

**Combat Poverty Agency**  
*working for the prevention  
and elimination of poverty*



# **LOCAL POVERTY PROFILING**

## **A GUIDEBOOK**

### **FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

**Combat Poverty Agency 2002**

## **Introduction**

In 1999 the Combat Poverty Agency initiated work to support local authorities to incorporate a strategic approach to addressing poverty and social exclusion. In order to begin the process of developing an anti-poverty strategy it is necessary to provide a clear picture of the nature and extent of poverty within the particular local authority area. Good information is critical to good decision-making; the need to define *where, why* and to *what degree* particular communities experience social exclusion and poverty is a key requirement of good policy making.

Between September and December 1999 the Small Area Health Research Unit (SAHRU) in Trinity College, Dublin, was commissioned by Combat Poverty Agency to carry out a Local Poverty Profile (LPP) feasibility study. This was followed in Spring, 2000 by a pilot implementation involving three Local Authorities: Sligo, South County Dublin and Offaly. This guidebook was produced as part of this pilot process and is intended to assist local authorities who want to develop a local poverty profile. Poverty Profiling is at an early stage of development in Ireland. The guidebook does not provide all the answers to a complex and developing process and it is important to note that issues such as data collection, highlighted in the guidebook, need to be addressed at national and local level.

We are particularly grateful for the co-operation of staff of county councils in the Sligo, South County Dublin and Offaly, in assisting us in the development of the profiling model and for their continued interest and support throughout the activity.

We also acknowledge the contribution of Dennis Pringle, Des McCafferty and in particular Carmel Corrigan as external readers for this report, and the members of the Advisory Committee for their contribution to the initial stages of the project. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of Combat Poverty Agency.

**Combat Poverty Agency, December 2002**

## FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS, ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>CPA</b>	Combat Poverty Agency
<b>CSO</b>	Central Statistics Office
<b>DED</b>	District Electoral Division
<b>GIS</b>	Geographical Information Systems
<b>LPP</b>	Local Poverty Profiling
<b>NAPS</b>	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
<b>SAPS</b>	Small Area Population Statistics
<b>SAHRU</b>	Small Area Health Research Unit, Trinity College

### Glossary

*The first use of each of these terms is highlighted in the text of the Guidebook. This is intended to guide the reader back to the Glossary if necessary.*

**Dataset:** In the context of this guidebook, datasets are collections of recorded figures on a range of issues related to poverty, deprivation and social exclusion. Datasets are typically held in spreadsheet or database form on computer. Some of the datasets that may be used in Local Poverty Profiling include the housing statistics held by the Local Authorities and Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) from the Census of Population. (See also **Domain** and **Indicator**.)

**District Electoral Divisions (DEDs):** these are the smallest geographical divisions for which the Central Statistics Office (CSO) routinely makes basic social, demographic and economic data available following a census of population. For the 2002 National Census, the country was divided into 3,440 DEDs.

**Domain:** this is more commonly understood as ‘subject’ or ‘theme’. Domain here refers to the broad or macro heading under which more detailed indicators are grouped. The domains used in this study are Housing, Welfare Dependency, Educational Disadvantage, Health, Quality of Life and Minority Groups. Additional or alternative domains can be developed and added as needed.

**Geographic Information System (GIS):** GIS is a specialised computer package that provides the power to visualise, explore, query and analyse data spatially, that is, in interactive map form. Leading GIS packages for the desktop computer include Arcview and MapInfo.

**Geo-Coding:** Geo-coding describes the mapping process by which a spatial coordinate is assigned to a specific area on a map. In LPP, geo-coding is often used

to assign street addresses to their District Electoral Divisions (DEDs) for mapping purposes.

**Indicator:** At their simplest, indicators are figures or statistics that illustrate (or indicate!) the occurrence, absence, degree or severity of a particular event or situation. Indicators are used when the target concept is not directly or easily measurable. For example, poverty is a multi-dimensional concept that is difficult to measure directly. When we say people are experiencing poverty, this usually means, in the first instance, that they have inadequate income to meet their needs or attain a lifestyle determined as acceptable by their society. Therefore, we are not measuring poverty per se, but are measuring income as a way of indicating poverty. In this case, level of income is the indirect measure or indicator of the target concept, that is, poverty.

**Spatial Area:** LPP makes frequent reference to spatial areas. Spatial areas are predetermined geographical divisions of land for analytical purposes. The most common spatial areas used in LPP are regions, counties, Local Authorities and district electoral divisions (DEDs).

**Stakeholder:** here, stakeholders are people, groups or organisations with a vested interest in the Local Poverty Profile. These include the Local Authority itself, the County Development Board and local groups and organisations, both statutory and community and voluntary, concerned with poverty and exclusion.

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## 1. The Guidebook

The aim of this Guidebook is to outline the steps involved in identifying, gathering and presenting data on poverty, deprivation and social exclusion within Local Authority areas – a process that has been termed *Local Poverty Profiling* (LPP). The Guidebook presents a model for LPP. It identifies data and *indicators* that can be employed in LPP, issues associated with data gathering, data management and analysis, and subsequent reporting and mapping. The model presented here is intended to be flexible enough to allow for local priority setting as poverty-related issues and priorities will differ between urban and rural Local Authorities, large and not so large areas, highly populated and sparsely populated areas. It provides a basic framework for starting and routinely implementing the LPP process.

