



THE NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

Forum Opinion No. 8

August 2000



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Section I

**Introduction
and Overview**

Introduction and Overview

1.1 Following up on the commitments which were made at the UN World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1997, the Government approved the preparation and development of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). In essence, the NAPS is now the Government's multi-annual Strategy to address poverty in an integrated way across five key policy areas:

- Income Adequacy;
- Unemployment;
- Educational Disadvantage;
- Rural Poverty; and
- Disadvantaged Urban Areas.

1.2 The Forum was given the following specific role by the Government in relation to the NAPS:

The National Economic and Social Forum has responsibility for monitoring the social inclusion element of Partnership 2000 and in that context will be specifically asked to report on the progress of implementing the National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

1.3 The Forum is well placed to review the Strategy and to report on the key issues affecting its implementation, given its uniquely wide representative structure and its focus on evaluating the implementation and effectiveness of a broad range of issues relating to poverty reduction, social inclusion and equality.

1.4 The Plenary Session of the Forum, held on April 4th 2000, was devoted to a debate on the National Anti-Poverty Strategy¹. It was opened by the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs, Mr. Dermot Ahern T.D., who has the lead role on the Anti-Poverty Strategy at Cabinet level. This Session also benefited from informative presentations from the Minister's Department and the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA).

¹ The Forum's first Opinion on the NAPS was published as Forum Opinion No. 2 in January 1996.

- 1.5 The CPA has recently completed an initial assessment of the NAPS². This assessment charts progress to date, assesses key achievements and, on this basis, draws conclusions on the issues to be addressed in the future implementation of the NAPS. It was underpinned by an extensive postal survey of the various organisations involved in implementing the NAPS - the statutory sector, the community and voluntary sector, social partners, academics, political advisers, the media and representatives of local government. The results of the assessment were presented at a major conference earlier this year.
- 1.6 Both the Forum and the Agency have been assigned a monitoring role by the Government. The Agency focuses on over-seeing a technical evaluation of the NAPS process and deals with detailed policies and implementation issues. The Forum sees its role, which is complementary to this, as more strategic and directed at monitoring the overall progress made in implementing the NAPS. Particular care has been taken to avoid duplication through regular and on-going contacts through, for example, the Agency's participation at the Forum's Plenary Session and the representation by the Forum's Secretariat on the Agency's Evaluation Advisory Committee on the NAPS.
- 1.7 This Opinion has been drawn up on the basis of the discussion and debate at the Plenary Session on 4th April and of subsequent work carried out by the Forum's Management Committee.
- 1.8 At the outset, the Forum wishes to emphasise that the NAPS, with its cross-Party support in the Oireachtas and the backing of all the Social Partners, represents an important landmark and a new departure towards a more effective, co-ordinated and integrated approach to policy-making in this country. The NAPS process is also innovative and flexible in seeking to identify what works and does not work and its possible application to other policy areas should be examined and actively encouraged.
- 1.9 While a lot has been achieved over the last few years, nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that this represents only a beginning. Much more decisive progress is needed in this area, as evidenced by the fact that at the present time

² Combat Poverty Agency (2000) *Planning for a More Inclusive Society: An Initial Assessment of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

of unprecedented prosperity in our society some 22 per cent of our people are still living below the 50 per cent poverty line, while one in ten Irish households are experiencing consistent poverty.

- 1.10 It is against this background that the Forum has prepared the present Opinion. A summary of its main conclusions and recommendations are listed in Box 1 beneath.

Acknowledgements

- 1.11 The Forum wishes to record its appreciation and thanks to Ms. Candy Murphy, Goodbody Economic Consultants, for her assistance in the preparation of this Opinion as well as to Ms. Mary Kennedy, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and Ms. Helen Johnston, Combat Poverty Agency, for the briefing papers which they prepared and presented at the Forum's Plenary Session in April last.

BOX 1

Summary List of Main Recommendations

(i) NAPS Strategy and Targets

- Reasons why the NAPS has not bedded down in some Government Departments should be examined and action taken, if necessary, by the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion;
- Future NAPS targets should be extended to new areas (such as the reduction of child poverty), while the targets themselves should now be more ambitious, more challenging and more specific;
- Consideration should be given to extending the global target to cover relative poverty indicators;
- Related performance indicators, against which targets can be assessed, should be developed; this should also include the setting of agreed output and outcome indicators for each target; and
- All Government Departments should publish strategic objectives under the NAPS and annual plans to realise these objectives.

(ii) Poverty-proofing

- Much greater transparency is needed and the results of poverty-proofing exercises should be made public;
- More specifically, there should be a commitment to poverty-proofing the Annual Budget and EU Operational Programmes;
- Poverty-proofing should be systematically applied across all Government Departments and not just those with a specific poverty remit;
- More adequate staff training and supports are needed to ensure that the poverty-proofing process is implemented as effectively as possible; and
- The process should be the subject of on-going reviews of its impact and effectiveness.

(iii) Extending the NAPS to the Local Authorities and Other Agencies at Local Levels

- The planned extension of the NAPS should be underpinned in the new Local Government Bill;
- The proposed social inclusion units should be established in a wide range of local authorities viz. authorities of different sizes and in both urban and rural areas;
- The NAPS should also be extended to the City/County Development Boards and other official bodies at regional and local levels;
- All these bodies should develop, in consultation with local communities, anti-poverty policies, with related objectives and annual plans, and devote resources (including staff training and poverty-proofing mechanisms) to their effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and
- Training, capacity-building supports and funding are also needed for the NGOs.

Section II

Main Features of the NAPS

Main Features of the NAPS

2.1 This Section of the Opinion is divided into the following parts:

- *NAPS Strategy;*
- *NAPS Targets;*
- *NAPS Institutional Mechanisms; and*
- *Poverty-proofing.*

NAPS Strategy

2.2 An Inter-Departmental Policy Committee developed the details of the ten-year National Anti-Poverty Strategy, based on widespread consultations with the Social Partners. The Strategy, which was launched in April 1997³, sets out targets for poverty reduction in the five key areas that are listed at the beginning of Section I of the Opinion. It also put in place new institutional mechanisms designed to drive and guide the implementation process. A number of principles were also adopted to underpin the Strategy. These principles included commitments to guaranteeing the rights of minorities, reducing inequalities, developing a partnership approach, the active involvement of the community and voluntary sector and encouraging self-reliance.

