approach but that it should be considered as certain areas face unique sets of problems and that they would benefit from these kinds of focused targets.

As mentioned above, the indicators by which the poverty is measured were raised by participants. The method of measurement by using the consistent poverty measure was welcomed by many as it targeted those in the most severe form of poverty. However, if we only prioritise tackling the consistent poverty measure over at-risk-of-poverty and material deprivation measures, then problems can be stored up as it is more likely that people who fall into one or the other category are the most likely to fall into consistent poverty in the long term. In addition, any new target would require a new set of indicators to measure performance.

2.3 What policy responses are needed to ensure that the poverty targets are met?

The response and commitment of government was recognised in all the workshops as being the crucial factor in ensuring any new poverty target is met. Many ideas as to what policies the government could formulate, and how they could be implemented, were discussed. These policy responses have to be responsive to the situation on the ground while being innovative in their use of resources given the current economic climate. In order to make these policy responses effective it was felt that an interdepartmental approach needs to be taken, meaning the work of all relevant departments has to be coordinated to ensure duplication is avoided and blockages such as bureaucratic barriers in the system are removed.

In terms of a poverty target, an overall strategy needs to be formulated taking into account all aspects of poverty including employment, income supports, health, children and other relevant areas. It was felt that this holistic approach would lead to better long term outcomes.

Participants expressed the view that preventative policies should be put in place in order to stop people falling into poverty in the first place. These could be related to income supports focused on those at risk of poverty to prevent them falling into consistent poverty. Whilst an equal focus on all indicators (at-risk-of-poverty, material deprivation and consistent poverty) was considered desirable, it was felt that this could lead to a dilution of resources and that the current focus on the consistent poverty measure was acceptable.

The key message coming from the sessions was that appropriate, effective and fair activation policies were required to get people back to work and that an inclusive debate involving people experiencing poverty, community members and policy makers was required to make this happen. In order to engage in effective activation, government needs to put in place strategies where education and up skilling are promoted while also ensuring interventions are targeted at those who need them and are appropriate for the situation of the individuals. The view was expressed that these activation policies should ease the path between welfare and work.

However, participants felt that there is an information deficit in regard to activation policies and this should be addressed as it can cause anxiety to people already experiencing difficulties. Many unemployed people who are reliant on social transfers are concerned as to what activation may mean for them and their families. They are concerned that they might be forced to take on unsuitable training courses or low paying employment at the risk of losing certain social welfare benefits. In this regard, incentives to work are crucial. For instance, it was suggested that people be allowed to keep the medical card while in training or upon taking employment. This was part of the overall discussion on the transition from welfare to work.

The issue of childcare was raised as a barrier to many for people returning to employment, particularly women. Whilst the introduction of the free preschool year was broadly welcomed the expense involved and limited availability of appropriate after school care meant that many could not avail of training and employment opportunities.

The application of Poverty Impact Assessment to all government policies was raised by some participants.[1] This would ensure that government policy in this area is targeted at those who most need it and that new policies do not lead to people falling further into poverty as a result of government policy.

2.4 Any other issues or comments?

Other issues were raised at the meetings, particularly regarding the secondary impacts of poverty and how these could be tackled and ultimately contribute positively to meeting targets.

Literacy was raised as a barrier for people trying to access services and as a barrier to gaining employment. While there is some training available in this area, primarily through the National Adult Literacy Agency, more work is required in identifying those who need literacy assistance.

The impacts on poverty of the loss of services due to lack of resources needs to be examined. Many participants at the events felt that these impacts are not being captured by current indicators and that their full effects haven't yet become apparent yet.

The secondary effects of poverty were discussed. The strain placed on families who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion can lead to mental health issues, alcoholism, and other side effects which make it more difficult for the people living in these households to lift themselves out of poverty if and when opportunities such as employment may arise. These kinds of issues make achieving a poverty target more difficult.

One of the key messages coming through in all of the events was the necessity for the community and voluntary sector to be consulted before decisions relating to poverty and social inclusion policy are made. The consultations on the Review of the National Poverty Target are welcome, but there is a need for more such consultation. Participants also felt that it was important that the outcomes from consultation processes would be evident when policy decisions were made.

1 Poverty Impact Assessment is the process by which policies and programmes are assessed at design, implementation and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty with a view to poverty reduction.

Chapter 3: Online Survey Results

In order to complement the local consultations, an online survey was carried out (See Annex 3). This survey was designed to ascertain people's views on the target and how it could be strengthened in the future. It consisted of 14 questions of varying types from multiple choice to narrative questions. A total of 76 people completed the survey which ran from September 1st 2011 until October 21st 2011. 42 responses came from individuals while 19 responses were from members of voluntary or community organisations. 8 responses were received from service providers. The responses to the survey are analysed below under six themes.