This Guidebook draws primarily on the experience of a pilot initiative of the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) aimed at developing a model for LPP. It has also been informed by other work commissioned by Combat Poverty in respect of secondary data analysis, poverty indicators and conducting local research.<sup>1</sup> It is intended to familiarise the reader with the basic rationale underlying LPP, the resources required for setting up an LPP system, the key steps in developing such a profile, and some of the general data issues that arise. The Guide is directed towards those in the Local Authority who will be involved in planning, carrying out and using the profile to inform their decisions, including managers, researchers and Directors of Community and Enterprise. Although not intended to be a technical manual, the Guide may also be useful to those within the Local Authority who will be involved in the more technical aspects of profiling (such as IT and other staff familiar with *GIS*) as it identifies some of the potential sources and types of data they may be required to handle. It is also intended to be of interest and use to external groups who have an interest in examining and addressing poverty at the local level, including community groups and service providers.

### Why *Poverty Profiles*?

Substantial economic growth over the late 1990s was accompanied by falling levels of unemployment, rising employment and increased labour market participation, particularly among women. These changes have resulted in a drop in some measures of poverty. Consistent poverty is defined as the proportion of households living on less than 60% of average disposable incomes (that is, income after tax and social insurance contributions have been paid and welfare and other payments have been received) and experiencing an enforced lack of at least one item on a list of eight necessities<sup>2</sup>. Research by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) shows that the proportion of households experiencing consistent poverty decreased from 15% in 1994 to 6% in 2002. In addition, the proportion of children living in households experiencing consistent poverty at the higher 60% line declined substantially from 24% in 1994 to 8% in 2002.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fitzgerald, E., Bates, J. and Matthews, A. (2002) *Secondary Data Sources on Poverty*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency. Palmer, G. and Rahman, M. (2002) *Monitoring Progress on Poverty*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

<sup>2</sup> These non-monetary deprivation items include one substantial meal each day, chicken, meat or fish every second day, a 'roast' or equivalent once a week, two pairs of strong shoes, a warm coat, new rather than second hand clothes and being able to pay everyday household expenses without falling into arrears.

<sup>3</sup> Layte, R., Maitre, B., Nolan, B., Whelan, C.T., Watson, D., Williams, J. and Casey, B. (2000) *Monitoring Poverty Trends and Exploring Poverty Dynamics in Ireland: Report for the National Anti-Poverty Strategy's Inter-Departmental Committee*, ESRI, December 2000.

Despite this progress, a different picture emerges when one looks at relative income poverty, whereby an income is so inadequate it precludes people from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by the society in which they live. The proportion of households experiencing poverty at the 50% relative income poverty line (that is, living on less than 50% of average disposable income) has risen. The gap between the better off and the less well off has widened and the real incomes of people experiencing poverty continued to fall significantly behind the majority of society. For example, in 2000, Unemployment Assistance for a single adult was €96.50 per week, whereas average disposable income per head (gained mostly from employment) was approximately €253.95 per week.<sup>4</sup> Poverty and exclusion, therefore, continue to be ongoing challenges.

Research has also shown that particular groups have a higher than average risk of poverty. These include

- single parents,
- people living alone, (including the elderly),
- women,
- children, and particularly those living in large families (those which have three or more children),
- unemployed people,
- ethnic minorities, including members of the Traveller community, refugees and asylum seekers,
- people with disabilities or experiencing long-term ill health, and
- homeless people.

Many of these groups are included in national surveys. However, as these surveys are based on *households* some groups, such as Travellers, homeless people and those residing in institutions (including some asylum seekers and refugees as well as a number of those with disabilities and long-term illness) are not included at all or are included in such small numbers that detailed analysis of their situation is not possible. Local research and data can contribute significantly to filling in some of these gaps left by such household surveys.

Poverty has causes as well as consequences, and the two are almost always inextricably linked. Commonly cited causes of poverty include low income, unemployment, educational disadvantage, disability and rural isolation. Other causes of poverty, in particular racism towards foreign nationals, are relatively new in Ireland but are of increasing importance. These causes are not only of concern at the national level, but will be reflected and need careful consideration at the local level also. Consequences include ill health, poor housing, social alienation, drug misuse and concentrations of poverty.

## **The National Anti-Poverty Strategy**

The need for and relevance of Local Poverty Profiles can be placed in the context of both the changing role of Local Authorities (see below) and the government's continuing commitment to the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS). Ireland's NAPS, launched in 1997, defines poverty as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Fitzgerald, E., 'Redistribution Through Ireland's Welfare and Tax Systems' in Cantillon, S. et al. (2001) *Rich and Poor: Perspectives on Tackling Inequality in Ireland*, Dublin: Oak Tree Press in association with the Combat Poverty Agency.

*People are living in poverty, if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society.*<sup>5</sup>

This definition encompasses a relative concept of poverty, that is, one's situation is measured against what is considered normal in wider society.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy originally had five key themes: Educational Disadvantage, Unemployment, Income Adequacy, Disadvantaged Urban Areas, and Rural Poverty. The current National Agreement, *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF), includes a commitment to a review of the NAPS.<sup>6</sup> It specified that this review should examine the original targets of the NAPS and consider new targets and objectives under the themes of child poverty, women's poverty, older people, health and housing/accommodation. Later, it was decided by the social partners that housing/accommodation and health would be considered as two additional themes and that the needs of older people, women, children, ethnic minorities, and disability would be included as cross-cutting themes that would be considered under all of the others. As can be seen from the above, these are among the groups identified as being most at risk of poverty.

