

ANTI-POVERTY

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Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network

Submission from the NORTHERN IRELAND ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK to the consultation on the Way Forward document Phase II

The NORTHERN IRELAND ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK works to end poverty by empowering communities and influencing government through research, education and campaigning.

NIAPN welcomes the governments continued commitment to develop an effective Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland, an action we have strenuously lobbied for since our establishment in 1991. Our submission to the Phase II document has been the usual bottom up approach informed through a variety of consultative events with our members and as a result of continued analysis with NIAPN Board members and staff.

NIAPN welcome

NIAPN welcome the vision of the Anti-Poverty Strategy;

"the development of a society which aims to enable its citizens to be fully participative, to realise their full potential and live free from poverty and social exclusion."

We welcome the high level priorities and the establishment of a Ministerial Forum, the commitment to a focus on outcomes and the proposed use of a broad range of indicators in support of the strategy. We also welcome the statement that the format of the Anti Poverty Strategy will aim to be more consistent with the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion and the acknowledgement of the wider European Union policy framework that the Anti Poverty Strategy must be developed within. We also welcome the introduction of a Regional Action Plan consistent with the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAP) and the four objectives that make up the NAP.

Four objectives

1. To facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services
2. To prevent the risk of exclusion
3. To help the most vulnerable
4. To mobilise all relevant bodies

NIAPN Concerns - No budget & no targets

NIAPN have a number of deep concerns over the proposed Phase II document. Regardless of massive criticism from right across the sector that the Government's NEW TSN has not delivered for people living with poverty, the Government has not listened to the key recommendation that Anti-Poverty Work needs a specific budget. We are particularly concerned that the Government is congratulating itself on a policy that has failed to deliver. We are also dismayed that within the new strategy there are no explicit targets.

People Experiencing Poverty

It is totally unacceptable that the strategy as it stands contains no proposals within the Ministerial Forum for the active inclusion of people experiencing poverty nor for the inclusion of representatives from civil society who should be supported to inform and direct the preparation, implementation and monitoring of such an important strategy.

Conflict

In the current climate of community tension and social disorder the importance of such mechanisms to secure a peaceful society cannot be over emphasised. The Anti-Poverty Strategy must enable people experiencing poverty, and civil society, to inform and direct its preparation, implementation and monitoring. This strategy presents a real opportunity for the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland to be acknowledged and 'actioned', basically that we are a country emerging from conflict.

As the non government organisation that facilitated the Phase 1 and 2 consultative events on behalf of the Anti-Poverty Unit we are dismayed at the lack of uptake of the many recommendations made by people attending these events.

Strategic Aim

It is the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Networks opinion that the strategic aim of an Anti Poverty Strategy must be to '**eradicate poverty and social exclusion and promote social inclusion**'.

Child Poverty & the Ministerial Forum

Within the current proposals and the Children and Young Persons Strategy there is a glaring omission for there are no proposals to attempt to address child poverty. There is no clarity on how the strategy will work with other central Northern Ireland strategies, for example Investment for Health which has key anti-poverty objectives. The framework for the strategy is unclear and there is no clarity on how the Ministerial Forum will actually operate, how it will work with other Ministerial Committees or what actual power it will have.

Mainstreaming

A serious criticism arising out of the evaluation of NEW TSN, which this strategy does nothing to address, is that there was no evidence that the policy had been successfully mainstreamed into the planning and implementation of Government programmes in the budgeting process. This is a particular concern as there is a lack of clarity about the location in strategic terms of a joined up programme aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland.

Research & Measurement

There appears to be no follow through on the excellent research initiated and carried out on behalf of OFMDFM within the strategy. There is no commitment to act on the identified risks, causes and consequences of poverty in Northern Ireland. Promoting social inclusion has not been achieved, resourced or actioned to date. The measurements to be used in support of the strategy are not

clearly defined and are not accessible. NIAPN call for clarity on current baselines being used and on how future progress will be evaluated.

Targets & Equality

The statement that 'a high level framework does not seek to identify specific initiatives or actions by individual departments, nor to set specific targets' is unacceptable; the EU National Action Plan does this so should an Anti Poverty Strategy for NI. The suggestion that the strategy is too high level to have a full Equality Impact Assessment; is a breach of Statutory Duty under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998.