2.3 The NAPS sets a global target for poverty reduction in Ireland, which is a major step forward in policy terms. This target was to reduce the number of people who are living in consistent poverty from 9-15 per cent in 1994 to less than 5-10 per cent by 2007 (based on 1994 data)⁴. Consistent poverty is defined as being below 50-60 per cent of average household disposable income and at the same time experiencing *enforced* basic deprivation on at least one of the deprivation indicators. These indicators include: lack of adequate heating, arrears of rent, mortgage, electricity or gas, debts relating to ordinary living expenses, a day without a substantial meal, and lack of a warm waterproof coat.

³ Ireland was the first EU Member State to adopt such a global poverty target and strategy.

⁴ See Table 1 below.

NAPS Targets

2.4 The key themes and original targets are shown below:

Table 1: Poverty and Unemployment Themes and Targets

	Consistent Poverty	Unemployment	Long-term Unemployment
Original position 1996	9-15%	11.9%	7%
Original target 2007	5-10%	6%	3.5%

Other targets are:

Educational Disadvantage:

- No primary students with literacy/numeracy problems;
- Eliminate early school leaving (before Junior Certificate); and
- 90 per cent sit Leaving Certificate by 2000, 98 per cent by 2007.

Disadvantaged Urban Areas

- Reduce deprivation by increasing standard of living and providing opportunities for participation; and
- Emphasis on unemployment/long term unemployment.

Rural Poverty

- Increase in services to rural areas; and
- Emphasis on education, unemployment and income adequacy.

NAPS Institutional Mechanisms

2.5 To ensure effective implementation of the NAPS the following institutional mechanisms were put in place:

Political Level

Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion (Chaired by the Taoiseach) provides the leadership to advance the goals of the NAPS.

Administrative Level

- Senior Officials Social Inclusion Group prepares the agenda and recommendations for the Cabinet Committee;
- Inter-Departmental Policy Committee (Departmental officials and representatives from State Agencies such as the CPA, ADM and FÁS) provides a strategic focus for the NAPS; and
- Departmental Liaison Officers who act as first point of contact on NAPS issues.

2.6 In addition, there is a NAPS Unit, located in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, whose role is to co-ordinate work being done in the individual Government Departments and feed this back to the Inter-Departmental Committee and the Cabinet Committee. The Unit also has responsibility for promoting the NAPS within the civil service and for cross-Department liaison. Liaison Officers were appointed in each Department to assist in implementation within their Department and to liaise with the NAPS Unit.

Monitoring and Evaluation

2.7 As already mentioned in Section I, both the Combat Poverty Agency and the NESF were given complementary roles by the Government in monitoring and evaluating the NAPS.

Poverty-proofing

2.8 In July 1998, following agreement with the Social Partners, the Government approved a new system of poverty-proofing as part of official Cabinet procedures. This means that all significant policy proposals must now be assessed to indicate their likely impact on poverty reduction. To assist in the implementation process,

the NAPS Unit produced a set of guidelines and worked examples on poverty-proofing which were distributed to all Government Departments.

- 2.9 The NAPS-related revised targets and poverty-proofing mechanisms have now been in place for over a year. Given the Forum's role in monitoring the impact of the Strategy, this Opinion presents the Forum's views on progress made to date under the NAPS (Section IV) and highlights areas requiring greater attention and focus in the future (Section V).

Section III

**Current
Situation and
Extent of
Poverty**

Current Situation and Extent of Poverty

3.1 This Section of the Opinion is divided into the following parts:

- *Current Targets;*
- *Extent of Poverty; and*
- *Poverty and Equality Linkages.*

Current Targets

3.2 The original global target and unemployment targets set for the NAPS were quickly achieved and surpassed. This was due in part at least to the buoyant economy and to the fact that the targets had been based on out-of-date information. New targets were set in July 1999 at the launch of the First NAPS Annual Report⁵. These were again revised in the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) to reflect continuing buoyant developments in the economy and the labour market. The current position is shown below, along with the original and revised targets:

Table 2: NAPS Targets, 1997-2007

DATE	Consistent Poverty	Unemployment	Long-term Unemployment
Original position 1996	9-15%	11.9%	7%
Original target 2007	5-10%	6%	3.5%
Revised Targets 2004	5%	5% (2002)	2.5% (2002)
NEAP Targets		5% (2000)	2% (2000)
Current Position ⁶		4.7%	1.7%

⁵ Inter-Departmental Policy Committee (1999) *Social Inclusion Strategy - 1998/99 Annual Report of the Inter-Departmental Policy Committee*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.

⁶ Central Statistics Office (2000) *Quarterly National Household Survey - First Quarter 2000*, Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

In contrast to the above achievements, little progress has been made, however, in meeting the NAPS educational target of raising the percentage of students who complete the senior-cycle. While a contributory factor in this has been the buoyant employment opportunities for early school-leavers, it has also to be accepted that policies up to now have not been sufficiently supportive of the pupils, the families, the schools and the local communities concerned. Moreover, the particular problem of adult illiteracy⁷ and other quality of life indicators such as healthcare and homelessness were not included among the NAPS targets.

3.3 The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) has reinforced the NAPS process in a number of important respects such as:

- a commitment to update the Strategy and related targets, and to review its methodology;
- working groups are being reconstituted to review existing targets and to identify new themes and set appropriate targets for them;
- a commitment to collection of the data required to effectively monitor the impact of the NAPS;
- mechanisms for strengthening involvement by the Social Partners; and
- extension of poverty-proofing arrangements to Local Authorities and the Health Boards.

3.4 There is also going to be a review of the implementation of the poverty-proofing system and, given its role for benchmarking progress under social partnership agreements, the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) was recently asked by the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion to undertake this task.

Extent of Poverty in Ireland

3.5 In terms of the standard macro indicators, the performance of the Irish economy over the last decade has been remarkable. GNP per head has increased by a cumulative 65 per cent in real terms since 1990 and there are now over 430,000 additional people at work compared with 10 years ago. The rate of unemployment has fallen from 16 per cent in 1994 to under 5 per cent at present and is still continuing to fall.

⁷ In August 2000, The Department of Education & Science published a White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life*.