<b>The Revised National Anti-Poverty Strategy</b>	
<b>Key Themes</b>	<b>Cross-Cutting Themes</b>
➤ Educational Disadvantage	➤ Child Poverty
➤ Unemployment	➤ Women's Poverty
➤ Income Adequacy	➤ Older People
➤ Disadvantaged Urban Dwellers	➤ Ethnic Minorities
➤ Disadvantaged Rural Dwellers	➤ People with disabilities
➤ Housing/Accommodation	
➤ Health	

The review of NAPS was undertaken over 2000 and 2001, and the revised strategy was launched in February 2002. A new NAPS with revised and new objectives, targets and indicators for measuring progress emerged from this process. As this new NAPS will be extended to Local Authorities, these will be of central importance in informing and developing Local Poverty Profiles and Local Anti-Poverty Strategies.

### **The Changing Role of Local Authorities**

The importance of addressing poverty and social inclusion at the local level has been identified and promoted in a number government policy documents, including *Better Local Government*, which dealt with the reform of local government, and the National Development Plan<sup>7</sup>. Of particular relevance here is that under the current National Agreement it was decided to extend the NAPS to local government. This requires Local

<sup>5</sup> Government of Ireland (1997) *Sharing in Progress: National Anti-Poverty Strategy*, Dublin: Government Publications.

<sup>6</sup> Government Publications (2000) *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, Dublin: The Stationery Office.

<sup>7</sup> Government of Ireland (1996) *Better Local Government: A Programme for Change*, and (1999) *National Development Plan 2000 – 2006*, Dublin: The Stationery Office

Authorities to consider how they will address poverty issues in their areas and also to poverty proof all of their policies. The process of poverty proofing requires each Local Authority to consider the possibility that some of its policies might result in people falling into poverty as well as assessing the impact of its policies and provision on those already experiencing poverty. It is intended that this process will improve the targeting of policy in respect of those experiencing or at risk of poverty and exclusion.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Role of the Combat Poverty Agency**

The aim of the Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) is to promote a more just and inclusive society by working for the prevention and elimination of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. The Agency advises the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs on policy relating to poverty, initiates measures aimed at overcoming poverty, promotes, commissions and interprets poverty related research and promotes greater understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty through information and awareness raising activities.<sup>9</sup> In recognising the increasing role of the Local Authorities in anti-poverty work, under its Strategic Plan 2002-2004 Combat Poverty has set itself the goal of contributing to developing local anti-poverty strategies with a particular focus on the role of local government.

As part of its programme of work in this area, Combat Poverty commissioned the Small Area Health Research Unit (SAHRU) in Trinity College to create and test a working model of LPP and to determine the requirements for implementation of this model by Local Authorities. Local poverty profiles are intended to address the nature, extent and distribution of poverty at a local level. As good policy and provision is founded on good information, these profiles are essential in the development of informed anti-poverty strategies and policies within local government.

## **The Need for Local Poverty Profiles**

A Local Poverty Profile can be thought of as a multi-dimensional picture of poverty in any given Local Authority area. Its development involves Local Authorities in the systematic identification, collection, analysis and mapping of data on a number of subjects or *domains* (such as income, education or health) related to poverty and social exclusion. Such data can be drawn from a range of local, regional and national sources.

The purpose of a Local Poverty Profile is to provide a clearer picture of the nature and extent of poverty within a specific area. As good information is critical to good decision-making, the need to define *where*, *why* and to *what degree* particular communities experience deprivation and poverty is a key requirement of good policy making. By providing a structured framework within which data on key poverty related **indicators** are consistently identified, routinely gathered, analysed and mapped, the Local Poverty Profile can actively support local (and contribute to national) needs appraisal, can assist in targeting limited resources efficiently and can facilitate any follow-up evaluation. It thereby helps to ensure that local poverty related issues are addressed as directly and effectively as possible.

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed definition and review of the poverty proofing process see National Economic and Social Council (2001) *Review of the Poverty Proofing Process*, Dublin: National Economic and Social Council.

<sup>9</sup> Combat Poverty Agency, 2001. *Annual Report 2000*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

## **The Development of a Model for Local Poverty Profiles**

The pilot project to develop a model of LPP took place in two distinct stages. In 1999, Combat Poverty invited local authorities to apply for inclusion in the initial pilot phase. Following careful consideration of all applications by Combat Poverty and SAHRU, South Dublin County Council and Sligo County Council were selected as pilot authorities for this stage. From September to December 1999, local resources in these areas were assessed, a general model for LPP was proposed and a preliminary audit of available local data took place. This work has been reported elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> This phase assisted in highlighting some of the difficulties in implementing a model for LPP, the demands that would be placed on the participating authorities, and the different degrees to which the two participating authorities were prepared for developing such a profile.

The second stage (April to December 2000) saw the inclusion of a third Local Authority - Offaly County Council. This Authority was already developing a local poverty profile as part of a pilot project on the development of a local anti-poverty strategy. Work in this second stage focused on the further practical development of an LPP model. Working in close co-operation with the staff of the three Authorities, data requirements were further refined and arrangements were put in place for the gathering and analysis of data already available at local and national levels. The resulting Local Poverty Profiles are now with the participating Local Authorities and have informed the content of this guidebook.

