Commission on Social Welfare - Outstanding Recommendations

Forum Report No. 3

January 1994

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Forum will be preparing a number of Reports under the general theme of "Poverty and Income Maintenance Strategies" over the coming months. This first Report under this theme identifies a number of the main issues still outstanding from the 1986 Commission on Social Welfare.

2. The Forum considers it timely to highlight these issues because of the imminence of the Budget, the commencement of the talks on a new national agreement to succeed the PESP and the Government's social welfare commitments as outlined in the Programme for Government.

3. The recommendations contained in this Report reflect the Forum's underlying philosophy to develop a more caring and equitable society and their implementation would provide real benefit for those affected.

4. The most important outstanding recommendation from the Commission on Social Welfare is that of inadequacy in the level of payments. The Forum attaches fundamental importance to this, against the background of the dramatic increase in poverty in recent years, and will be submitting recommendations in this area in a subsequent Report. Commitments made in this area should be clear, unambiguous and time specific for their achievement.

5. As a general operating principle, the Forum recommends that our social welfare system should be neutral in its gender effects and in its influence on people's personal choices of where to live, who to live with and their legal status as married or as single people. Equally the system should be sensitive to and appropriate to the differing requirements and needs of particular marginalised groups. More specifically, it is recommended that the discriminatory treatment in certain instances of widowers and deserted husbands should be addressed.

6. The main recommendations, on the basis of the Commission on Social Welfare's Report, listed by the Forum for immediate action include:

- a significant move towards adequate rates of payment should be undertaken in the forthcoming Budget;

- guidelines on the operation of the benefit and privilege rule in household means-tests should be published; this rule should be abolished for those aged over 25 and a more reasonable rate of assistance should be considered to encourage young people to live at home;

- a wider review of payments and programmes for those aged 18/21 should be carried out with a view to offering young people alternatives, on a voluntary basis, to simply leaving school and signing on;

- Unemployment Assistance rates and Lone Parent's Allowance rates should be brought into upward convergence, with specific reference to the Allowances for Child Dependants;

- a substantial means disregard should be introduced into the Carer's Allowance;

- consideration should be given to a pre-retirement benefit for older age groups on Unemployment Benefit and anomalies in relation to pro rata pensions and treatment benefit in retirement for the self-employed should be addressed;

- means tests should be standardised to ensure that all claimants are treated fairly, equitably and consistently; all income disregards should be updated, made more uniform and simplified; the treatment of Maintenance Payments should be reviewed as well as the living alone criteria for the elderly;

- the weekly limit on spouse's earnings should be tapered and the rules reviewed in order to increase the incentive for work; rules for the assessment of capital means need to be simplified;

- parents should receive the Child Dependant Allowance for children in the 18/21 age group in full-time education, irrespective of their social welfare status;

- the numbers of places on the VTOS should be increased, restrictions on eligibility eased and child-care facilities provided to increase women's participation;

- the Part-time Job Incentive Scheme has not been a success and needs to be reviewed;

- all income maintenance payments should be paid through the Department of Social Welfare and there should be a time-limit for assessment/adjudication in the case of the Disabled Persons Maintenance Allowance; and

- an Advisory Council should be established and further improvements made in the delivery process; priority should be given to removing the discriminatory rules for travellers, including segregation, and the use of Garda Stations in the delivery of services should be phased out.

7. Finally, the Forum emphasises that the nature and alarming scale of poverty in our society requires a comprehensive review of our social welfare system as well as all other redistributive policies. All our people must be treated as equal citizens and provided with an adequate standard of living and an acceptable lifestyle. While some progress has been made since 1986, the Forum is particularly concerned to note that at present only four social welfare payments have reached the adequacy rates recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare and that these cover only 18% of all welfare recipients.