- 3.6 Taken as a whole, the country has clearly enjoyed significant increases in prosperity in recent years and contemporary economic and social debate centres on how best to “*manage the growth*”. The challenge now is to make use of this unprecedented opportunity to address deeper problems in our society, problems which in the past have been neglected to some extent as political efforts were channelled more into managing one economic crisis after another.
- 3.7 While the success story of the Celtic Tiger has rightly been the subject of much celebration over the past several years, the Forum wishes to take this opportunity to highlight again the need to maintain the reduction of poverty and the elimination of social exclusion as key policy priorities. The nature of the challenge has been outlined by one observer as follows:

*Ireland is a deeply unequal country, marked by one of the most unequal distributions of income in Europe, massive class inequalities in educational participation and entrenched intolerance toward minorities such as Travellers*⁸.

- 3.8 One study that examined trends in income distribution in Ireland since the 1970s found that the disposable income of the wealthiest 10 per cent of the population is greater than the disposable income accruing to the bottom 50 per cent. It also found that the share of total disposable income going to the bottom 50 per cent was the same in 1994 as it was in 1973. The study concluded: “... *disposable income remains highly concentrated at the top of the income distribution*”⁹.
- 3.9 Furthermore, a recent analysis by CORI Justice Commission on the implications of budget decisions and national agreements for income distribution found a “*dramatic widening of the gap between the poor and the better off in this (1994-99) period*”¹⁰. Taking into account the impact of all budgets and pay rises over the period, CORI found, for example, that single people who are unemployed were £338 a year better off, while those on £15,000 a year were £2,616 better off. Those earning £40,000 per annum were over £4,700 a year better off.

8 Baker, J. (1998) ‘Equality’ in Healy, S. and Reynolds, B. (Eds.) *Social Policy in Ireland: Principles, Practice and Problems*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

9 Collins, M. and Kavanagh, C. (1998) ‘For Richer, for Poorer: The Changing Distribution of Household Income in Ireland, 1973-94’ in Healy, S. and Reynolds, B. (Eds.) *Social Policy in Ireland: Principles, Practice and Problems*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

10 CORI Justice Commission (1999) *Socio-Economic Review 2000: Resources and Choices Towards a Fairer Future*, Dublin: Conference of Religious of Ireland.

3.10 Recent work in the ESRI by Nolan and Maitre has also indicated that, despite reductions in unemployment, the extent of income inequality has actually risen in Ireland between 1994 and 1997 as shown in Table 3¹¹.

Table 3: Decile Shares in Disposable Income among Households, 1994 and 1997 Living in Ireland Surveys

Households Decile	Share in total disposable income (%)	
	1994	1997
Bottom	2.2	2.0
2	3.2	2.9
3	4.6	4.4
4	5.8	5.7
5	7.4	7.4
6	8.9	9.1
7	11.0	11.2
8	13.3	13.6
9	16.3	16.3
Top	27.3	27.3
All	100.0	100.0

Source: Nolan and Maitre *op. cit.*

3.11 The authors conclude from this analysis that:

The share of the bottom 40% fell by 0.8 percentage point.... such a redistribution of almost 1% of total income away from the bottom half is a substantial shift over a short period.

3.12 Another equally disturbing finding in a further recent ESRI study¹² has been the increased risk of poverty facing women living in Ireland. As the authors of this study conclude, the main contributory factors in this have been the growing number of women living alone and that of lone parent households. In contrast, there was a decreasing risk of relative poverty for two-parent households with children.

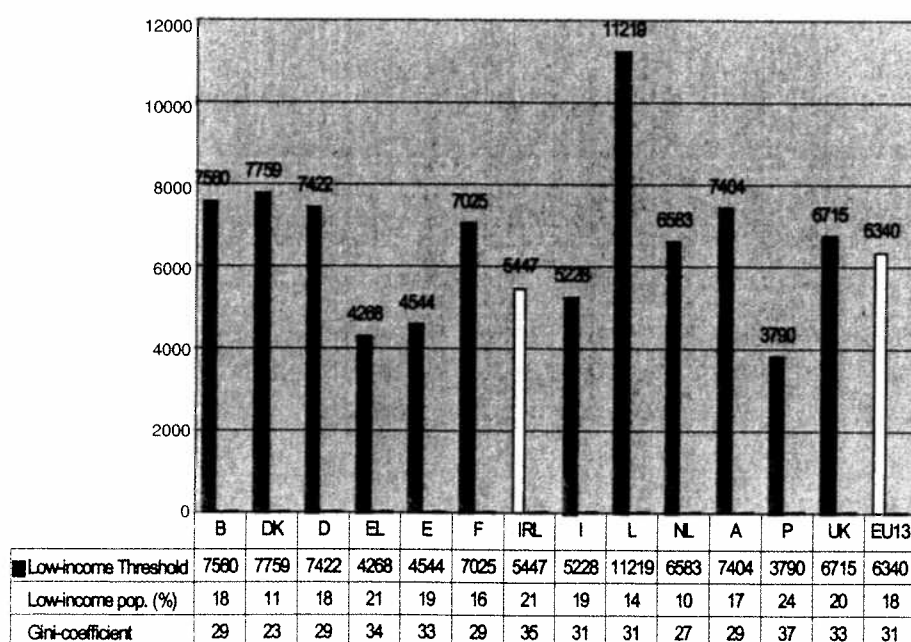
¹¹ Nolan, B. and Maitre, B. (April, 2000) *A Comparative Perspective on Trends in Income Inequality in Ireland*, paper presented to the Irish Economic Association Annual Conference, Waterford.

¹² Nolan, B. and Watson, D. (1999), *Women and Poverty in Ireland*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

3.13 Another key target group for urgent priority consideration should be that of children. Recent research into child poverty¹³ shows that 25 per cent of Irish children live in households below half the average income. In addition, children are 1.25 times more likely to be in poverty than are adults, and Irish children have the highest rate of income poverty in the EU.

3.14 The following comparative picture of income inequality across the EU¹⁴ also indicates that Ireland’s income distribution is among the most unequal in Europe.

Figure 1: The Low-income Population (in Purchasing Power Standards and %) and the Gini-coefficient (1994)



Source: Eurostat (1999) *European Community Household Panel*, Luxembourg: European Commission.

3.15 It will be noted from the above that Ireland along with Greece has the second highest proportion of its population under the low-income threshold, set at 60% of the median equivalised income per person in each Member State. This was surpassed only by Portugal. Moreover, Ireland had the second highest Gini-coefficient, which measures overall levels of disparity in each Member State’s income distribution.