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<sup>10</sup> Keavney, S., Kelly, A., and Teljeur, C. (2000), *'The Development of a Model for Local Poverty Profiling'*, unpublished paper available from Combat Poverty.

## 2. CHECKLIST OF RESOURCES FOR LOCAL POVERTY PROFILING

Before embarking on the process of developing a Local Poverty Profile, there are a number of steps that can be undertaken within the Local Authority that will significantly contribute to the success of the LPP process. This preparatory work, the key aspects of which are outlined below, will be spread across various departments and individuals within the Local Authority, but also requires a degree of centralised co-ordination. This initial work will serve to raise awareness of LPP and the nature and extent of poverty. While much of this will be internal to the Local Authority, relevant external *stakeholders* should also be involved at this initial stage.

LPP involves some routine tasks including:

- Data acquisition/gathering
- Data management
- Basic statistical analysis
- GIS mapping
- Reporting and presentation

The first steps in LPP involve putting in place the personnel, hardware and software resources needed to carry out these tasks to ensure a successful outcome. These resources include the following.

### Key Personnel and Structures

- **LPP Co-ordinator:** one of the most crucial requirements for LPP success is an LPP co-ordinator. This co-ordinator will have responsibility for raising awareness of LPP, harmonising the various stages of the LPP process, and should seek to involve representatives from the various Local Authority departments, as well as external stakeholders (relevant to the theme), through the processes of data identification, collection and submission, as well as feedback on the LPP process and outcome.
- **LPP Steering Committee:** A steering committee will facilitate the co-ordination of the LPP process within a Local Authority area. Members of the steering committee (most likely representatives from key functional areas of the Local Authority) can assist the co-ordinator in the overall operation of LPP and be actively involved in the collection and analysis of LPP *datasets* held by individual Local Authority departments. Consideration could also be given to the inclusion of external stakeholders on the Steering Committee as these may contribute significantly in identifying and providing additional background information and data that could prove essential in the creation and interpretation of the profile.
- **Research Officer:** A Research Officer, preferably with GIS training, will be required to source relevant data, manage databases, develop mapping routines and, working with the co-ordinator, prepare relevant reports.

## Technical and Training Requirements

The following will be required:

- A reasonably high-specification modern computer (PC or Macintosh with clock speed of a minimum of 700 or 500 MHz, respectively, and a minimum Hard Drive capacity of 30Mbytes). The computer should have a **ZIP** drive for data back-up, and a **CD-ROM drive** for software installation.
- **Internet** and **e-mail** access for the purposes of research, communication and data gathering and exchange. **Intranet (internal to the Local Authorities) links** are optional but are useful in sharing information and exchanging datasets within and between Local Authorities.
- **Spreadsheet** software to harmonise and store LPP data. Microsoft Excel (1998 or later) provides useful tools for data preparation, cleaning and basic statistical analysis.
- A **GIS** software package to map and analyse LPP data. **ArcView** or **MapInfo** GIS systems are both suitable for use in LPP.
- A **colour printing** facility for producing reports and maps.
- The necessary **licensing** for the above software packages and for a GIS electronic base map of the Local Authority for use in the GIS package; the latter may be obtained from the Ordnance Survey.
- **Training** in the use of spreadsheet and GIS applications and statistical software may be necessary depending on the existing skill level within any given Authority.

Even with all of the above in place, LPP will only be at its most effective if Local Authorities make a long-term commitment to the process. The LPP process is dynamic in nature. It should be used, assessed and continuously adjusted and improved over time as new poverty issues emerge and new datasets and technologies become available. Such ongoing monitoring and review of the process will be necessary if it is to continue to yield useful and relevant information for policy. Therefore the resources devoted to the start-up and implementation stages will need to be sustained in the longer term.

### **3. SELECTING INDICATORS & DOMAINS**

One of the first steps in developing a Local Poverty Profile is to determine the key indicators of poverty to be used and the subject areas or domains under which these indicators will be grouped. The careful selection of indicators and domains is essential if an accurate and useful picture of poverty is to be built up. Whether indicators are selected first and domains second, or vice versa, is somewhat of a chicken and egg situation. Some researchers prefer to start with the specific (indicators) and move then to the more general (domain). Others prefer to start with the broad subject, policy or function heading (domain) and then consider the specifics (indicators) that most clearly show the extent of the issue in question. Irrespective of which approach is taken, a number of common issues arise for consideration.

#### **Selecting Indicators**

The LPP process is based on the analysis of indicators. Indicators can be thought of as indirect measures or proxies when one cannot directly measure a given concept or phenomenon. More simplistically, they indicate by the use of numbers the extent to which a particular phenomenon occurs. In research, they are usually expressed as actual numbers, percentages, proportions, rates or ratios. For example, let's assume that we want to measure homelessness. Homelessness is a condition that has many different manifestations and results from a complex set of events. Not all of these will be measurable and we must think about what specific measure best illustrates or 'indicates' the extent of homelessness. Is this the proportion of the population sleeping on the streets on a given night, the number of people in temporary hostel accommodation, or the number of families in emergency Bed and Breakfast accommodation? These three measures could in fact all be used as indicators of homelessness.