The EU Framework – the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion

There is a lack of clarity on how the three high level priorities set out in the Anti Poverty Strategy will work with or compliment the four objectives of the NAP referred to below.

Anti Poverty Strategy - 3 Priorities	4 NAP Objectives
1. Building capacity- to (a) participate in the labour market and take advantage of the market economy and (b) benefit from greater participation in social and cultural life the community	1. To facilitate participation in employment and access by all to resources, rights, goods and services
2. Increasing employment opportunities and reducing barriers to employment.	2. To prevent the risk of exclusion
3. Dealing with financial hardship	3. To help the most vulnerable
	4. To mobilise all relevant bodies

Clarity needed

We need more information on the proposed framework for the Anti Poverty Strategy. We need more information on the proposed Regional Action Plan. We need to see and comment on targets for all government departments. We need more information on the proposed role of local councils in relation to anti poverty work at a local level.

Disability, long-term illness and caring responsibilities

An economic growth approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion does not work for many people living with poverty. The APS's continued insistence on work as the only route out of poverty shows no recognition of the fact that some people have a disability or chronic illness so severe they are unable to work, even if there were jobs available for them to access. Within the UK generally, the employment rate for those disabled people who are able to work, if 'reasonable accommodation' is provided, is significantly below the level for the wider population. While people with disabilities generally find it hard to access paid employment, those living in areas of high unemployment have even less chance of finding a job.

Table 1: Long-term illness/disability and provision of unpaid care (%)

Region	Long-term limiting illness/disability	Providing unpaid care	Providing 50 or more hours unpaid care
United Kingdom	18.5	10.0	2.1
Northern Ireland	21.3	14.7	3.6
England and Wales	18.2	10.0	2.1
Scotland	20.3	9.5	2.3
NE England	22.7	11.0	2.7

Source: Census 2001

The high level of households with disabled people in Northern Ireland, combined with an acknowledged paucity of services for people with disabilities impacts greatly on poverty. The lack of services means that much of the care and support for disabled people comes from other family members. As Table 1 illustrates, a considerably higher proportion of people in NI provide unpaid care than in other parts of the UK. Even when compared to the North East of England which has slightly higher levels of disability, the proportion of those providing unpaid care is significantly higher. While some of these unpaid carers manage to hold down a paying job also, the reality is many cannot and have to depend on benefits.

Thus, work is not a viable route out of poverty unless there is a huge increase in services to those with a disability or long term illness. This needs to be reflected in any adequate Anti Poverty Strategy

Impact of the Conflict

There is already significant evidence of the role of the conflict and its legacy in exacerbating the difficulties of addressing child poverty in Northern Ireland. On a macro level, conflict undermines economic growth. Higher levels of mental ill-health are significantly related to the Troubles. Variation in intensity of political violence between different areas of Northern Ireland has been linked to area differences in the level of psychological disorder. A report from the 1997 Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey indicates that people in poorer households were more likely to suffer significant health stresses and were also more likely to have borne the brunt of the Northern Ireland Troubles either in their areas or on their lives.

Like poverty, the conflict was concentrated in a small number of areas. In fact, a map of the areas where poverty is most concentrated in Northern Ireland will match very closely the map of areas where the conflict has been most intense. There is growing evidence that the interaction of conflict with poverty tends to exacerbate both. While poverty does not cause conflict, the evidence both locally and internationally indicates that conflict feeds on poverty while undermining the potential of those living in poverty to escape it.

The high levels of fear that remain in those areas that have taken the brunt of the conflict are reflected in high levels of unemployment and long-term unemployment in those areas. Given that the Belfast labour market is relatively strong, the impact of the conflict on the ability of people in North and West Belfast to take advantage of employment opportunities has to be acknowledged. A large-scale survey of the impact of fear on Belfast 'interface' communities collected data on over 4,500 individuals. It revealed that just one in twelve worked in areas dominated by the 'other' religion. 48% would not travel, due to fear, through an area dominated by the other community during the daytime. Depending on the area they lived in, between a third and two thirds of respondents said their job seeking activities are limited by fear.