13 Nolan, B. (2000) *Child Poverty in Ireland*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press.

14 Cited in the Communication from the EU Commission, *Building an Inclusive Europe*, Brussels (March 2000).

3.16 Indeed, comparisons with other similar developed countries outside the EU show that Ireland's rate of income inequality is only surpassed by North America (USA and Canada).

3.17 These findings, while limited by the lack of more up-to-date statistics¹⁵, indicate nevertheless that poverty remains a real issue in Ireland today. It highlights the importance of a continuing and increasing focus on poverty reduction in policy-making and the need to ensure that existing policies and mechanisms aimed at poverty reduction are strengthened significantly, are made more effective and are better targeted.

Poverty and Equality Linkages ¹⁶

3.18 An important point to note is that the new poverty-proofing guidelines, already mentioned above, include also a focus on inequality. Indeed, the target groups identified under these guidelines extend also to a number of those covered by the Employment Equality Act 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000. The policy and practical implications arising from this overlap need to be assessed. An important focus in all of this should be how best to promote cross-Departmental actions and devise more effective and integrated strategies between all the varied interests involved.

3.19 The joint study in this area by the Equality Authority and the Combat Poverty Agency is, therefore, opportune and it is understood the results should be available in the early Autumn. The NESC study (mentioned in Section II) on poverty-proofing and its possible integration with equality and other proofing requirements will also be particularly relevant.

¹⁵ Inequality is likely to have further increased since 1997, given that social welfare increases have lagged behind wage increases and tax reductions in the economy at large.

¹⁶ The Forum is at present preparing an Opinion which is designed to set out *A Strategic Framework for Action on Equality Issues*.

Section IV

**Progress
To-Date under
the NAPS**

Progress To-Date under the NAPS

4.1 This Section of the Opinion is divided into the following parts:

- *Overall Assessment; and*
- *Forum's Views on NAPS Impact.*

Overall Assessment

4.2 The CPA in its initial assessment of the NAPS concluded that:

Since the launch of the NAPS in 1997, Ireland has experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth. This has led to significant reductions in the levels of unemployment and poverty. ... It is difficult to assess the exact extent to which the NAPS process has contributed to these reductions, however it is clear that it has played an important role in raising awareness of the need for anti-poverty and social inclusion policies within the political and administrative systems¹⁷.

The authors went on to say that:

However, while much has been achieved much remains to be done. Although levels of consistent poverty have fallen significantly, relative income poverty has increased. NAPS, while making an important contribution in many areas, has been slow to develop in some respects and needs to be further strengthened if it is to achieve its full potential. Many commentators have argued, and it is now broadly accepted, that a rising economic tide does not lift all boats. In the current economic environment the nature of poverty is changing. NAPS and associated anti-poverty and social inclusion policies need to reflect these changing circumstances.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*

It is also pertinent to note the following comments from the ESRI¹⁸:

It is much too early to say how much impact the Irish anti-poverty strategy, and the adoption of a global poverty target, will have on poverty. In a sense one could say that the easy part has been done, and that delivery as the strategy faces the test of time - and in particular bad times - is what counts.

Forum's Views on NAPS Impact

- 4.3 Based on consultations with its Members, who include representatives of the Social Partners and the main Political Parties in the Oireachtas, and on the information provided to the Forum by those responsible for implementing and reviewing the Strategy, the Forum's views are set out in the following paragraphs.
- 4.4 The intrinsic value of an agreed NAPS and related poverty-proofing mechanism is increasingly being recognised within the policy-making system. The Strategy is gradually changing the culture and ways of operating by some Government Departments and has resulted in policies and policy-makers becoming more focussed and targeted on poverty reduction. The issue of poverty is seen, therefore, to have moved up the policy agenda.
- 4.5 The Strategy does not appear to be consistently applied across all Government Departments. This is reflected in the absence of clear statements by each Department on how they are implementing the NAPS, and in the lack of information and transparency on the impact of the Strategy on key policy decisions made within each Department.
- 4.6 The Forum also questions the extent to which the Strategy has been embedded as a key element in policy-making. This viewpoint is formulated on our understanding that the last Budget was not fully poverty-proofed and the absence of clear evidence that reductions in poverty were a key guiding principle under the National Development Plan. Another disturbing feature is that, at the time of preparing the Framework Document on Poverty-proofing under the NAPS, nine out of a total of thirteen Government Departments failed to provide worked examples to assist officials through the process.

18 Callan, T. Nolan, B. and Whelan, C. (April, 2000) *Targeting Poverty: The Irish Example*, paper presented to the Irish Economic Association Annual Conference, Waterford.

- 4.7 The reasons why the NAPS has not bedded down in some Departments and the barriers involved in this should be explored in the first instance by the NAPS Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. Following on this, appropriate action could be taken through the NAPS Inter-Departmental Policy Committee and, if necessary, by the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion.
- 4.8 The process of target setting contained in the NAPS has shown the benefits of explicit measurable targets. Such targets have, however, not been developed for all the identified themes. In the future, specific, measurable, and more ambitious and more challenging targets are required for all the agreed policy themes. These should be monitored regularly through a process of poverty-auditing¹⁹.
- 4.9 The extent to which the impact of the NAPS can be measured, and the linkages between anti-poverty actions and the NAPS, is seriously limited by the lack of available and up-to-date data. For example, the most recent data relates to 1997 and this only became available after a two-year time lag in 1999. This, of course, makes it impossible to provide an up-to-date assessment on the impact of the NAPS. The Forum very much welcomes, therefore, the commitment in the PPF to addressing such data gaps through new studies, including systems to measure poverty among groups not included at present such as people living in institutions, Travellers and the homeless.
- 4.10 Finally, recent developments in the Irish economy have resulted in lower unemployment and a consequential reduction in the overall level of consistent poverty and social exclusion. This has not, however, eliminated poverty. Indeed, the new environment is one in which the issue of poverty has become more complex, with the addition of new marginalised groups, such as ethnic minorities, while the relative position of those at the bottom of the income ladder has deteriorated still further. This should now, of course, necessitate, *inter alia*, a broadening of the groupings and of the targets to be addressed as part of the NAPS review process which is now underway.

¹⁹ In contrast to "poverty-proofing" which takes place at the policy design and/or review stage, "poverty-auditing" assesses the impact of a given policy retrospectively.