Much has been written about indicators to the point that many people are now confused or nervous about their selection and use. However, a wide range of indicators of various concepts are used in daily life. For example, we use age as an indicator of capacity to work, by using 65 years as the common age of retirement, level of formal education as an indicator of capacity to do specific jobs, the unemployment rate as an indicator of the country's economic performance and well-being, or how much we recycle as an indicator of our concern for the environment.

As the definition used in the NAPS indicates, poverty is a multi-dimensional problem that includes but also goes beyond the question of adequate income or money. It is concerned with, and reflected in, other resources, life experiences and opportunities such as education, housing, work, health, environment and recreation. When first thinking about indicators, it is best to start with a long list that covers as many areas as possible. This will help to ensure that no reasonable and useful indicators are overlooked. This initial list can be informed by a number of sources including:

- The National Anti-Poverty Strategy: indicators are being selected under the seven themes considered in the revised NAPS. As the NAPS themes highlight national policy priorities that will be reflected to a greater or lesser extent at local level, these indicators should be one of the first points of reference for those involved in LPP;
- internal (that is, Local Authority) and external databases;
- previous local research studies;

- national and international publications concerned with indicators and data relating to poverty and social exclusion. The publications of the Central Statistics Office (CSO), government departments and agencies, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) may prove particularly useful. All of these organisations have web sites from which much information is available;
- brainstorming sessions with relevant Local Authority staff; and
- contact with relevant national and local external experts and organisations.

It is frequently easier to think of long lists of potential indicators than to decide on the most relevant and useful ones. While starting with a long list is useful, for pragmatic reasons it will probably be necessary to be more selective in determining the final set of indicators to be included in the Local Poverty Profile. For this reason, most projects involving indicators use a list of criteria in their selection process. These criteria help to focus the selection process and also help to reduce (but not completely eliminate) the time and resources spent in the search for data for inappropriate indicators. Commonly used selection criteria include the following:

- **Readily understood:** indicators should be simple, clear and easy to interpret, taking into account the proposed use of the indicators and the needs and capacity of the potential audience.
- **Address priority issues:** this is to ensure that key issues of concern are not excluded.
- **Be conceptually valid and analytically sound:** indicators should actually measure the concept being considered and be scientifically and logically defensible.
- **Be measurable:** this criterion relates to the availability of data. It is preferable that indicators be based on currently available, good quality and regularly collected data. However, consideration should also be given to indicators for which data could or can be expected to exist in the future.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these, specific criteria that should be included in relation to LPP include

- **Poverty relevance:** this relates to the above criterion of conceptual validity. Given the focus of the Local Poverty Profiles, it is essential that the indicators selected actually relate to and illustrate poverty. While this may appear to be extremely obvious, it is not always clear whether indicators are measuring poverty or a related issue. For example, consider the issue of housing and more explicitly the potential indicator of proportion of income spent on heating. If a household spends a higher than average level of their income on household heating this could potentially signal: (a) a sound financial position that allows for a higher level of expenditure and therefore the absence of poverty; (b) personal preference for high levels of warmth; (c) poor quality housing that requires more significant expenditure on heating to make it comfortable or habitable, or (d) a lower than average household income in a house in which heat is a priority. The relationship between the indicator and poverty is therefore unclear and the indicator invalid. Generally, indicators of poverty must show a greater prevalence or absence of something amongst those with low incomes. A more appropriate indicator in this instance may therefore be the proportion of households that suffer an enforced lack of heating due to low income.

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<sup>11</sup> The identification of ideal indicators for which there is no data available may guide the Local Authority in its considerations of future data needs, planning its own data collection and analysis work and influencing external organisations responsible for data collection.

- **The geographic coverage of the available data:** as the Local Authority is concerned with its own catchment area, if data are not available on a small area basis then they are of little use in LPP.

It is important to decide the grounds on which indicators might also be rejected, even if they meet the above criteria. These might include double-counting, the same thing being measured using different indicators or susceptibility to manipulation through small changes in policy or provision.

The optimum number of indicators to use under any one subject heading or domain also needs careful consideration. Too few indicators may lead to misinterpretation due to too little information or the presentation of too simple a picture of poverty. Too many indicators, on the other hand, may result in confusion and lack of clarity. While there are no hard and fast rules in determining the final number of indicators used either within any one domain or in total, a broad rule should be to ensure that enough are used to give sufficient detail and coverage of priority issues, while not resorting to such a level of detail as to make the profile unwieldy, unintelligible and unhelpful. In order to cover the principal domains of poverty and social exclusion included in the NAPS, for instance, a range of between 50 and 100 indicators has been suggested.<sup>12</sup> For LPP, it is more likely that this will be somewhere in the region of 20 to 50.

One further point needs to be made here in relation to indicators. Although it may take some time to select the first set of indicators, it is essential that each of these is subject to ongoing assessment. Indicators should be regularly reviewed and modified to reflect changing priorities, circumstances and data availability.