PART I : INTRODUCTION

1.1 In discharging its responsibilities of providing recommendations to the Government on economic and social policy issues, the Forum has already declared that its underlying philosophy will be very much committed to the creation of a more caring and equitable society in this country. This it sees as essential in its role of contributing to the formation of a wider national consensus involving all the main sectors and interests in our society and whose overall aim will be to ensure that unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are more resolutely and effectively tackled in the future.

1.2 In its Report No. 1, which was published in December last, the Forum emphasised in particular that the increasing incidence of poverty in our society must be meaningfully and progressively addressed over the period of a new PESP. In the specific area of income adequacy, the following broad principles were recommended in that Report:

- any new PESP should contain a specific commitment to reform the social welfare system rather than continuing with the present pattern of piecemeal changes from year to year; this should be guided by the principles agreed by the Commission on Social Welfare, namely that of adequacy, redistribution, comprehensiveness, consistency and simplicity;

- families with children should be a priority group for increased resources and this needs to be done in a way that does not exacerbate poverty or unemployment traps; and

- commitments made in this area should be clear, unambiguous and time specific for their achievement.

1.3 As part of its Work Programme over the coming months, the Forum will be preparing a number of Reports under the general theme of "Poverty and Income Maintenance Strategies" which will address a whole range of key social policy issues such as the need for greater clarity in policy objectives and social rights, better targeting of public resources to priority objectives, the setting of performance indicators and improved management and appraisal in the effectiveness, integration and delivery of social services.

1.4 Aside from the level of payments which is singularly the most important recommendation outstanding, this initial short Report in this series is limited in scope to identifying a number of other main issues from the 1986 Commission on Social Welfare still outstanding and which the Forum recommends should now be implemented.

1.5 The level of social welfare payments and their inadequacy in relation to prevailing living standards in our society is one to which the Forum attaches fundamental importance. It will be addressing this, but is not yet in a position at this early stage in its work to submit agreed recommendations in this area.

1.6 In this context, and by way of background, the scale and dramatic increase in the number of our people living in poverty in recent years - which the Forum believes is not sufficiently appreciated by the public at large - is illustrated in the Table on the next page.

Growth of Poverty in Ireland over the period 1973 - 1987

	Population (000's)	% of the population below 50% poverty line	Estimated Numbers (000s) below 50% line
1973	2,978	17.8	530
1980	3,368	19.2	647
1987	3,541	22.9	811
Increase 1973 - 87	+ 563 (+19%)	+5.1%	+ 281 (+ 53%)

1.7 The above data is based on research undertaken by the ESRI which identified people with incomes below a range of poverty lines set respectively at 40%, 50% and 60% of average disposable income, as adjusted for family size. In the above Table, while the income represented by the 50% poverty line has only been used, it is important to note that all these three lines were below the "minimally adequate income" which had been recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare.

1.8 All three lines showed that poverty had increased over the 1973-1987 period. The increase in unemployment was a contributory factor in this. Using the 50% line, the proportion of the population living in poverty increased from 17.8% in 1973 to 22.9% in 1987 which was the equivalent of an increase of over 50% in the number of people living on that income. Below the 40% line the increase was a staggering 80%.

1.9 At the same time, the composition of our population living in poverty has changed significantly since the early 1970's. Elderly people now make up a smaller proportion while, with the increase in unemployment, much more families with children are now living in poverty. In 1973, 16% of all children under the age of 14 lived in poor households but by 1987 this had increased to 26%.

PART II : OUTSTANDING RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION ON SOCIAL WELFARE

2.1 While improvements have been made in recent years to the social welfare system, within the framework outlined by the Commission on Social Welfare, nevertheless, there are a number of recommendations still outstanding, the more important of which are outlined below. In what follows, the number references in each case are to those contained in the Commission's Report.

2.2 As a general principle, and one which has influenced it in its selection of these outstanding recommendations, the Forum recommends that our social welfare system should, as far as possible, be neutral in its gender effects and in its influence on people's personal choices of where to live, who to live with and their legal status as married or as single people. Equally the system should be sensitive to and appropriate to the differing requirements and needs of particular marginalised groups. In this context, the Forum specifically recommends that the discriminatory treatment in certain instances of widowers and deserted husbands should be addressed.