Section V

Steps Required to Enhance Impact of the NAPS

Steps Required to Enhance Impact of the NAPS

5.1 The Forum considers that a number of actions are required to increase the impact of the NAPS. These cover:

- *Updating the Strategy;*
- *Target Setting;*
- *Implementation Process;*
- *Role of Poverty-proofing;*
- *Broadening the NAPS;*
- *Anti-Poverty Strategies at Local Government/Local Development levels;*
- *Stakeholder Involvement;*
- *Participation and Consultation;*
- *Monitoring and Evaluation; and*
- *Raising the Public Profile.*

Updating the Strategy

5.2 To be fully effective, the NAPS must be recognised and approached as a more central platform of Government policy rather than being viewed as one of a number of interests competing for resources. This requires commitment from all Government Departments, and not only those with a specific social inclusion remit.

5.3 As outlined earlier, poverty and social exclusion are still prevalent in Ireland today. The nature of social exclusion has, however, become more complex and this must be reflected in the Strategy, and in particular, in the target setting element of the Strategy.

5.4 The NAPS recognises the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion. It should focus, therefore, on co-ordinating and integrating policy responses while individual Departments should be responsible for implementing their own anti-poverty strategy.

- 5.5 At Departmental level this means that each Department should establish clearly and publish its own objectives in relation to reducing poverty and social exclusion and should ensure that actions are in place to achieve these objectives, and to monitor and report on progress. The role of NAPS Liaison Officers should be reviewed in this regard, and strengthened if required.
- 5.6 At the overall Strategy level, targets should be updated again and each new target should be:
- Ambitious;
 - Challenging;
 - Clearly Specified;
 - Measurable; and
 - Implementable.
- 5.7 For instance, in relation to rural poverty, this should necessitate setting clear, measurable targets in relation to addressing identified issues of rural disadvantage, such as reducing isolation and improving access to public services.
- 5.8 New target areas should also be included to cover specific issues such as child poverty, women's poverty, poverty among older people, links between health and poverty, links between housing and poverty, racism and poverty and poverty among people in low paid employment. The Forum welcomes the commitment of the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs to the setting of such targets in consultation with the Social Partners.
- 5.9 As referred to in the PPF, these developments must be supported by the availability of relevant data and data collection systems for monitoring and evaluating performance in achieving these objectives. This includes the need to develop systems for measuring poverty among groups not currently included in the ESRI's Living in Ireland Surveys e.g. people living in institutions, Travellers and the homeless.
- 5.10 Finally, the Forum is also encouraged by the wide range of working groups which are at present in the process of being established, either as part of the NAPS review process or as a follow up on commitments contained in the PPF. A particularly significant and welcome feature of the NAPS review is the emphasis which will be placed in the evaluation process on "*outcomes*" rather than on the process itself.

Target Setting

- 5.11 The Forum welcomes the PPF commitment to revising and updating the global and thematic targets and to extending the target areas, reflecting the changing and more complex nature of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland today. The Forum also welcomes the proposed strengthening of the Social Partners' involvement in this process and the commitment to on-going consultation with the wider social partner representatives in both setting and reviewing the targets.
- 5.12 More specifically, the Forum believes that consideration should now be given to extending the global target to encompass *relative* poverty indicators. As mentioned earlier, relative poverty levels have actually increased in Ireland as the economy generally has prospered and expanded. The "*consistent poverty*" measure (relative income plus basic deprivation) should, of course, continue to be used but the deprivation indicators should themselves be subject to regular review in the light of changing economic and social circumstances.
- 5.13 Consideration should also be given to the concept of a guaranteed minimum income. This could act as an effective safety net to ensure that relative poverty levels do not increase as the economy grows. The Forum fully supports the commitment in the PPF to set up a working group to examine issues around developing a benchmark for adequacy of social welfare payments and indexation of payments. Income inadequacy is, of course, one of the root causes of poverty and the Forum looks forward to this group finalising its work as quickly as possible.
- 5.14 Given the difficulties of linking cause and effect under the NAPS, the Forum calls for the development of related performance indicators against which targets can be assessed. This should include setting agreed output and outcome indicators for each target and measuring progress in relation to these key indicators on a regular basis.
- 5.15 In relation to specific targets, the Forum believes that all targets should be quantified and capable of measurement. The educational disadvantage target should be expanded to cover literacy targets for both adults and children. The elimination of long-term unemployment, as called for in the Forum's own Report No. 4 back in 1994, should also now be agreed as an appropriate policy objective.

- 5.16 The urban and rural disadvantage targets should be much more specific and quantified, accompanied by relevant performance indicators and with a focus on reducing rural population decline and isolation.
- 5.17 As stated above additional target areas should include child poverty, women's poverty, homelessness, healthcare, racism and people in low-paid employment.
- 5.18 Finally, the Forum wishes to emphasise once again the importance of having access to necessary and up-to-date data in relation to all the agreed target areas. This is essential both to setting appropriate, challenging, yet achievable, target levels and also to measuring the extent to which the targets are achieved. In relation to a number of the target areas, this will necessitate allocating resources to the collection of new data at the national, regional and local levels.

Implementation Process

- 5.19 There is general agreement that the setting of targets is a key element in guiding effective implementation and that the new structures set up as part of the NAPS have assisted in the development of an emerging cross-Departmental approach to poverty reduction.
- 5.20 The Forum Members expressed concern, however, on the extent to which the NAPS has actually been embedded in the decision-making process. Attention should now be focussed, therefore, on the optimal ways of ensuring that the Strategy is fully supported both vertically and horizontally across all Government Departments. As stated above, this necessitates each Government Department adopting a number of strategic objectives in relation to the NAPS. To ensure the achievement of these objectives, NAPS Plans should be prepared by each Department on an annual basis. Adequate resources should also be allocated to the identified policy areas and to the support mechanisms required to ensure their implementation. Progress in implementation should be carefully monitored and annual progress reports produced and published.

Role of Poverty-proofing

5.21 If poverty reduction and elimination are to move to the centre of policy-making, it is essential that all key policy decisions are poverty-proofed. The Forum welcomes the implementation of a poverty-proofing process across the civil service and the commitment to extending this process to the wider public service on a phased basis.

Poverty-proofing is defined in the Strategy as:

The process by which government departments, local authorities and state agencies assess policies and programmes at design and review stages in relation to the likely impact that they will have or have had on poverty and inequalities likely to lead to poverty, with a view to poverty reduction.