## **Identifying Domains**

LPP indicators are grouped into domains. These are the broader subject headings, themes or functions, such as housing, education and welfare dependency, to which indicators are relevant. If indicators are selected first, the grouping of these will be the primary influence on the choice of domains. As stated above, domains may sometimes be selected before indicators. This is particularly the case where existing information and knowledge of poverty within the Local Authority area is good and, on the basis of this, priority areas are already known. In most cases the domains selected will also reflect a number of national anti-poverty priorities. Again, the themes of the NAPS are a useful point of reference here. Where possible, more than one indicator should be included in each domain as analysis of a set of carefully chosen indicators will provide a more reliable and useful picture with respect to that domain than any one single indicator.

The following are some of the indicators identified by one of the Local Authorities that participated in the pilot LPP project. It is likely that most of these domains and at least some of the indicators will arise in all Local Poverty Profiles, although others may also be included according to the specific poverty issues and policy priorities arising within any one area.

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<sup>12</sup> Palmer, G. and Rahman, M. (forthcoming 2002) *The Development of Poverty Reduction Indicators for Ireland*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

**Welfare Dependency**

Age Dependency Ratio  
Economic Dependency Ratio  
Unemployment  
Long Term Unemployment  
On-Farm Underemployment  
Lone Parent Families

**Housing**

Local Authority Rented Housing Stock  
Housing Applicants / Waiting Lists

**Health**

Persons Unable to Work  
All Cause Standardised Mortality Ratio  
Infant Mortality Rate

**Educational Disadvantage**

Early School Leavers

**Quality of Life**

Elderly Living Alone  
Location of Childcare Centres

**Minority Groups**

Traveller Families

## 4. Sourcing & Gathering Data

As with any project concerned with or using indicators, data issues are central in LPP. Obviously, indicators for which data are available are immediately accessible at one level. However, even where data are readily available, it should be remembered that data can vary considerably in terms of quality, coverage, timeliness, regularity and levels of disaggregation (that is, the ways in which data can be broken down, for example, by gender, locality, age or social group).

The availability of data is a key criterion used in selecting indicators. Identifying data sources is one of the most important and potentially difficult stages of the LPP process. The identification of the most appropriate *datasets* for analysis will eventually determine the quality and accuracy of the final profile and therefore its usefulness.

Sourcing and gathering appropriate data for the profile is one of the most time consuming aspects of LPP. Many "dead ends" may have to be followed before appropriate data can be identified, or an indicator rejected on the grounds of poor quality or no data being available. Some steps can be taken to reduce this effort. These largely involve pursuing the most obvious or logical sources of relevant data in the first instance. For example:

- The data held by the Local Authority itself in respect of relevant indicators, such as housing or the built environment, should be among the first sources of data pursued.
- Information held by Area Development Management and their local area profiles.
- Any previous local studies, either of the Local Authority area in question or other local studies, should be carefully examined to assess the type of data used.
- The Central Statistics Office (CSO) can be expected to be the source of information for a number of indicators. Relevant publications from the CSO include the Census of Population, Small Area Population Statistics (SAPS) and the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). Much of the material produced by the CSO is now available in both paper and electronic formats. A starting point for investigation of the data held and produced by the CSO is a visit to their website at [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie).
- In relation to the various functional areas of policy, such as housing, welfare and health, one of the first ports of call should be the reports, websites and information sections of the relevant government departments and agencies. Much of the data held by these can now be accessed in electronic format.
- International reports to which Ireland contributes information should be consulted and the agency supplying the data identified. In some cases data that appears in international reports is not reproduced in national reports, but the relevant datasets exist and can be accessed on request.
- Contact with relevant national, regional and local state or community and voluntary organisations should also be established to determine the data held by them.

Nonetheless, sourcing and gathering data will absorb considerable time and it is vital that sufficient staff resources are allocated to this aspect of the work.

### The Nature of Data for Local Poverty Profiling

Following the identification of data suitable for use in LPP, Local Authorities can begin the process of data gathering. This should be regarded as an ongoing process due to new and emerging issues, changing economic, social and policy contexts, new data coming on-stream

at the local and national level and the need to continuously bring information up-to-date. Data suitable for LPP analysis is likely to be in one of two formats.

- Important historic data may be held in paper form (typically as reports), some of which may be electronically scanned or may need to be manually re-entered into spreadsheet software or directly into a GIS package.
- Much data are now stored in electronic format and held in a number of different programs (e.g. databases such as Excel or Access). These require data to be exported and harmonised before they can be made available to a GIS package for analysis, management and subsequent mapping.

Given the local and spatial aspects of LPP, information should be area-based, that is, be suitable for mapping, and preferably be available at the small-area level. Generally, small-area refers to data at the *District Electoral Division (DED)* level. This is the smallest area for which census data are routinely made available. Higher levels of aggregation, say to county level, may conceal important details whereas sub-DED level data are often difficult to come by and issues of data confidentiality may arise. For example, at sub-DED level there is a real possibility that individual households might be identifiable for certain kinds of information, and therefore lose their anonymity and right to confidentiality. One way of avoiding such issues is through the use of *Geo-coding*.

Geo-coding involves assigning and recording the precise geographic co-ordinates or grid reference for each household or street address. It allows data for any geographic area, irrespective of size or shape, to be analysed using GIS. The availability of data at this very local level has the capacity to greatly enhance the understanding of the spatial distribution of poverty and would therefore be particularly useful in the development of local anti-poverty strategies. This system would also allow for the comparison of areas over time, even if the physical boundaries of the standard area divisions, such as DEDs, change.