Recommendation Nos. 2 to 4 : Adequacy of Payments

2.3 These are singularly the most important outstanding Recommendations. The Forum attaches fundamental importance to this issue, against the background of the dramatic increase in poverty in recent years, and is particularly concerned to ensure that commitments in this area should be clear, unambiguous and time-specific for their achievement. The present level of welfare payments are clearly inadequate and the Forum will be submitting recommendations in this area in a subsequent Report, using as a basis the methodology and the rates of Social Welfare payments which had been recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare. In the meantime, the Forum recommends that a significant move toward adequate rates of payment should be undertaken in the forthcoming Budget.

Recommendation No. 5 : **The means assessment for adults over 25 years applying for assistance payments should not include any assessment of the general household living standards, i.e. benefit and privilege should be excluded from the means test for all those aged over 25 years (Section 9.4, Chapter 9).**

Recommendation No. 6: **Single applicants for unemployment assistance aged 18-25 years, should be entitled to a standard allowance irrespective of household circumstances. Payments above this minimum would continue to include an assessment of parental means for young people living at home, i.e. the benefit and privilege rule (Section 9.4 Chapter 9).**

2.4 Applicants for Unemployment and Supplementary Welfare Allowance are treated differently from other applicants in that a household means test operates in the form of the benefit and privilege rule. At present, there are no formal published guidelines on the operation of this. The Forum recommends that these guidelines should now be published.

2.5 The Commission on Social Welfare's Recommendation that this rule should be abolished for those aged 25 and over is the informal practice in some areas but in others the rule is applied to those over this age limit. The Forum recommends that it should be abolished outright for those above this limit.

2.6 Young people living at home often move out and qualify for full payment of Unemployment Assistance and the Rent Allowance, because they are only entitled to the minimum £5 payment if living at home. If it is intended to retain some distinction in rates of payment between those living in the parental home and those who run their own households, the Forum recommends that a more reasonable standard rate of payment should be considered while still safeguarding the right to leave the family home if circumstances demand. Some offsetting savings on Rent Allowances could be used to help finance this.

2.7 The Forum also recommends that a wider review of payments and programmes for those aged 18-21 should be undertaken to try and offer young people alternatives on a voluntary basis to leaving school and signing on, particularly for those young people at higher risk of becoming long-term unemployed.

2.8 With the changing pattern of family formation - one in three first births now occur outside marriage - young unemployed couples are increasingly beginning their families outside marriage. The structure of our welfare system with its differentiation between Unemployment Assistance rates and Lone Parent's Allowance provides financial disincentives to such couples against setting up home together and against marriage. The Forum recommends that the system should aim at neutrality between these options, and that Unemployment Assistance rates and Lone Parent's Allowance rates should be brought into upward convergence, with specific reference to the Allowances for Child Dependants.

Recommendation No. 8 : **While, in general, the age limit for social assistance should remain at 18 years, those aged between 16 and 18 years who need an independent income should be catered for by the reformed supplementary welfare allowance scheme (Section 9.4, Chapter 9).**

2.9 The Forum supports this Recommendation in principle but a mechanism must be found to ensure that it does not act as an incentive for young people to drop out of school.

Recommendation No. 13 : **Persons providing full-time care for relatives should have entitlement in their own right to an assistance payment in lieu of the prescribed relative allowance (Section 9.6.2, Ch. 9).**

2.10 While noting that this Recommendation has been acted on, the Forum recommends that a substantial means disregard should be introduced into the current Carer's Allowance so that this Allowance can genuinely become a supplement to support the work of the Carer. As things now stand, if an elderly person is living with and being cared for by a son or daughter and their spouse, then no Carer's Allowance will be payable if the working spouse is earning more than £120 per week. In addition, the elderly person will lose entitlement to electricity, television and free phone rental.