Any Anti Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland must take account of the particular circumstances of a region that is just emerging from over 30 years of conflict. Our public services have been severely impacted by so much potential investment going instead to the security forces. Some of the money saved by demilitarisation must be put into supporting the development of new services for those sick or disabled, many as a result of the conflict, even if that is simply the stress of living in a conflict situation.

Will anything change?

We are very concerned that there has been a whole range of other consultations such as the Children's Strategy, the Gender Strategy and the Fuel Poverty Strategy where a massive amount of human and financial resources have been invested by the community and voluntary sectors. To date there has been no return for People Experiencing Poverty or for the sectors. The result to date has been nothing new and no resources.

In the light of increasing disillusionment with consultation processes within Northern Ireland and a continuing desire to continue to impress on Government the need to listen to hear what is said and crucially to act on proposals made; we are proposing the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- A strong Anti-Poverty Strategy needs to be the key strategy that informs and directs all other strategies.
- To ensure anti-poverty policy is placed at the 'heart of Government' the strategy needs to establish a Statutory Committee, an All Party Departmental Review Group on Poverty & Social Exclusion & Social Inclusion.
- It needs the political will to ensure that financial support is targeted to reduce existing income and other social and economic inequalities.

- It needs to tackle inequality as a priority, to recognise that tackling employability is only one part of an anti-poverty strategy which should aim to reduce social and economic inequalities.
- It needs to address the legacy of conflict on the ability of people in some parts of the region to take up employment opportunities outside their own area.
- It needs to ensure that the above practices are mainstreamed into the application and delivery of all government policies.
- The new strategy must be owned by (all actors) Government departments, NGO's, disadvantaged communities, groups, trade unions, employers and civic society to ensure delivery on commonly agreed targets.
- All Government departments must develop, for external public comment, clearly defined and specified targets, which must be measurable and time based and we need increased consistency, communication and co-ordination across Government departments.
- We need clarity on how the Anti-Poverty Unit will poverty & gender proof all policies.
- The different nature of rural poverty, particularly lack of access to services, must also be taken account of within a proposed Anti-Poverty Strategy
- An Anti Poverty Strategy MUST be resourced. The Northern Ireland bloc grant should be top sliced to ensure Poverty and social exclusion targets direct and inform the setting of overall budget priorities and local groups addressing poverty must have access to resources. NIAPN call for a minimum '3% budget-line' for anti-poverty initiatives within each Government department and at local council level.
- Tackling child poverty must be effectively resourced, addressed and actioned.
- Poverty for those who are unable to work due to caring responsibilities, or severe disability must be addressed.
- In-work poverty must be addressed, we must move away from the current reality where 56% of all children living in poverty live in households where at least one adult is working.



NORTHERN IRELAND ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK

Summary Position Paper on the Way Forward document Phase II

The strategic aim for an Anti-Poverty Strategy must be to eradicate poverty and social exclusion and promote social inclusion.

- Government has not listened to the key recommendation that Anti-Poverty Work needs a specific budget.
- Government is congratulating itself and planning to further extend on a policy that has failed to deliver.
- The strategy has no explicit targets, what little is proposed is not quantifiable, measurable or time based.
- It is totally unacceptable that the strategy contains no proposals within the Ministerial Forum for the active inclusion of people experiencing poverty.
- There are no proposals for the active inclusion of representatives of people experiencing poverty from civil society.
- There is no acknowledgement of the fact that NI is a society emerging from conflict and no measures aimed at supporting and securing a peaceful society.
- There is no attempt to address Child poverty within the current proposals.
- There is no clarity on how the strategy will work with other central Northern Ireland strategies like Investment for Health.
- The framework for the strategy is unclear.
- It is unclear how the Ministerial Forum will be appointed, how it will work with other Ministerial Committees or what actual power it will have to hold government departments etc to account.
- NEW TS did not 'mainstream*' anti poverty work and neither will the current proposals (*put anti poverty work at the heart of all government policies and programmes and resources)
- Findings from existing research into poverty in NI have not been acted upon within the current proposals.
- The measurements to be used in support of the strategy are not clearly defined and are not accessible.

- An economic growth approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion does not work for many people living with poverty.
- There is no commitment to identify the causes and consequences of poverty in Northern Ireland.