The Ordnance Survey Office and An Post have developed a GeoDirectory which links ordinary geographical addresses with their precise geographical co-ordinates. This has been developed as a commercial product and various levels of information for different geographical areas may be purchased for analysis. The GeoDirectory has already been used by several Local Authorities and has been combined with other databases for planning purposes. Local Authorities could draw on this for profiling purposes, although a three-year commitment is required from any organisation seeking to purchase the GeoDirectory and the costs may prove to be prohibitive.

While most indicators used in LPP will be developed at the area level, and in many cases at the DED level, in some cases data may be provided as a series of specific locations or 'points'. Such data often relate to the location and availability of services and include the location of health centres, childcare facilities and schools.

### **DATA COLLECTION: LEARNING FROM THE PILOT PROJECT**

Data collection represented the most labour-intensive stage of the LPP pilot process. The process of data sourcing and gathering, especially from sources outside the Local Authority, was frequently protracted and often dependent on the voluntary co-operation of individuals outside the Authority.

Effective data collection was dependent on a continuous effort to source and gather new datasets by the participating Authorities. The importance of allowing for time lags between the original request for data and the provision of the same helped to underline the necessity of an ongoing LPP process. Many of the difficulties experienced at the data collection stage arose largely as a result of time restrictions imposed by the pilot project timetable, but these simply served to mirror the reality of deadlines in real working time.

The ease with which data were collected varied by domain and individual indicators across the Authorities. In most cases, Local Authorities sourced a wide range of data across all domains, but these had varying degrees of coverage, quality and timeliness.

Information on the domains with direct links to Local Authority departments or local organisations, such as the Health and Housing domains, was relatively easy to source and gather. Conversely, those domains without specific local organisational links, such as the Quality of Life domain, proved significantly more difficult to source initially.

This experience underlined the importance of a good knowledge of local and national information sources for successful LPP operation. The formulation of a directory of data providers should be considered to facilitate routine data collection and updating. Many of the required datasets were simply unavailable at the level of the DED and census data were used as a stop-gap measure.

**Conclusion:** the evidence suggests a steep learning curve associated with this essential process for the three participating Local Authorities. However, this becomes easier as contacts are made and sustained with relevant internal staff and external organisations.

## Sources of Data

In the first instance data should be gathered from within the authority itself. Experience during the pilot project showed this internal process benefited from two clearly inter-related factors:

- a high degree of internal awareness of LPP. As suggested above, an internal awareness-raising process should form a key part of the work of the LPP Co-ordinator.
- good interaction between those carrying out the profile and staff in the various Local Authority departments.

External national and local organisations should also be involved in the identification, gathering and analysis of relevant data. Interaction between Local Authorities and these organisations is vital to the successful implementation of LPP, and will undoubtedly have a significant knock-on benefit in terms of familiarising staff with the process of establishing contacts, with routine data acquisition and data management. Such contacts should also prove useful in the context of the comprehensive area profiling now required of all Local Authorities by the Department of the Environment and Local Government, and in the development of City/County Strategies. Building relationships with external organisations will be helped by:

- identifying key personnel in the organisation with data collection, management and analysis responsibility;

- clearly communicating the purpose and planned use of the data requested as well as the overall LPP process;
- allowing sufficient time for data to be supplied. This requires that organisations are contacted at an early stage in the process;
- providing ongoing feedback on the profile, its development and uses.

In the pilot exercise, South Dublin County Council used the following local and national sources of data.

<b><i>Local and Community Groups</i></b>	
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Domain</b>
Integrated Services Process, Jobstown	Quality of Life
Local Garda Authorities	Quality of Life
South Dublin Air Quality and Noise Control Unit	Quality of Life
South Dublin Urban Initiative	Various
Tallaght Partnership	Welfare Dependency

Other local sources of information might include the

- Health Boards;
- VECs;
- FÁS offices;
- Social Welfare offices;
- Resource Centres for the Unemployed;
- Money and Budgeting Services (MABS);
- Citizen's Information Centres, and
- Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

### ***National Governmental and Non-Governmental Agencies***

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Domain</b>
Central Statistics Office	Various
Combat Poverty Agency	Various
Department of Education and Science	Education
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform	Various
Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs	Welfare Dependency
Department of the Environment and Local Government	Housing
FAS	Welfare Dependency
Focus Ireland	Minority Groups
National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism	Minority Groups

At the national level additional sources of data might include:

- government departments;
- Teagasc;
- the Equality Authority;
- the Combat Poverty Agency
- the National Disability Authority, and
- the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

The Combat Poverty Agency will shortly be publishing a guide to secondary data sources, which may also be a useful guide.

In addition, many of the bodies covered by the Freedom of Information Act may prove useful sources of data. These bodies are required to produce a guide, known as a Section 15 Guide, to their records every three years. The list of bodies covered is available from [www.irlgov.ie/finance/publications/foi/foibodies.htm](http://www.irlgov.ie/finance/publications/foi/foibodies.htm) or from the Department of Finance.

## 5. PRESENTING AND MAPPING DATA

While data are central to LPP, ultimately they will be of little use if they cannot be presented in a clear format that allows for easy interpretation. Presenting data requires consideration of the data itself, the technical facilities available and the capacity and needs of the target audience.