3.1 Theme 1: Perception of Target

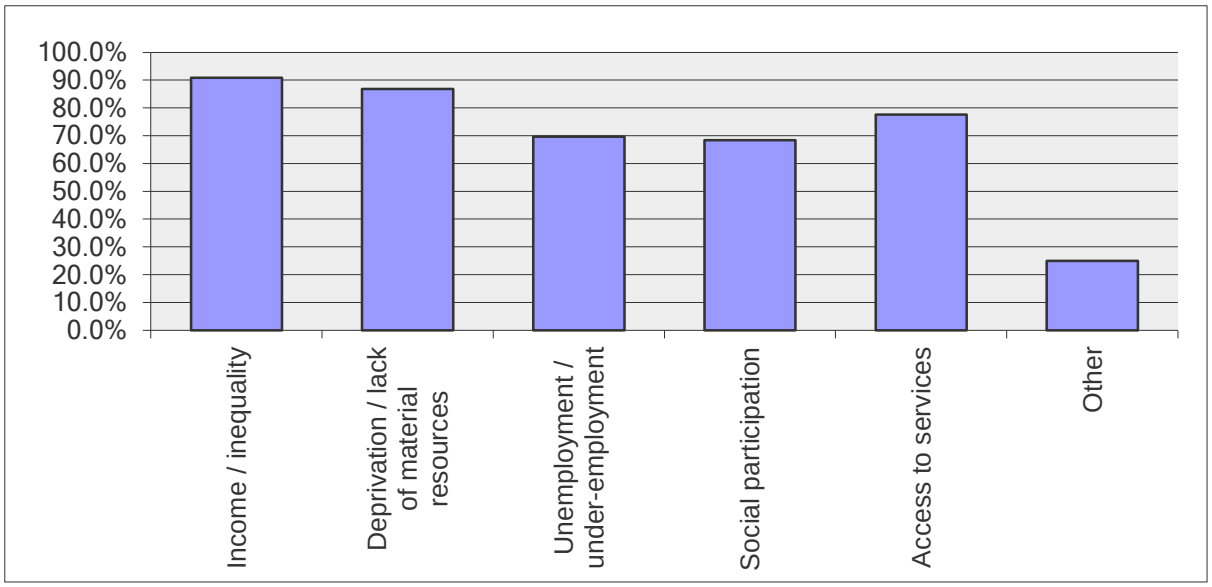
The first two questions of the survey related to awareness of and the importance of the target. Results indicated that 82% of respondents were somewhat or very aware of the existence of the national poverty target, while 97% agreed that it was important to have a national poverty target.

3.2 Theme 2: Choice of indicators and priorities for the national poverty target

The next set of questions related to the indicators used to measure the target. The diagram (Figure 1) overleaf shows how people responded to the question regarding which indicators should be used to identify the target population for the national poverty target. An indicator related to income/inequality was selected by the largest number of respondents to the question. 91% of participants in the survey responded favourably to this while 87% said that a deprivation/lack of material resources indicator should be used. This is interesting as these responses support the use of the at-risk-of-poverty indicator and the material deprivation indicators currently in use.

Those who responded in the "other" category were given an option to include comments. Ideas contributed by participants included the use of indicators relating to educational attainment, gender, levels of household debt and in-work poverty. Many respondents also indicated that the European "Low Work Intensity" indicator would be useful in the Irish context.

Figure 1: What indicators should be used to identify the national poverty target population?



It is interesting to note that 45% of respondents felt that a combination of these indicators was the method that should be used to identify the target population, while 36% felt that an overlap of indicators was most appropriate. Only 13% of respondents felt that stand alone indicators should be used.

The survey asked respondents which groups should be prioritised under the National Poverty Target. Respondents were given a number of options and asked which groups they would prioritise from a list of 10. 81 % of respondents indicated that they would favour that children should be prioritised under the review. This could be in the form of a new child-specific target. It is interesting to note that 51% of people identified the “working poor” as a group that also needed to be prioritised; particularly when it is taken into consideration that only 46% of respondents identified unemployed people as being a priority. 43% identified the homeless while 34% identified both people with disabilities and older people as other groups which they felt should be prioritised under the new target. It was argued in the comments section that all the groups mentioned should be prioritised and that the worst affected by poverty from each group should be targeted. Other groups identified which could be prioritised include those who live in isolation in rural areas, problem drug users and people experiencing literacy difficulties.