5.22 As already mentioned in Section III, the NESC is now undertaking a review of the poverty-proofing arrangements and the lessons to be drawn as to how these can be maintained and strengthened. A notable feature of this review is that it is also going to assess how poverty-proofing might be integrated with other policy-proofing requirements such as equality-proofing, rural-proofing and eco-auditing. However, particular care needs to be taken to ensure that this does not at the same time weaken the role and impact of the poverty and equality-proofing processes.

5.23 Quiet apart altogether from this review, the Forum is in any case restricted on the extent to which it can comment on the poverty-proofing process due to a lack of evidence of and examples of such poverty-proofing exercises to date. These concerns are raised, given the lack of evidence that the last Budget was poverty-proofed or on the extent to which the National Development Plan was adequately poverty-proofed.

5.24 In the circumstances, the Forum calls for much greater transparency in relation to poverty-proofing and for the publication, where possible, of the process used to explore the different options upon which key policy decisions are made, as well as the results of poverty-proofing exercises and related decisions. Public access to the Environmental Impact Assessments under the Planning Acts provides an important precedent in this regard.

5.25 The Forum believes that the process will be greatly enhanced if there is a strong commitment to more openness in relation to how and to what extent poverty-proofing is being applied.

- 5.26 To this end, it considers that policy proposals should be screened to ensure that poverty-proofing resources and expertise are concentrated on key policy decisions.
- 5.27 The Forum also supports the work being done to share experience and knowledge of poverty-proofing across Government Departments and calls for an on-going commitment to training and awareness raising for all personnel with responsibilities in the area of poverty-proofing.
- 5.28 Finally, the Forum considers that poverty-proofing should be subjected to on-going monitoring of its implementation and regular reviews of its impact and effectiveness.

Broadening the NAPS

- 5.29 The NAPS process should now be broadened into the wider public service, especially into regional and local decision-making bodies. In this regard, the Forum fully supports the extension of the Strategy, and the related obligation to poverty-proofing, to cover the work of Local Authorities and other locally-based organisations such as the new County/City Development Boards, the Strategic Policy Committees, the Health Boards and the Area Partnership Companies. Any lessons from the current review of poverty-proofing should, of course, be taken into account before embarking on this.
- 5.30 Consideration should also be given to underpinning this extension by including a commitment to the NAPS in the Local Government Bill, 2000.

Anti-Poverty Strategies at Local Government/Local Development levels

- 5.31 The Forum considers that this is a key area for the future, particularly given the increasing role and remit of regional and local planning and decision-making bodies. This increasing focus on regional and locally-based development is already demonstrated in the National Development Plan. This has led to greater power being devolved to the Regional Assemblies, a wider

socio-economic remit for the Local Authorities, and the setting up of the County and City Development Boards. All these bodies will now have a responsibility for reducing social exclusion in their respective areas.

- 5.32 Alongside these structures a wide range of locally-based bodies with a specific focus on social inclusion and local development already exist. These include the Area Partnership Companies, the ADM-funded Community Groups, LEADER Companies and the County Enterprise Boards.
- 5.33 The development of regional and local anti-poverty strategies to complement the national Strategy is, therefore, an urgent priority if these organisations are to have a real effect on people living in poverty in their areas. The PPF states that the Department of the Environment and Local Government, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Combat Poverty Agency will jointly introduce the NAPS initiative into the Local Authorities. In this context, regional seminars to introduce the NAPS to Local Authorities already took place in April and May this year.
- 5.34 In welcoming the decision under the PPF to establish pilot social inclusion units in five local authority areas, the Forum recommends that these units should be established across a wide range of local authorities (to cover authorities of different sizes and locations viz. both urban and rural areas) to maximise the learning from the pilot processes. Any further extension beyond this, could then be considered, taking into account other commitments such as the proposed targeted investments in the 25 most deprived disadvantaged areas.
- 5.35 The Forum urges that consideration be given to the following factors when introducing the NAPS initiative at the local level:
- Local government and local development structures can have a very profound influence on the achievement of the national targets, particularly in relation to the education, urban and rural disadvantage targets. They can also play an important role in the achievement of the proposed new NAPS targets in areas such as child poverty, women's poverty, older people, housing and accommodation²⁰, healthcare and anti-racism.

²⁰ In a forthcoming *Report on Social and Affordable Housing and Accommodation - Building the Future*, the Forum will be recommending a range of targets and policy measures for the elimination of waiting lists.

- The new structures, particularly the County and City Development Boards and Strategic Policy Committees, can play a key role in co-ordinating local anti-poverty and social inclusion actions. They can also provide a forum for empowerment, widespread consultation and participation locally, as their membership includes representatives of all the key agencies as well as organisations representing people living in poverty and experiencing social exclusion.

5.36 To be effective in addressing anti-poverty issues, the Forum recommends that immediate consideration now be given to:

- The embedding of the PPF commitment to local anti-poverty strategies through the inclusion of such a commitment in the Local Government Bill, 2000.
- The provision of awareness-raising seminars and related training and supports for all Local Authority Council members, managers and staff, as well as for the relevant personnel in the other organisations represented on the City/County Development Boards. It is understood that such action has already commenced for Local Authority councillors and staff.
- Similarly, training, capacity-building supports and funding are needed for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), given their key role and involvement in the process.
- The development and adoption of local anti-poverty strategies by the Local Authorities, and the City/County Development Boards, in consultation with local communities. This process should include the setting of annual objectives and related plans, adoption of systems for monitoring implementation and evaluation, as well as a commitment to publish annual progress reports. A system of local poverty auditing should also form part of this process.
- Given the planned wider remit of the Local Authorities, it is important that the concepts and ways of working effectively in the anti-poverty

area are clearly understood and supported throughout the Local Authority. This will mean that attention must be paid to the type of cultural and institutional changes required within the local government system if it is to work successfully in this area.

- The allocation of dedicated staff and other resources within these organisations to support the development, implementation, and review of the local strategies, with the full support of the senior staff and the Local Authority, and backed up by the national NAPS Unit.
- The adoption by Local Authorities, and by the City and County Development Boards, of poverty-proofing mechanisms to guide the very important decision-making process that they will be involved in over the next two years. Again adequate resources and supports are needed for this²¹.
- Agreement to allocate the necessary resources to the collection and dissemination of the relevant data required to guide decision-making in this area at the local level.
- The establishment of an Advisory Committee by the Department of the Environment and Local Government to examine how Local Authorities can play a more effective role in the elimination of poverty and social exclusion.