Recommendations

- A strong Anti-Poverty Strategy needs to be the key strategy that informs and directs all other strategies.
- To ensure anti-poverty policy is placed at the 'heart of Government' the strategy needs to establish a Statutory Committee, an All Party Departmental Review Group on Poverty & Social Exclusion & Social Inclusion.
- It needs the political will to ensure that financial support is targeted to reduce existing income and other social and economic inequalities.
- It needs to tackle inequality as a priority, to recognise that tackling employability is only one part of an anti-poverty strategy which should aim to reduce social and economic inequalities.
- It needs to ensure that the above practices are mainstreamed into the application and delivery of all government policies.
- An Anti Poverty Strategy MUST be resourced. The new strategy must be owned by (all actors) Government departments, NGO's, disadvantaged communities, groups, trade unions, employers and civic society to ensure delivery on commonly agreed targets.
- All Government departments must develop for external public comment, clearly defined and specified targets, which must be measurable and time based and we need increased consistency, communication and co-ordination across Government departments.
- We need clarity on how the Anti-Poverty Unit will poverty & gender proof all policies.
- The different nature of rural poverty, particularly lack of access to services, must also be taken account of within a proposed Anti-Poverty Strategy
- An Anti Poverty Strategy MUST be resourced. The Northern Ireland bloc grant should be top sliced to ensure Poverty and social exclusion targets direct and inform the setting of overall budget priorities and local groups addressing poverty must have access to resources. NIAPN call for a minimum '3% budget-line' for anti-poverty initiatives within each Government department and at local council level.

NORTHERN IRELAND ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK
Summary Position Paper
September 05



NORTHERN IRELAND ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK

Summary Position Paper on the Way Forward document Phase 1

If this consultation is to be meaningful to people living in poverty, there is a serious need for the political will within Government to listen to what has been said and to take it on board.

- It must take account of and be influenced by the social, economic and structural circumstances that all our citizens live within.
- It must have a definition of poverty, social exclusion and social inclusion.
- The strategic aim of an Anti- Poverty Strategy must be to **eradicate poverty and social exclusion and promote social inclusion.**
- There must be SMART objectives, actions, quantified targets and indicators detailed against a realistic and ambitious timescale and budget.
- Qualitative indicators.
- The Strategy must continue to carry out analysis to develop solutions and on provide new analysis rather than simply listing existing policies.
- The role of an Anti-Poverty Strategy and its impact on and relationship with other strategies and policies needs to be defined and explained.
- The different nature of rural poverty, particularly lack of access to services, must also be taken account of within a proposed Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- It must have cross-border dimensions.
- It must be Rights and Equality based with a gender dimension that must be actioned. It needs to tackle structural inequality, benefit levels, housing and income differentials.
- An Anti-Poverty Strategy must address how it will protect the interests of people living in poverty and those at risk of poverty from policy proposals such as the proposed introduction of Water Charges. This particularly regressive tax must be urgently addressed.

- Introduce a further category under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act, low income, or poverty and social exclusion.
- The issues of regionality, rurality and poverty need to be addressed in a way that enable and ensure participation, especially of socially excluded groups at a variety of levels, up to and including the Ministerial Forum.
- The next stage of consultation on the development of a strategy must address the mechanisms and structures of the proposed Forum.
- The Northern Ireland bloc grant should be top sliced to ensure Poverty and social exclusion targets direct and inform the setting of overall budget priorities.
- Local groups addressing poverty must have access to resources, NIAPN call for a minimum '3% budget-line' for anti-poverty initiatives within each Government department and at a local council level.
- There must be SMART objectives relating to people with disabilities and carers who cannot take up paid employment in the Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- The structural and social barriers that prevent people moving out of poverty need to be identified and addressed.
- The social protection system needs to develop mechanisms to ensure that accepting work is always financially worthwhile.
- There is a serious need for awareness raising on the European Union policy, **National Action Plans for Social Inclusion**, and its implications for Northern Ireland. The degree of 'fit' between this policy and future proposals within an Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland must also be addressed in the next stage of this consultation.
- At its heart an Anti-Poverty Strategy must enable people experiencing poverty and civil society to inform and direct its preparation, implementation and monitoring.