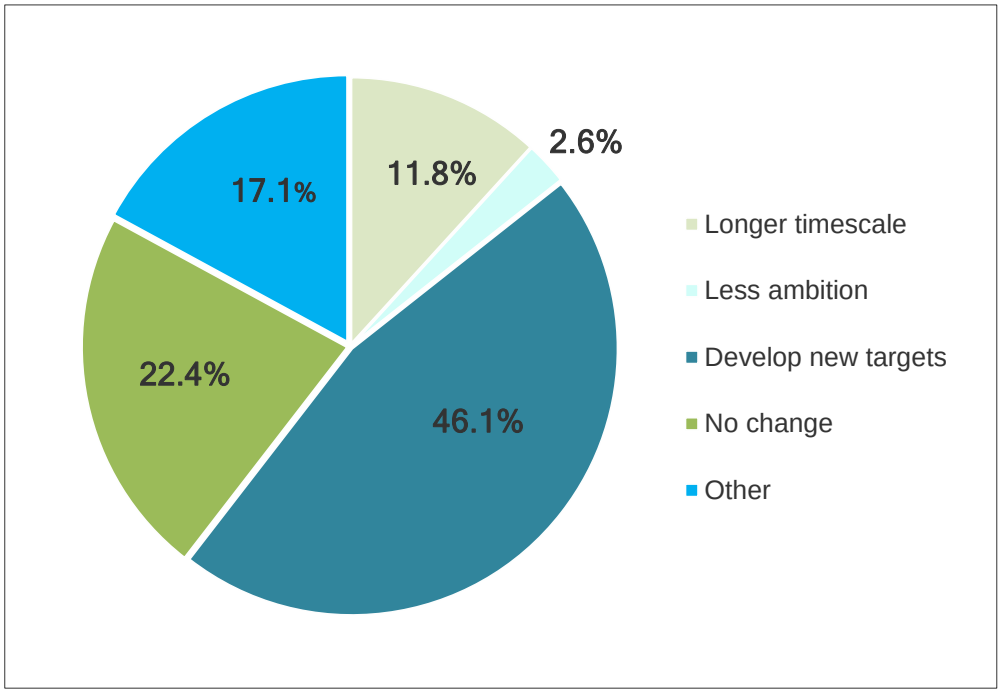
3.3 Theme 3: Impact of the crisis

Respondents were asked to comment on the issues and challenges for the national poverty target resulting from the economic downturn and fiscal crisis.

The overall point was made that the difficulties facing the public finances will have an impact on the ability to meet the target however it was important to maintain expenditure in this area at current levels while maintaining political commitment to the targets. Tackling unemployment through effective use of social transfers and activation strategies is an important step. Any revised target agreed upon must be robust and must be one that cannot be ignored when fiscal adjustment measures are being devised.

Respondents were asked how the poverty target could be adjusted to take into account the economic downturn and the fiscal reality. The graph below (Figure 2) illustrates the responses to the question:

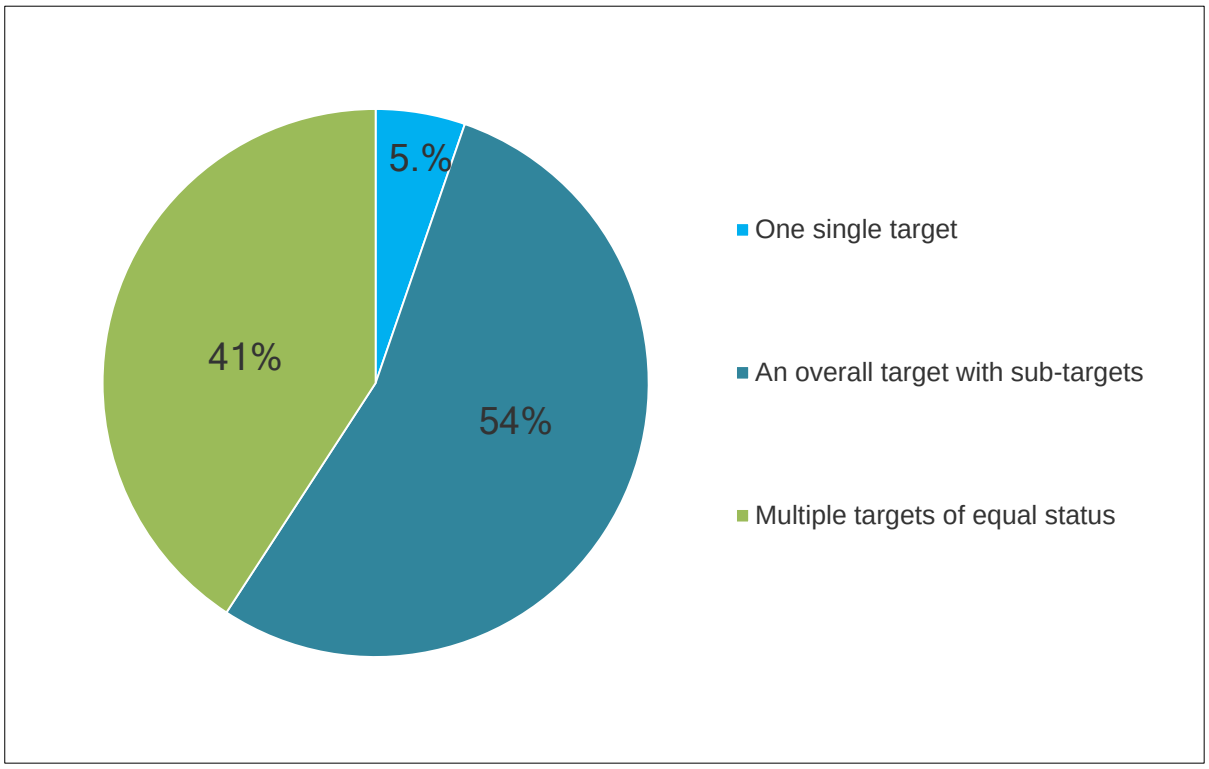
Figure 2: How should the national poverty target be adjusted to take account of the economic downturn?



The survey found that 46% wanted the development of new targets. It was suggested that this could take the form of a number of sub-targets or the development of sectoral targets. 12% indicated that a longer timescale in meeting the targets should be considered as this would provide more time to develop the policy responses and the implementation of services needed to tackle poverty. 22% wanted the current target of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016 to remain in place. Given the current economic context, it is interesting to note that only 3% of respondents were willing to consider a less ambitious poverty target than the one currently in place.

Respondents were asked if there should be a single or multiple national poverty targets. The graph below (Figure 3) illustrates the responses:

Figure 3: Should there be a single or multiple national poverty target?



54% of people preferred an overall target with a number of sub-targets, while only 5% of respondents felt that there should be one single target. 41% felt that there should be multiple targets of equal status. A number of comments were made by participants.