Recommendation No. 17: The duration of unemployment benefit should be extended as an immediate priority for the unemployed in the middle and older age groups (Section 10.5, Chapter 10).

2.11 The Forum wishes to emphasise that the case in support of the above Recommendation has been further strengthened with the dramatic increase in unemployment and its duration for these age groups since the Commission reported.

2.12 In addition, the Forum recommends that, to achieve the objective underlying the above Recommendation, consideration be given to introducing an insurance-based mechanism, such as a pre-retirement benefit, which would also have the advantage of serving as an employment-creation measure.

2.13 The Forum also supports Recommendation No. 18 that specific provision should be made for those with a mixed or broken social insurance record. People with an average of fewer than 20 contributions a year do not qualify at present for pro-rata pensions and those in this position, who entered insurance before age 56, get no refund on their contributions while those whose first insurance is after 56 do. Also, a person in self-employment for the first time in the last two years before retirement loses entitlement to treatment benefit, not only for the next two years but for the whole retirement period.

Recommendation No. 26 : The means test should be rationalised and applied uniformly to all applicants for social assistance (Sections 11.3.1 and 11.3.2, Chapter 11).

Recommendation No. 27: Components of the means test should be widely publicised (Section 11.3.3, Chapter 11).

2.14 The anomalies and inequities in means testing, some of which are briefly outlined below, must be dealt with and a standardised means test needs to be introduced to ensure that all claimants are treated fairly, equitably and consistently.

2.15 Currently the low paid at work cannot qualify for Supplementary Welfare directly and, alternative mechanisms are needed to ensure that emergency/exceptional needs are catered for.

2.16 Income disregards in means-tested payments such as Lone Parents etc. are at unrealistic levels and have not been revised for years. On the other hand, income disregards for Unemployment Assistance are better but are administratively more cumbersome. The Forum recommends that all these income disregards should be updated, made more uniform and simplified in their application.

2.17 At present, Maintenance Payments from an absent husband are treated as self-employed income for PRSI purposes if they exceed £2,500 a year, or £50 a week. Minimum PRSI is £204, or £4 a week which can be substantial in these circumstances. Also, Maintenance Payments which are lower than a Lone Parent's Allowance (LPA) rate are offset in full against LPA payment. Some retention level by parent should be allowed. An ESRI report on Lone Parents recommends that Child Support should be exempt from this clawback.

2.18 Many people on low income from private pension sources are not eligible for free schemes (electricity, telephone, fuel, television) which are limited to those on social welfare. The living alone criteria should also be reviewed to enable the elderly to live with their families.

2.19 The present rules on income disregards also militate in particular against single parents who might wish to move in a gradual way from total dependence on welfare through part-time work and ultimately into full-time work when children are older. It may be more expensive for the State in the long run to penalise financially such partial moves towards economic independence.

2.20 There is no formal offset offered in respect of supplementary earnings where there is a particular expenditure problem eg a mortgage, or arrears of bills, which have to be paid off. People on Assistance are locked in and unable to increase their earnings to cover any shortfall not being met from their regular welfare payments or from Supplementary Welfare.

2.21 The limit of £60 a week on spouses' earnings creates poverty traps for low-paid workers, mainly women. This limit should be tapered so that is it more gradual in its application. The rules regarding the assessment of means of a spouse's earnings overlap with these provisions, causing an effectively lower income ceiling in some cases. The Forum recommends that these rules should be published and reviewed with a view to increasing the incentive for work.

2.22 The rules for assessment of capital means have been unaltered for very many years, and the difference between the various complicated formulae are now of little practical relevance in today's money. The Forum recommends that these should be simplified on the lines suggested by the Commission on Social Welfare.

