

**Submission to Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection**

**National Action Plan for Social Inclusion**

**April 2018**

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Founded in 1976, Treoir is the National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children.

Treoir, in partnership with its member agencies, has promoted the rights and best interests of unmarried parents and their children through its National Specialist Information Service and by advocating for their rights.

Treoir works to achieve this aim by:

• Providing a National Information Service to unmarried parents, their extended families and those working with them through answering queries, information website, publications and outreach workshops

• Co-ordinating the Teen Parents Support Programme

• Promoting change at every level to achieve constitutional and legal equality for unmarried parents, and to improve services and attitudes to unmarried parents

• Promoting/undertaking research to better understand the situation of unmarried parents and their children in Ireland

• Collaborating with other agencies to promote our aim through the federation of Treoir and agencies outside Treoir

Treoir recognises the diversity of family life in Ireland and that all families, including unmarried families, have the same rights to respect, care, support and protection.

In addition, Treoir supports and promotes the rights of all children as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Treoir, in partnership with its member agencies, promotes the rights and best interests of unmarried parents and their children through providing specialist information and advocating for their rights.

In 2017 Treoir’s National Information Service responded to over 5000 calls, a significant number of which were from lone parents, unmarried fathers, extended

family members and professionals. Over 60% of all queries related to Guardianship, custody and access issues.

The recommendations in this Submission are based on the experience of those contacting Treoir’s Specialist Information Service.

**Consultation Process:**

**Timeframe:**

3. Do you think a 4 year timeframe 2018 to 2021 is sufficient to achieve tangible results?

Yes. Treoir believes that a 4 year timeframe can achieve tangible results but believes that the plan must continue be ambitious across all the necessary policy areas and supported by the political commitment to implementation. There must be an oversight body to ensure implementation of the strategy.

**Active Inclusion Approach:**

**4. For each group, please select the theme that is most \* important/relevant.**

All the groups are relevant to Treoir. Our clientele includes for instance young parents (18-24 years); parents/cohabitants of working age (25- 64 years); older people such as grandparents looking after their grandchildren 65+ years; parents from ethnic minorities and migrant parents; parents with disabilities or whose children suffer disabilities; children such as teen parents; unemployed people who are lone parents/cohabitants, and parents from the Traveller community.

Adequate Minimum Income – Lone Parents

Inclusive Labour Markets – Minorities and migrant workers including Travellers

Access to Quality Services - Unemployed

Any other groups

Unmarried fathers, People experiencing homeless, disadvantaged urban communities and also those experiencing poverty in rural communities.

**5. Based on the current economic climate and the challenges and opportunities facing Ireland and its citizens, do you think the active inclusion approach is more appropriate than the previous life-cycle approach?**

An active inclusion approach is always appropriate regardless of the economic climate. A fully integrated plan will not only support all three components listed but will include actions to address discrimination and inequality.

**Scope of Commitments:**

**6. Do you think a 'whole of Government' approach will be effective in delivering tangible results over the lifetime of the new plan?**

Yes

**7. Do you agree with a 'whole of Government' approach that incorporates existing actions and commitments from other relevant national strategies**

Yes

**8. How do you think 'whole of Government' implementation might be improved? (please be concise, max. 500 words):**

It will be improved if the plan is linked with other relevant strategies and commitments including those which will address the structural causes of poverty and social exclusion, e.g. housing/accommodation, migration, taxation. There must be a lead department or structure established that has statutory powers to bring other departments to account. The Department of An Taoiseach would be the best department to lead on the plan.

Supporting Structures

**9. The above structures were established under the 2007-2016 plan. For each one, please indicate whether you would like it to**

**(a) continue in the new Plan as it is (keep);**

**(b) continue in the new Plan but with some amendments (amend); or**

**(c) be removed (stop)**

Institutional Structures – Keep

Monitoring and reporting on implementation and progress – Keep

Consultation on implementation and progress – Keep

Poverty Impact Assessment and proofing – Keep

Poverty Measurement – Keep and amend

Poverty Research – Keep and improve

EU and International - Keep

**What other supporting structures do you think would be effective in delivering and/or monitoring and/or reporting on the new Plan?  Please be concise, max. 500 characters:**

Poverty research needs to put greater emphasis on qualitative research and the involvement of people and communities who experience poverty and social exclusion.