It was suggested that the issue of poverty was too complex to deal by way of a single target and multiple targets are more appropriate. Respondents felt that a single target was more focused and provided clarity on the issue of poverty. The desirability of a child poverty target as a sub target to an overall target was again raised by respondents in the comments section.

3.4 Theme 4: Link between the national and EU poverty targets

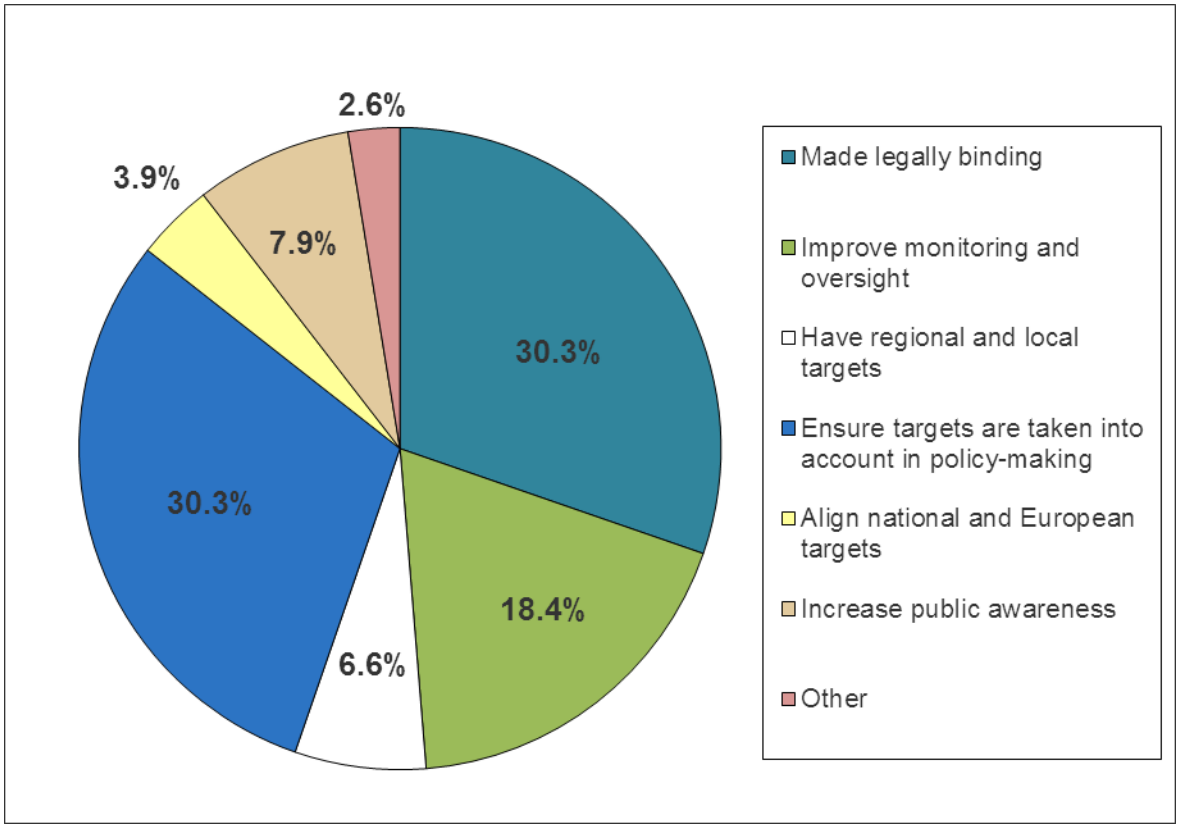
The link between the national poverty target and the new EU poverty target was the focus of a question in the survey. Respondents were asked how the national poverty target should take into account the new EU poverty target. Some respondents questioned the ambition of the European target and wanted the national target in place to remain.

Respondents also felt that the consistent poverty measure used in Ireland could act as a model for the European target. Other respondees welcomed the European target and suggested the establishment of a link between the indicators used in Europe and those used in Ireland with particular reference to the Low Work Intensity indicator.

3.5 Theme 5: Strengthening the National Poverty Target

The graph below (Figure 4) illustrates the responses to how the National Poverty Target could be strengthened.

Figure 4: How could the national poverty target be strengthened?



In their comments, a number of respondents stated that they would like to see the target strengthened by a combination of the above actions. It is essential to note that 30% of respondents felt that central government has a key role to play in meeting the national poverty target; both in ensuring targets are taken into account in policy making and in making the National Poverty Target legally binding. By making the target legally binding, government would be held to account if it is not met.

Equally, 30% of respondents wanted the target to be taken into account when government policy is being formulated. This could take the form of carrying out poverty impact assessments on policy proposals to ascertain their impact on poverty.

18% of respondents wanted improved monitoring and oversight of targets if they are to have an impact on poverty rates. In this regard a number of respondents said that they would like people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to be involved in both the design and monitoring stages of policy development, as they were of the view that this insight would make for more robust and effective policy making.

3.6 Theme 6: National Poverty Target and Policy Responses

The survey asked respondents to prioritise policy measures in order to meet the poverty target. Respondents were given a number of options and asked which options they would prioritise on a scale of 1-7.

Respondents clearly indicated that the provision of services for those experiencing poverty and supports for children and families should be considered the highest priorities when developing measures in order to meet the poverty target. Respondents also identified welfare benefits and work incentives as important priorities in this regard, these could include a form of in-work income support. Another priority area identified was the development of an integrated education, training and activation strategy. A jobs stimulus package should also be considered. Other respondents felt that all options should be considered as part of an overall policy response, rather than prioritising specific areas.