2.23 The Forum also recommends that parents should receive the Child Dependant Allowance for children 18/21 who are in full-time education, irrespective of the social welfare payments which they receive. At present, this is restricted to parents on long-term payments.

2.24 The Forum notes that Recommendation No. 40 (on the unemployed being allowed to engage in education courses) has been acted on with schemes such as the VTOS, VPTP etc. and that these schemes also include people on the Lone Parent's Allowance. However, the Forum considers that the limited number of places on the VTOS should be increased, that restrictions on eligibility should be eased and it also emphasises the importance of providing child-care facilities to enable women to participate on these schemes.

2.25 The Forum is pleased to note that Recommendation No. 41 (on allowing the unemployed to engage in paid work on a part-time basis) has also been acted on with schemes such as the Part-time Job Incentive Scheme, which allows certain long-term unemployed people to take up a part-time job and receive a special income supplement, and the Back-to-Work Allowance Scheme. The former Scheme has not, however, been a success and needs to be reviewed. Simplicity is an important criteria in facilitating return to work. The Forum is concerned at the increasing complexity being built into the system and intends to research and make recommendations on this aspect.

Recommendation No. 47 : **There should be a transfer of the main income maintenance functions from the Health Boards/Departments of Health to the Department of Social Welfare (Section 19.2, Chapter 19).**

Recommendation No. 49 : **The Department of Social Welfare should make arrangements for interim means- testing and payment at the centre where a person applies for payments, so that the supplementary welfare allowance scheme can revert to its intended function as a residual income maintenance scheme catering for situations of special need (Section 19.3, Chapter 19).**

2.26 The Forum supports the above Recommendations and acknowledges the progress made in having interim payments paid through the local Social Welfare Offices. It considers that all statutory income maintenance payments should be delivered through the Department of Social Welfare and that the provisions currently available through the Supplementary Welfare system in respect of long-term payments such as rent, diet, heating supplements etc. would be more effectively delivered through the mainstream Social Welfare system. This would have positive effects both for the recipients and administrative efficiency.

2.27 In addition, the Forum recommends that there should be a time limit on assessment/adjudication in the case of the Disabled Persons Maintenance Allowance (DPMA). It also recommends that the provision whereby people receiving five-day care are not eligible for DPMA, or in the case of handicapped children, Domiciliary Care Allowance on a pro-rata basis when at home for weekends or holiday periods where there is a maintenance cost for the family, should be reviewed.

Recommendation Nos. 52 to 59 : **These relate to improvements in the delivery process through, inter alia, the accelerated development of computerisation, the upgrading of premises where social welfare services are provided and the administration of the services to be decentralised as far as possible to local offices.**

Recommendation No. 64 : **An advisory council representative of contributors, beneficiaries and administrators should be established and should publish an annual report (Section 22. 3, Chapter 22).**

2.28 Here again, it is acknowledged that considerable progress has been made in implementing Recommendation Nos. 52 to 59. In view of the particular importance which it attaches to the above Recommendations, the Forum will be returning to these again at a later stage. In their implementation, it considers that priority should be given to removing the discriminatory rules, including segregation, in the case of travellers. The Forum also recommends that the use of Garda Stations in the delivery of services should be phased out.

PART III : UNEMPLOYMENT/POVERTY TRAPS AND THE STRUCTURE OF CHILD INCOME SUPPORT

3.1 The relatively high tax and PRSI deductions at moderate income levels, and the significantly less favourable treatment in our welfare code of the children of parents in employment lead to significant unemployment traps at moderate income levels. Workers with a couple of children are little better off when Secondary Benefits are taken into account, if gross earnings are under £180 a week or so. In this context, it is important also to note that a high proportion of the long-term unemployed are unskilled workers with limited earning power.

3.2 Mainly families more than single people are caught in the unemployment trap. It affects the composition more than the level of unemployment, but its effect on composition is important. Since there is a strong link between parental unemployment and the future educational and employment chances of the next generation, a welfare structure that militates against parents taking up job offers has long-term consequences. About 45% of families with four or more children have a parent out of work or on welfare.