Stakeholder Involvement

5.37 Regular consultation in relation to NAPS is a vital element of its success. The involvement of the Social Partners, Political Representatives, and of the wider NGO network at both the national and local level is essential to ensuring the on-going relevance of the Strategy and the continuing commitment of those responsible for its implementation.

Participation and Consultation

5.38 The Forum considers that the inclusion of those living in poverty and representatives of the community and voluntary sector in the development, implementation and evaluation of the Strategy, both nationally and locally, is vital to its successful development as a key tool of public policy-making. This will require a commitment to the development, at national and regional levels,

²¹ Within the various demands facing Local Authorities, the Department of the Environment and Local Government has undertaken to do its best to advance the NAPS process and provide more focussed or special funding where possible and also encourage Local Authorities to adopt a flexible approach.

of a range of consultative and participative structures and processes and the allocation of adequate human and financial resources to support them.

5.39 In this regard, the Forum understands and welcomes that the forthcoming White Paper on Relations between the State Sector and the Voluntary and Community Sector will cover the question of how funding will be provided for new emerging needs, such as the NAPS for example.

Monitoring and Evaluation

5.40 As referred to above, on-going monitoring and evaluation are key elements of the successful implementation of the NAPS, and of the related poverty-proofing mechanism. The Forum has a key role to play in such a monitoring and evaluation process in: (i) providing a focus for up-to-date information to be presented and debated; and (ii) in offering an effective mechanism for ensuring consultation with, and the involvement of, a wide range of interested parties, including representatives of those living in poverty.

Raising the Public Profile

5.41 The Forum is concerned to ensure that the NAPS continues to have widespread support both within and outside the public service. It recommends, therefore, that the revised targets, the results of the poverty-proofing review, and the extension of the NAPS to the wider public sector and to local decision-making structures and systems, should all be used as opportunities to re-launch the Strategy. This will help to raise public awareness of the continuing need to address the issues of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland.

5.42 While the public at large have, in various opinion polls conducted in recent years, been very supportive of increased resources and higher policy priority to be given to tackling poverty, this support must be channelled into concrete action through, for example, increased public participation and greater empowerment in policy-making at national, regional and local levels.

Section VI

Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

- 6.1 Poverty continues to exist in Ireland and strategies to reduce it must remain a key element of Government policy. At the same time, we have never before been so well placed to focus the resources of the State for its reduction and eventual elimination.
- 6.2 The development and adoption of the NAPS has been a major milestone in the evolution of public policy in Ireland, both because of the strategic focus it has brought to the issue of poverty reduction and because of the consultative and inclusive process through which it has been developed.
- 6.3 The declaration of explicit policy targets in a number of policy areas under the NAPS has been an important feature of its achievements to date.
- 6.4 There is now a need to review the existing targets and to expand the target setting into new areas, such as the reduction of child poverty. The Forum welcomes the commitment in the PPF to such a review. In this respect, it considers that this review should be based on more widespread and strengthened consultations with all the varied interests involved.
- 6.5 At the same time, this should be underpinned by more determined efforts, through special studies and information-gathering exercises to address data deficiencies and provide more up-to-date statistics for policy analysis and decision-making purposes.
- 6.6 Notwithstanding data deficiencies, it is extremely difficult in any case to capture the direct impact of the NAPS to date. The introduction and planned development of poverty-proofing will, the Forum believes, be central to future reviews of the impact of the Strategy. It welcomes, therefore, the work being done in this area and believes that poverty-proofing has the potential to place poverty reduction at the centre of public policy-making. However, the Forum has a number of concerns regarding its effective implementation.
- 6.7 The Forum calls for much greater transparency in relation to how and in what contexts poverty-proofing is being implemented. Such transparency is required to inform the debate on available policy options and on the methods

used to make key policy decisions. In this regard the Forum calls for a commitment to poverty-proofing of the Annual Budget, the Operational Programmes and other complementary documents arising out of the National Development Plan, the publication of the results and of the rationale for the policy options chosen. Moreover, poverty-proofing must be systematically applied across all Government Departments not just those with a specific poverty reduction remit.

- 6.8 The Forum also recommends that clearer guidelines, accompanied by more adequate training and supports, should be provided to ensure that the poverty-proofing process is implemented as effectively as possible. The resource implications implicit within a comprehensive and effective poverty-proofing system must be assessed and addressed.
- 6.9 The Forum believes that the range of institutional mechanisms set up to ensure the effective implementation of the NAPS has played an important role in ensuring that the Strategy is increasingly seen to be central to the development of public policy in Ireland and that these should be continued.
- 6.10 The Forum recommends that the completion of the review of the NAPS, which is at present underway, should be used as an opportunity to re-launch the Strategy. The aim should be to harness maximum political and public support for the principles underpinning the NAPS and to generate fresh impetus and momentum for the achievement of the revised/new targets. It also represents an opportunity to raise awareness and support, both among policy makers and the general public, of the on-going presence of poverty in Ireland and of the need for more effective policies to address it.
- 6.11 The Forum strongly supports the extension of the NAPS beyond Central Government level to the work of the Local Authorities and believes that this remit can be very usefully extended also to the work of the newly set up County and City Development Boards and other regional and local development organisations.
- 6.12 Given the increasing responsibility of local government and regional and local development organisations in addressing poverty and social exclusion, it is vital that effective anti-poverty strategies are developed and implemented, particularly within the local authority system. This requires these bodies to develop anti-poverty policies, with related objectives and annual plans, and to

devote resources to their effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It also requires leadership at the most senior level to ensure that such important work is given the priority it deserves and that the culture and ways of working of such institutions are supportive of an anti-poverty and inclusive approach to policy-making and implementation.

- 6.13 Finally, and in keeping with its mandate from Government, the Forum intends to continue to monitor progress in relation to the NAPS and plans to issue yearly Opinions on its implementation and impact. This process will have as a focal point the convening of an annual Plenary Session exclusively devoted to the NAPS. It is envisaged that these Opinions will deal, *inter alia*, with Departments' plans under the NAPS as well as on their poverty-proofing assessments.