Chapter 4: Consultations with the Community and Voluntary Pillar and Trade Union Pillar

Consultation meetings were held with the community and voluntary pillar and the Trade Union Pillar of social partnership. The meeting with the community and voluntary pillar was attended by representatives from the Irish Council for Social Housing, St Vincent de Paul, OPEN, Congress Centres Network and Social Justice Ireland. A separate meeting with members of the End Child Poverty Coalition, which is a partnership of eight national non-governmental organisations working together to end child poverty in Ireland, was also held. Members of this group are also members of the community and voluntary pillar. The Trade Union meeting was attended by members of Congress and SIPTU. The following points were discussed at the meetings:

- Challenges in meeting the national poverty target arising from the economic and fiscal situation.
- Alignment of the national poverty target and the EU poverty target under the *Europe 2020 Strategy*.
- Different levels of ambition for poverty reduction in the economic circumstances
- Integration of the national poverty target with government/departmental policies.

We will deal with the responses to each issue raised in turn below.

4.1 Challenges in meeting the national poverty target arising from the economic and fiscal situation

It was recognised that the current national poverty target of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016 is ambitious in the current context given the austerity measures which have been implemented by government in recent years. These measures, including the reduction of social transfers and the reduction in spending on services make it very difficult to meet the current target. This did not take away from the fact having a national poverty target has proved useful particularly in relation to holding government accountable for meeting that target. The group also felt that the target encourages more positive decisions relating to social policy, particularly in relation to anti-poverty policy.

The trade union pillar highlighted the unemployment problem as a major obstacle in meeting the current target, or any new target on time. Long term unemployment leads to marginalisation and people in long term unemployment are more affected by reductions in spending on social transfers and other cuts to services. Service reduction will also affect other groups who are dependent on public services which will impact on our ability to meet the national poverty target.

4.2 Alignment of the national poverty target and the EU poverty target under the *Europe 2020 Strategy*

The community and voluntary pillar immediately raised the issue of the ambition levels of each target. When taken in an Irish context the European target aims to lift 186,000 out of consistent poverty by 2020 whereas the Irish target, as mentioned above, aimed to eliminate consistent poverty by 2016. It was argued that the current Irish national target should not be watered down to meet the less ambitious European target. There was a particular concern that this European target could be met with relative ease if economic growth resumes while the underlying causes of poverty and social exclusion will not be addressed. This is particularly relevant in the case of new groups who have emerged during the recession such as emigrants, people experiencing in work poverty and those who are heavily indebted. These groups will find it difficult to emerge from poverty as the economic situation improves.

The indicators used to measure both the national and European Targets were raised. There was concern expressed among the group about the use of the consistent poverty indicator. It was recognised that this was a useful measure, however by focusing on a cohort in extreme difficulty it did not help address broader social issues which can also impact on poverty. The at-risk-of-poverty measure is very useful as it is income based so is easy to communicate to a wider audience. It indicates people's ability to participate in society and in this regard it is a crucial measure. The at-risk-of-poverty measure also picks up many more people than the more focused consistent poverty measure. The Irish material deprivation measure was recognised as performing well and indeed better, the equivalent European measure as the Irish standard is more robust. In Europe the low work intensity was used as part of the overall European measure of poverty and it was argued by the trade union pillar that, with some modifications, it could prove useful in an Irish context. There is also the need for an in work poverty measure which could feed into the overall target.

The trade union pillar felt that the number of people falling into this category are on the increase and as such a measure needs to be developed to capture this group. The trade union pillar also argues that specific targets could be introduced for the measures that are currently in use mentioned above and the suggested additional indicators such as the low work intensity measure could be introduced to complement the existing measures.

The slow pace of making data on poverty available was raised and contrasted with the availability on the economic and financial data which is produced regularly and is available in a timely fashion. The *Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)* data by which poverty is measured in Ireland is issued every November for the year preceding it. The community and voluntary pillar felt that this compares poorly with data on economic measures which is published in a more timely fashion and with more frequency.

The issue of targets for sub groups was raised and all groups felt it would be important to introduce these as they would pick up people on the margins, particularly as the current indicators provide and overall picture but the experiences of different groups are not captured. All groups strongly supported the development of a child poverty target.

Currently the baseline year for measurement on the national target is 2007 and the idea of using a new baseline year for the target was discussed. A number of options were discussed with 2008 being suggested as it brings us into line with the European baseline year while using a baseline year of 2010 was also suggested given that a new target is being developed and measurement should be by reference to the most recent data available. It was important that the basis for the choice of any new baseline year was expressed clearly to avoid any suggestion of manipulation of the poverty figures.

4.3 Different levels of ambition for poverty reduction in the economic circumstances

It was recognised that the current poverty target was ambitious given the current economic and fiscal circumstances. However the trade union pillar felt it was important to have a poverty target even if this target will be difficult to meet in the short term.

The community and voluntary pillar agreed, arguing that even if the target was not to be met in the short term then it was important that government implement a set of initiatives to that will show their commitment to meeting the overall poverty target in the long term and that will bring numbers experiencing poverty down as much as is possible in the short term.

The introduction of short, medium and long term targets was suggested as short term targets would provide intervals for reassessment on the road to meeting the long term target.