3.3 The increase in child poverty, which has been referred to in the Introduction to this Report, is unacceptable. The Forum considers that reforms to the Child Income Support system (Child Benefit, Child Additions to the tax exemption limits, the Family Income Supplement and the Child Dependant Allowance), coupled with amendments to the income tax system, may be needed to provide a more effective mechanism to reduce child poverty, redistribute resources to the poor as well as to improve work incentives. It notes that all options in this area are at present under examination by the Expert Group on the Integration of the Tax and Social Welfare Systems.

3.4 However, the alleviation of the unemployment trap would of itself do little to resolve the unemployment crisis. This will have to be tackled through a whole range of new policy initiatives, along the lines outlined in the Forum's Report No. 1, and which will be developed by the Forum in subsequent Reports over the coming months.

3.5 Finally, one anomaly in relation to Child Benefit occurs where a student reaches 18 years before finishing second-level school, and this Benefit is then cut off. The Forum recommends that consideration be given to extending Child Benefit beyond the age of 18 until the student has completed the 6th year programme as well as the payment of Child Benefit at a higher rate for children over the age of 12.

PART IV : CONCLUSION

4.1 Although limited in their scope, the adoption of the recommendations proposed in this Report would, nevertheless, provide real benefits for those affected.

4.2 However, the nature and scale of poverty, as outlined briefly in the Introduction to this Report, requires a comprehensive review of our social welfare system and other redistributive policies, if all people are to be treated as equal citizens and provided with an adequate standard of living and an acceptable lifestyle.

4.3 The fundamental question of what constitutes such a standard of living raises major economic and fiscal policy issues and these will be examined by the Forum in a subsequent Report, using as a basis the methodology and the rates of social welfare payments which had been recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare (CSW).

4.4 In the meantime, the Forum notes that progress made in this area has been slow and disappointing. The priority rates recommended by the Commission have been exceeded only in respect of all long-term social welfare payments and 25% of recipients still receive payments below these rates.

4.5 However, it must be recognised that the priority rates were viewed by the Commission as only interim targets for the lowest level of payments and were set at levels between 10% and 25% below the minimally adequate rates which it had recommended. At present, only four welfare payments have reached the recommended adequacy rates and these cover only 18% of all welfare recipients.

4.6 The following Table summarises the current position, with the Commission's rates adjusted in line with consumer price increases since 1985 and using 1993 rates of payment, expressed as a percentage of the Commission's minimum recommended rates.

COMPARISON BETWEEN CSW RATE AND ACTUAL PERSONAL RATES OF SOCIAL WELFARE PAYMENTS, 1985 AND 1993				
	Lowest CSW Rate		Highest CSW Rate	
	1985 %	1993 %	1985 %	1993 %
Contributory Old Age < 80	100	106	88	92
Contributory Old Age > 80	107	113	94	99
Contributory Widow's	90	96	79	84
Contributory Invalidity Pension	88	93	77	82
Contributory Unemployment/ Disability Benefit	77	85	67	75
Non-Contributory Old Age	86	91	75	79
Non-Contributory Widow's/ Deserted Wife's Allowance	84	91	74	79
Non-Contributory Short-term Unemployment Assistance	64	85	56	75
Non-Contributory Long-term Unemployment Assistance	68	91	60	79
Supplementary Welfare Allowance	62	85	54	75

4.7 It will be noted from the above Table that in all cases where the rate of payment was below the minimum in 1985, there has been a convergence to the minimum rates recommended by the Commission. This convergence has been most significant in the case of those rates which had been considerably below the minimum (generally speaking, the Assistance rates).

Annex 1

Terms of Reference and Constitution of the Forum

(1) The Terms of Reference of the National Economic and Social Forum are to develop economic and social policy initiatives, particularly initiatives to combat unemployment, and to contribute to the formation of a national consensus on social and economic matters.