Terms of Reference and Constitution of the Forum

1. The main task of the Forum will be:-
 - to monitor and analyse the implementation of specific measures and programmes identified especially those concerned with the achievement of equality and social inclusion;
 - to do so through consideration of reports prepared by teams comprising the social partners, with appropriate expertise and representatives of relevant Departments and agencies and its own Secretariat;
 - with reports to be published by the Forum with such comments as may be considered appropriate; and
 - to ensure that the teams compiling such reports take account of the experience of implementing bodies and customers/clients, including regional variations in such experience.

2. The Forum may consider such policy issues on its own initiative or at the request of the Government.

3. Membership of the Forum will comprise representatives from the following four strands:
 - the Oireachtas;
 - employer, trade union and farm organisations;
 - the voluntary and community sector; and
 - central government, local government and independents.

4. The terms of office of members will be for an initial period of at least two years during which alternates may be nominated. Casual vacancies will be filled by the nominating body or the Government as appropriate and members so appointed shall hold office until the expiry of the current term of office of all members. Retiring members will be eligible for re-appointment.

5. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Forum will be appointed by the Government.

6. The Forum will decide on its own internal structures and working arrangements.
7. The Forum will be under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach and funded through a Grant-in-Aid which will be part of the overall Estimate for that Department. The annual accounts of the Forum will be submitted for audit to the Comptroller and Auditor General.
8. Finally, the staffing and conditions of employment of the Forum's Secretariat will be subject to the approval of the Department of the Taoiseach.

Membership of the Forum

Independent Chairperson:

Maureen Gaffney

Deputy Chairperson:

Dermot McCarthy

(i) Oireachtas

Fianna Fáil:

Noel Ahern T.D.
Seán Haughey T.D.
Beverley Cooper-Flynn T.D.
Michael Kitt T.D.
Senator Margaret Cox
Senator Paschal Mooney

Fine Gael:

Gerry Reynolds T.D.
Paul McGrath T.D.
Bill Timmins T.D.
Senator Mary Jackman
Senator Therese Ridge

Labour:

Derek McDowell T.D.
Senator Joe Costello

Progressive Democrats:

Vacancy

Independents:

Michael Lowry T.D.

(ii) Employer, Trade Union and Farm Organisations

(a) Employer/Business Organisations:

IBEC:

Brendan Butler
Aileen O'Donoghue

Small Firms Association:

Lilian O'Carroll

Construction Industry Federation:

Mirette Corboy

Chambers of Commerce/Tourist

Industry/Exporters Association:

Carmel Mulroy

(b) Trade Unions: Eamonn Devoy
Blair Horan
Jerry Shanahan
Manus O’Riordan
Joan Carmichael

(c) Agricultural/Farming Organisations:

Irish Farmers Association: Betty Murphy
Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association: Pat O’Rourke
Irish Co-Operative Organisation Society: Vacancy
Macra na Feirme: Eileen Doyle
Irish Country Womens Association: Eva Coyle

(iii) Community and Voluntary Sector

Womens Organisations: Ursula Barry
Gráinne Healy
Susan McNaughton

Unemployed: Camille Loftus
Joan Condon
Mary Murphy

Disadvantaged: Joe Gallagher
Chris McInerney
Janice Ransom

Youth: Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl

Older People: Paddy Donegan

Disability: John Dolan

Environment: Jeanne Meldon

Others: Fr. Seán Healy
Mary Murphy

(iv) Central Government, Local Government and Independents

(a) Central Government

Secretary-General, Department of Finance

Secretary-General, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Secretary-General, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs

Secretary-General, Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation

Secretary-General, Department of the Environment and Local Government

(b) Local Government

General Council of County Councils:

Councillor Constance Hanniffy

Councillor Tom Kelleher

Councillor Enda Nolan

Association of Municipal Authorities:

Councillor Tadhg Curtis

County and City Managers Association:

Donal O'Donoghue

(c) Independents

Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, National University of Ireland, Galway

Ms. Marian Vickers, Northside Partnership

Ms. Helen Johnston, Surg Equipment Ltd.

Mr. Niall Fitzduff, Rural Communities Network

Ms. Noreen Kearney, Trinity College, Dublin

Secretariat

Director:

Seán Ó hÉigearthaigh

Policy Analysts:

Laurence Bond

Sarah Craig

David Silke

Executive Secretary:

Michelle Ryan

Forum Publications

(i) Forum Reports

Report No.	Title	Date
1.	<i>Negotiations on a Successor Agreement to the PESP</i>	November 1993
2.	<i>National Development Plan 1994 – 1999</i>	November 1993
3.	<i>Commission on Social Welfare - Outstanding Recommendations</i>	January 1994
4.	<i>Ending Long-term Unemployment</i>	June 1994
5.	<i>Income Maintenance Strategies</i>	July 1994
6.	<i>Quality Delivery of Social Services</i>	February 1995
7.	<i>Jobs Potential of Services Sector</i>	January 1996
8.	<i>First Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	June 1995
9.	<i>Jobs Potential of Work Sharing</i>	January 1996
10.	<i>Equality Proofing Issues</i>	February 1996
11.	<i>Early School Leavers and Youth Employment</i>	January 1997
12.	<i>Rural Renewal - Combating Social Exclusion</i>	March 1997
13.	<i>Unemployment Statistics</i>	May 1997
14.	<i>Self-Employment, Enterprise and Social Inclusion</i>	October 1997
15.	<i>Second Periodic Report on the Work of the Forum</i>	November 1997
16.	<i>A Framework for Partnership – Enriching Strategic Consensus through Participation</i>	December 1997
17.	<i>Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Local Employment Service</i>	March 2000

(ii) Forum Opinions

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1.	<i>Interim Report of the Task Force on Long-term Unemployment</i>	March 1995
2.	<i>National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>	January 1996
3.	<i>Long-term Unemployment Initiatives</i>	April 1996
4.	<i>Post PCW Negotiations – A New Deal?</i>	August 1996
5.	<i>Employment Equality Bill</i>	December 1996
6.	<i>Pensions Policy Issues</i>	October 1997
7.	<i>Local Development Issues</i>	October 1999
8.	<i>The National Anti-Poverty Strategy</i>	August 2000

(iii) Forum Opinions under the Monitoring Procedures of Partnership 2000

Opinion No.	Title	Date
1.	<i>Development of the Equality Provisions</i>	November 1997
2.	<i>Targeted Employment and Training Measures</i>	November 1997