If a new target is to be implemented then consideration must be given to implementing a diverse range of targets including targets directed at new groups that have emerged during the recession discussed above. However it is important that any approach needs to holistic and deals with all facets of poverty if the development of a hierarchy of poverty is to be avoided.

There was also a belief that if the current target is watered down then it will be difficult to get a commitment to a more ambitious target in the future.

4.4 Integration of the national poverty target with government/departmental policies

The group emphasised the importance of the maintenance of social transfer rates into the future as they are the most effective tool in reducing poverty rates. Along with this an effective activation strategy must be implemented. This strategy should be driven by effective education and training policy, including literacy supports, this is particularly relevant as the literacy problems are a barrier to some individuals in accessing services and employment opportunities. In addition activation policy needs to be linked to the national poverty target in order to make enhance the effectiveness of both. This policy should help develop a culture of empowerment for people experiencing poverty rather than one of sanction and control (examples of this would be threats to remove benefits if specific job/training placements are not taken up). It should give people the tools to gain employment and lift themselves out of poverty with tangible outcomes for people who go through the activation process.

A key issue raised by both pillars was that if the national poverty target was to be met then government departments and key stakeholders will need to work in a more co-ordinated fashion. There is a perception that the national poverty target was a purely social welfare target and as such decisions made by other departments are not made with reference to the current target. It is vital that the new target is communicated as a government-wide target and that the target needs to be referenced when decisions are being made, particularly in areas of health, education, training and welfare policy.

The point was made strongly throughout the consultation process and was reiterated in the social partners meetings that poverty impact assessment needs to be carried out on all government policy initiatives to ensure that proposals do not negatively impact people experiencing poverty.

Chapter 5. Social Inclusion Forum

The annual Social Inclusion Forum was held on 9th November 2011 in F2 Centre, 3 Reuben Plaza, Rialto, Dublin 8. The Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) was established by the Government as part of the structures to monitor and evaluate Ireland's *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPinclusion) 2007- 2016.* The conference provides a forum for engagement between officials from Government Departments, Community and Voluntary Organisations and people experiencing poverty in relation to the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The review of the National Poverty Target was a key theme for discussion at this year's event.

Jim Walsh from the Social Inclusion Division gave an input to the opening plenary session of the forum detailing the on-going progress on the review.

A workshop was held to address one of the terms of reference for the review: to consider how the Government can set out different levels of ambition for poverty reduction having regard to the economic circumstances, the likely economic and fiscal scenario for the immediate years ahead and EU/ECB/IMF Troika agreement.

The following questions were considered in the workshop:

- Should the national poverty target be adjusted to take account of the economic downturn and the new fiscal reality?
- How can the situation of vulnerable groups, with higher poverty rates, be reflected in the national poverty target?
- Should there be a differentiated approach to national poverty targets using a range of indicators?
- Should the focus be on short, medium and long-term poverty targets to reflect current and future economic realities, including the policy priority to protect the most vulnerable from economic and fiscal adjustments?

The workshop began with context setting inputs from two experts:

- Paul Ginnell, European Anti-Poverty Network – Presentation on EAPN views on the Review of Poverty Target
- Dorothy Watson, Economic and Social Research Institute Measuring Poverty for the National Anti-Poverty Programme.

The group then addressed the four key questions discussed above. We will deal with the responses to each question individually.

5.1 Should the national poverty target be adjusted to take account of the economic downturn and the new fiscal reality?

There was a consensus from the group that the levels of ambition in the current target of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016 should remain in place. This level of ambition represents a statement of intent from the government; there was also the view that if the targets were diluted then it would be very difficult to strengthen them again in the future.

Measurement of poverty was also raised as an issue with participants suggesting the use of the persistent poverty indicator in measuring poverty[2]. It was pointed out that whilst this is a useful indicator there are difficulties in gathering data for this measure, particularly in relation to the sample size available for analysis. The availability of data for all poverty measures was an issue for people at the workshop. Many felt that the data available does not pick up a large number of people experiencing difficulty as many people are reticent to speak about the situations they may find themselves in.

The group agreed that the ambition of the current target should not be downgraded but that there is potential to use other indicators such as the Persistent Poverty indicator to measure poverty.

5.2 How can the situation of vulnerable groups, with higher poverty rates, be reflected in the national poverty target?

In response to this target the group focused on the idea that sub targets would be very useful in targeting vulnerable groups with higher poverty rates. There was particular reference to desegregating poverty targets, this could mean the development of a specific target for women. Other sub groups that were suggested where targets might be effective were people experiencing long term unemployment, Children, older people, people in isolated rural areas, people in disadvantaged urban areas and travellers. Specific indicators would need to be introduced to measure poverty in these groups. Participants also felt that groups of people experiencing other issues such as physical disabilities, people experiencing difficulties in their mental health and people with literacy difficulties may also need a target dedicated to them.

[2] The persistent poverty indicator is defined as the percentage of people below the at risk of poverty threshold in the current year and in two of the last three previous years.

It is important to note that while the use of the consistent poverty indicator was welcomed it should be complemented by other indicators directed at these vulnerable groups.

The approach of having specific targets for specific groups does have issues however. It was stated at the workshop that it may not be possible to identify and formulate a target for every vulnerable group and that an overall national target with targets related to specific sub groups might be the best approach. Progress on the sub targets could be measured by reference to the national target and any groups where were not performing as well as the national target could then trigger a particular policy response. This would also have the effect of strengthening the monitoring of the target by providing a reference point by which to benchmark sub targets.