Monitoring needs to be reviewed to ensure it is transparent, participative and effective and results in needed changes. Return to a strong programme of support for local autonomous community development organisations to support participation at all levels in decision making.

**10. The Programme for Partnership Government includes a commitment to develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights.**

**Do you think that enough consideration is given to poverty proofing by Government Departments when policy is being developed?  NO**

**How would you improve the process of poverty proofing? Comment (please be concise, max. 500 characters) :**

Poverty proofing needs to move way beyond the financial impact on the population and look at impact of all legislation particularly on key target groups.

There needs to be a much clearer ex-ante proofing of the annual budget process and other policies which impact on poverty and social exclusion. The poverty proofing process is currently very limited with very little transparency either in terms of participation of those affected or the impact of the process on policies. These need to be greatly strengthened. This can be an integrated process as part of wider equality proofing/impact assessment. Guidelines already exist to support this process.

**Targets**

11. Do you think that we should continue to measure progress against targets that are ambitious and challenging but which may also be seen as unrealistic and/or unachievable **(retain target)**

Yes

**Comment:**

Poverty at any level is a breach of human rights and unacceptable. It is essential therefore that the current target and level of ambition is maintained. The target should be the driver for a NAP Inclusion with the policies that will support the level of poverty reduction to achieve of the target.  The priority is to make serious impact into poverty.

12. Do you think that we should revise the existing targets in order to achieve a balance between being sufficiently ambitious while also remaining realistic **(revise target)**

NO

Comment:

The plan should include concrete targets across a wide range of policy areas and these should be monitored as part of the overall monitoring process. Better to fall short on an ambitious plan than meet or fall short of targets in a revised “realistic” plan.

13. If consideration was given to revising the target for the reduction of consistent poverty in the new plan, what would you regard as the most appropriate, using the 2015 rate of 8.7% as a baseline?

* **Remain unchanged at 2% or less by 2020**

If other, please provide details of the proposed target and a concise rationale in less than 500 characters:

The risk of poverty and deprivation indicators tell us different things about poverty. There should therefore be sub-targets for both these indicators. In line with the commitment in the SDGs ‘to leave no-one behind’ there should also be sub targets for other groups with higher levels of poverty in order to bring poverty levels for these groups down to that of the overall population. This should also apply to groups not shown in SILC e.g. minority ethnic groups, including Travellers and migrants.

**Outcomes:**

**14. Top 3 Outcomes**

In principle an inclusive society means that people’s well-being and life chances should not be pre-determined by their background, such as marital status, gender, age or ethnicity, disability etc.

Changing the constitutional definition of family would mean that legislation no longer will have to protect the family based on marriage and discriminate the ever-increasing modern family types such as cohabitants, lone parents, grandparents or certain other persons having custody of children. It would mean that social welfare legislation would provide for widows payment to be available to cohabitants or legislation regulating tax entitlements would allow cohabitants to have the same tax entitlements than married couples, etc.

In relation to lone parents, Ireland has among the highest rates in the EU of lone parents at risk of poverty and social exclusion. When compared to couples with children, parents who are bringing up a child or children without a partner face poverty remarkably more often.

Appropriate income levels for lone parents and an extension of the age of the OPF as well as the restoration of tax credits for both lone parents would be important. They were all severely reduced with the recession. It is also fundamental to have effective and integrated family support services including mental health, parenting, counselling, etc.

Housing is a key problem spiralling out of control and the provision of adequate childcare is falling short. In addition, access to education and support throughout is key. Difficulties finding full-time jobs/part-time that are flexible enough to accommodate their parenting responsibilities is also an issue.

It is important to take into account how these categories interact. Poverty and social exclusion rate for people with disabilities and migrants is also higher than for the native-born EU population. Individuals that belong to more than one of these categories – ie a migrant lone parent with a disability – are particularly vulnerable.