The Forum will:

(a) Have a specific focus on:-

- job creation, obstacles to employment growth and models of economic growth;
- long-term unemployment;
- disadvantage;
- equality and social justice in Irish society; and
- policies and proposals in relation to these issues.

(b) Make practical proposals on measures to meet these challenges.

(c) Examine and make recommendations on other economic and social issues.

(d) Review and monitor the implementation of the Forum's proposals and if necessary make further recommendations; and

(e) Examine and make recommendations on matters referred to it by Government.

(2) The Forum may consider matters on its own initiative or at the request of Government.

(3) The Forum will work in two year cycles and will inform Government of its programme of work within three months of the beginning of each cycle.

(4) In drawing up its work programme, the Forum will take account of the role and functions of other bodies in the social and economic area such as NESC and the CRC to avoid duplication.

(5) The Forum may invite Ministers, Public Officials, Members of the Forum, and outside experts to make presentations and to assist the Forum in its work.

(6) The Forum will publish and submit all its reports to Government, to the Houses of the Oireachtas and to other Government Departments and bodies as may be appropriate.

(7) The Forum will be drawn from three broad strands. The first will represent the Government and the Oireachtas. The second will represent the traditional Social Partners. The third strand will be representative of groups traditionally outside the consultative process including women, the unemployed, the disadvantaged, people with a disability, youth, the elderly and environmental interests.

(8) The Forum will have an independent Chairperson appointed by Government.

(9) The term of office of members will be two years during which term members may nominate alternates. 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. The size of the membership may be varied by the Government.

(10) The Forum is under the aegis of the Office of the Tánaiste and is funded through a Grant-in-Aid from that Office. This Grant-in-Aid is part of the overall estimate for the Office of the Tánaiste.

Annex 2

Membership of the Forum

Independent Chairperson:	Maureen Gaffney
Government Representative:	Eithne Fitzgerald T.D., Minister of State at the Office of the Tánaiste
Chair (Employment and Economic Policy Committee):	Prof. John O'Hagan
Chair (Social Policy Committee):	Tríona Nic Giolla Choille

Oireachtas

Fianna Fáil:	Ned O Keeffe, T.D. Éamon Ó Cuív, T.D. Chris Flood, T.D. Liam Fitzgerald, T.D. Sen. Brian Hillery Sen. Brian Crowley
Fine Gael:	Richard Bruton, T.D. Frances Fitzgerald, T.D. Paul Connaughton, T.D. Sen. Madeleine Taylor-Quinn
Labour:	Joe Costello, T.D. Sen. Jan O'Sullivan
Progressive Democrats:	Martin Cullen, T.D.
Technical Group:	Pat Rabbitte, T.D.
Independent Senators:	Sen. Mary Henry

Social Partners

Trade Unions:	Philip Flynn Patricia O'Donovan Noel O'Neill Mary Ann McGlynn Manus O'Riordan
Employer/Business Interests:	Declan Madden Anne Coughlan Karen O'Sullivan David Croughan Mirette Corboy
Agricultural/Farming Organisations:	John Tyrrell Tom Parlon Ciarán Dolan Clare Higgins Monica Prendiville

"Third Strand"

Womens Organisations:	Ann Taylor Noirín Byrne Ina Broughall
Unemployed:	Brendan Butler Jane Foley Mike Allen
Disadvantaged:	Niall Crowley Joan Byrne David Joyce
Youth:	Gearóid O'Maoilmhichíl
The Elderly:	Michael White
People with a Disability:	Roger Acton
Environmental Interests:	Jeanne Meldon
Academics:	Fr. Seán Healy Stasia Crickley

Secretariat

Director:	Seán Ó hÉigeartaigh
Secretary, Social Policy Committee:	Majella Kelleher
Secretary, Employment & Economic Policy Committee:	David Hegarty