The group made the point strongly that tackling poverty in particular vulnerable groups would have long term benefits and would decrease the risk of intergenerational poverty taking hold.

5.3 Should there be a differentiated approach to national poverty targets using a range of indicators?

Given that poverty and social exclusion is a complex and a multidimensional phenomenon a wide and participants suggested a varied range of indicators should be used to measure this. These suggestions included the use of a regional indicator which could feed into an overall regional target. It was suggested that the border region should have its own targets given the unique difficulties faced in these areas with jobs and economic activity potentially going over the border to Northern Ireland.

Indicators dedicated to measuring the numbers of the immigrant community should be introduced. Participants felt that immigrants are more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion, particularly asylum seekers who are recipients of direct provision from the Department of Justice and Equality. Currently they are not included in the poverty statistics as they do not live in households measured by the *Survey on Income and Living Conditions* carried out by the Central Statistics Office.

The issue of EU indicators were raised. The EU uses a portfolio of 27 indicators to monitor the European Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion. It was suggested that Ireland's indicators could be more closely aligned with these EU indicators. Whilst it was recognised that these are not specifically poverty indicators, it was felt that it was still important to take cognisance of them.

5.4 Should the focus be on short, medium and long-term poverty targets to reflect current and future economic realities, including the policy priority to protect the most vulnerable from economic and fiscal adjustments?

The idea of a long term target which would focus on intergenerational poverty was raised. People experiencing long term unemployment find it more difficult to access supports such as education and training and job opportunities which makes it very difficult for people to lift themselves out of poverty. This will impact on children in these families and can lead to intergenerational poverty. A long term target could focus on such households and policy responses could be designed tackle this issue.

Participants felt that a short term strategy was also important as those currently experiencing difficulties must be assisted before they fall into the long term cycle of poverty. Questions of the commitment of government to protect those most vulnerable from the economic and fiscal adjustments taking place were raised, in particular the relevance of poverty targets to these decisions. There is a perception that government are not looking at the target when formulating policies and making decisions on social transfers or service reduction which impact on those experiencing poverty.

Annex 1: Having Your Say Information Flyer

Have your say on the review of the national poverty target

Have your say

Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton is overseeing a government review of the national poverty target. Minister Burton has launched a public consultation on the review and invites all stakeholders to Have Your Say.

You can have your say through:

Local workshops for community representatives and people experiencing poverty to be held in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Monaghan. The workshops will be held in September.

An online survey to ascertain the views of individuals and organisations on the review of the poverty target. The survey will be open until 21st October, 2011.

The annual Social Inclusion Forum which will consider the key issues in the reveiw. The forum takes place on the 9th November, in the F2 Centre, Fatima, Dublin 8.

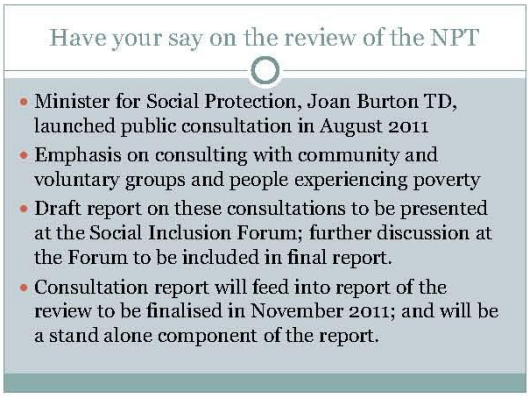
A technical workshop for experts in poverty research from government departments and agencies, the social partners, academics and research organisations will take place in September.

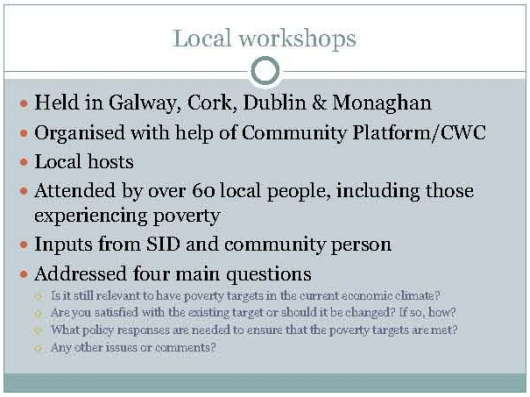
Bilateral meetings with the social partners will take place in October.

Events organised by other organisations, where the review will be discussed.

The Social Inclusion Division has prepared a consultation paper setting out the background to the national poverty target and identifying the main issues to be considered. The review is scheduled to be completed by the end of November 2011. Further details and background papers are available at www.socialinclusion.ie. Any queries can be directed to the Social Inclusion Division at social.inclusion@welfare.ie and 01-7043245.

Annex 2: Having Your Say Social Inclusion Forum Presentation





Main points (1)

- National poverty target still important
- But, a disconnect between target and what people are experiencing on the ground
  - Welfare reductions
  - Unemployment
  - Reduction in services
  - Indebtedness
- Desire to broaden the target
  - indicators
  - groups

Main points (2)

- Preventative measures required to stop people falling into poverty
- Poverty impact assessment of policies
- 'Whole of government' approach
- Activation should be appropriate, effective and fair
- Barriers to employment
- Consultation with C&V groups

Online survey

- Ran from mid Sept to late October
- 76 responses
  - 42 individuals
  - 19 C&V
  - 8 service providers
- 14 mainly quantitative questions
- comment boxes

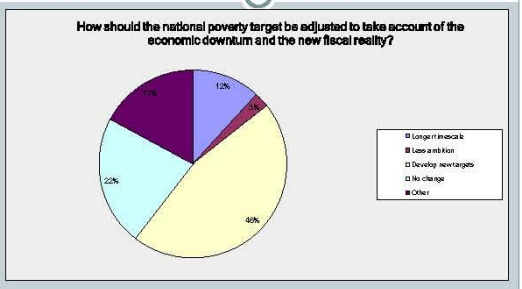
Main findings (1)

- 97% said important to have a NPT, though only 82% were aware of the target
- c 90% of respondents said income and deprivation indicators should be used to set poverty target;
- 80% said services, 70% said unemployment & social participation
- 45% said indicators should be combined; 36% said the focus should be on the overlap; 13% said stand alone indicators

Main findings (2)

- Four in five respondents prioritised a poverty target for children; half said the 'working poor'
- Other priority groups included unemployed, homeless and people with disabilities

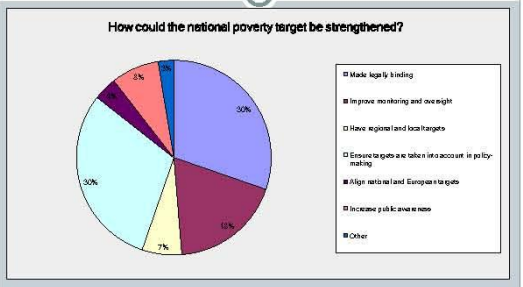
Main findings (3)



Main findings (4)

- 54% of Rs want overall target with sub-targets
- 41% want multiple targets of equal status
- 5% want single target

Main findings (5)



Main findings (6)

- Provision of services and supports for children and families the highest policy priorities
- Welfare benefits and in-work supports also important
- Jobs, training and education also important

Next steps

- Comments on the report, either from participants in local workshops or from SIF delegates?
- Add in outcome of SIF workshop discussion
- Also consultations with C&V groups and SPs
- Report will be published on www.socialinclusion.ie

Annex 3: Having Your Say Online Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this online survey on the review of the national poverty target. Your views will inform the outcome of the review.

A consultation paper setting out the background to the review and identifying the main issues to be considered is available on www.socialinclusion.ie.

Details on other consultation events are available on www.socialinclusion.ie.

***1. I am responding**

- ◯ As an individual
- ◯ As a member of a voluntary or community organisation
- ◯ As a service provider
- ◯ Other

If a member of an organisation or service provider, please give name

***2. How aware are you of the national poverty target?**

- ◯ Very aware
- ◯ Somewhat aware
- ◯ Not at all aware

***3. How important is it to have a national poverty target?**

- ◯ Very important
- ◯ Somewhat important
- ◯ Not important

Please elaborate your response below

***4. What indicators (measures) should be used to identify the target population for the national poverty target? (Please tick all that you feel apply)**

- ☐ Income / inequality
- ☐ Deprivation / lack of material resources
- ☐ Unemployment / under-employment
- ☐ Social participation
- ☐ Access to services
- ☐ Other

Other (Please specify)

***5. How should these indicators be used to identify the target population?**

- ◯ Stand alone indicators
- ◯ Overlap of indicators
- ◯ Combined together
- ◯ No opinion

Please make any additional comments in the box below

***6. Which of the following groups should be a priority in the national poverty target? (Please rank your top three groups)**

Children	
Unemployed	
People with disabilities	
Lone parents	
Working poor	
Members of the Traveller Community	
Older people	
Homeless people	
Ethnic minorities and migrant workers	
Other (Please specify)	

***7. What are the issues/challenges for the national poverty target in the economic downturn and fiscal crisis?**

***8. How should the national poverty target be adjusted to take account of the economic downturn and the new fiscal reality?**

- ◯ Longer timescale
- ◯ Less ambition
- ◯ Develop new targets
- ◯ No change
- ◯ Other

Please elaborate on your response below

***9. Should there be a single or multiple national poverty target(s)?**

- ◯ One single target
- ◯ An overall target with sub-targets
- ◯ Multiple targets of equal status

Please elaborate on your response below

***10. How should the national poverty target take account of the new EU poverty target?**

***11. How could the national poverty target be strengthened?**

- ◯ Made legally binding
- ◯ Improve monitoring and oversight
- ◯ Have regional and local targets
- ◯ Ensure targets are taken into account in policy-making
- ◯ Align national and European targets
- ◯ Increase public awareness
- ◯ Other

Other (Please specify)

***12. What policy measures should be prioritised in order to meet the national poverty target? (Please rank your responses from 1 to 7)**

Welfare benefits	
Work incentives	
Access to employment	
Services for those experiencing poverty	
Supports for children and families	
Community initiatives	
Other (Please specify)	

***13. How did you find out about the review of the national poverty target?**

- ◯ Media
- ◯ Activelink
- ◯ www.socialinclusion.ie
- ◯ Community or voluntary networks
- ◯ Direct contact from the Social Inclusion Division
- ◯ Attended a consultation event
- ◯ Other

Other (Please specify)

14. Please make any additional comments you have on the review of the national poverty target in the box below

Thank you. The survey is now completed.