### Presenting Domains and Indicators

One of the first pieces of information yielded by the LPP process is the selected domains and indicators. In most studies concerned with indicators, these are presented in report format, with the domain being presented first and then the individual indicators expanded upon under a number of headings. Typically these headings include at least some of the following:

- Domain
- Indicator
- Indicator Description
- Measure Used
- Rationale for Selection
- Strengths and Weaknesses of the Indicator
- Sources, Regularity and Timeliness of the Data
- Baseline Situation

The clear presentation of indicators and some baseline data in this way provides any reader with an insight into the profile background and the thinking that informed it. For example, information on the indicator of lone parent households might look as follows.<sup>13</sup>

❖ **DOMAIN**

Welfare Dependency

❖ **Indicator**

Lone Parent Households

❖ **Indicator Description**

This is the proportion of households headed by lone parents. These are households that are headed by one adult (either never married, separated, divorced or widowed) and contain at least one dependent child (usually defined as under 18 years of age or 23 years if still in full-time education).

❖ **Measure Used**

The proportion of households headed by lone parents.

❖ **Rationale for Selection**

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<sup>13</sup> This is intended as an example only. It is not taken from any profile already conducted nor is the information provided here intended for quotation in any actual profile.

There is a significant relationship between household type and the experience of poverty. Lone parent households have been identified as being among those most at risk of poverty.

❖ **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Indicator**

This is a widely used and accepted indicator of poverty and deprivation. It is easily understood and at least some data is readily available from the Local Authority housing statistics, which categorise tenants as well as those on the housing lists by their family status. National data clearly indicates the relationship between lone parent households and poverty, and lone parents remain a national and potentially local policy priority.

Weaknesses arise more with the available data than with the indicator itself (see below).

❖ **Sources, Regularity and Timeliness of the Data**

Data on lone parent households can be drawn from the Local Authority housing statistics as Local Authority tenants are categorised by family status. This has the advantage of being immediately available and relatively up-to-date.

However, this data source will not capture all lone parent households. Lone parents living in privately owned or rented accommodation, as well as those residing within other households (most commonly their own parent's household) will not be captured here irrespective of the level of poverty or deprivation they experience. Local Authority housing statistics can be complemented by Census of Population data which is available at DED level. However, the most recent data here refers to 1996.

❖ **Baseline data**

**Lone Parent Households in Cavan, 1996 – 2000**

Year	Local Authority Housing Statistics		Census of Population	
	No. of Lone Parent Households	% of all LA Households	No. of Lone Parent Households	% of all Households
1996				
1998			N.A.*	N.A.
2000			N.A.	N.A.

\* N.A. = Not Available

**Using Numbers, Percentages and Rates**

In presenting data on indicators, the first step is to decide on the most appropriate summary measure to use. This might be the absolute number of cases. Alternatively, proportions or percentages may be used through the selection of an appropriate denominator or population.

A denominator is the base or population on which proportions or rates are calculated. For example, in determining the proportion of unemployed males in a DED, a known and reliable denominator must be selected. In this case, the total number of men of working age (15 – 65 years) in the DED is a reasonable denominator that is much used in labour force studies. The number of unemployed men in this age group is then expressed as a proportion of all males in this age group in the DED. The choice of denominator used in any given instance must be made explicit for clarity.

Percentages or rates may prove more suitable than absolute numbers for comparison across similar areas or where a large number of cases is involved. However, the total absolute numbers should always be provided for clarity. This is particularly relevant if dealing with a very small number of cases or making comparisons between areas that have substantially different relevant populations. This is essential if percentages, proportions or rates are not to be misinterpreted. For example, let's consider lone parent households within two areas. If it is reported that 40% of households are headed by lone parents in Area A and only 10% in Area B, it would appear that new initiatives or services for lone parents should be directed towards Area A. However, if the *total* number of households in the Area A is 20 (as is possible in some rural areas), but is 4,000 in Area B, the number of lone parent households in the areas are 8 and 400 respectively. This casts a different light on where interventions are most needed. As a general rule, absolute figures should be used when the population is less than 50. Above this, percentages or rates should be used, but the absolute numbers should also always be given.<sup>14</sup>

## MAPPING INDICATORS

The core information for LPP may be graphically presented in a number of formats, including tables, graphs and charts, but for spatial statistics primarily in the form of maps. Indicators are mapped at the local level through the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software. The production of LPP maps has a number of advantages at the local level.

- First, and most importantly, LPP maps provide a clear visual picture of local conditions, however, the outcome is dependent on the data inputted in the first place.
- Mapping enables Local Authorities to use a variety of datasets simultaneously to provide a wider picture. With the use of electronic mapping tools, the information held in a number of spreadsheets or tables is easily interpreted, can be seen all at once, and areas experiencing particular deprivation readily identified.
- The mapping process can utilise data at almost any area level, including streets, neighbourhoods, DEDs and sub-county regions. Access to services across county and DED borders may be assessed to give a more exact illustration of the needs of small areas. Physical barriers, such as mountains, rivers and lakes can all be represented in order to help better inform decisions on local issues.
- At the county level, mapping permits comparisons within and across counties. Maps representing health board areas, provinces and administrative areas, down to sub-county maps of specific areas or regions, can all be constructed at for comparative purposes.
- Through the use of overlay maps, local data and area data may be combined at the mapping stage to build a more comprehensive picture of local conditions. For example, Map 1 below shows the location of schools (locally available, point data) – in this

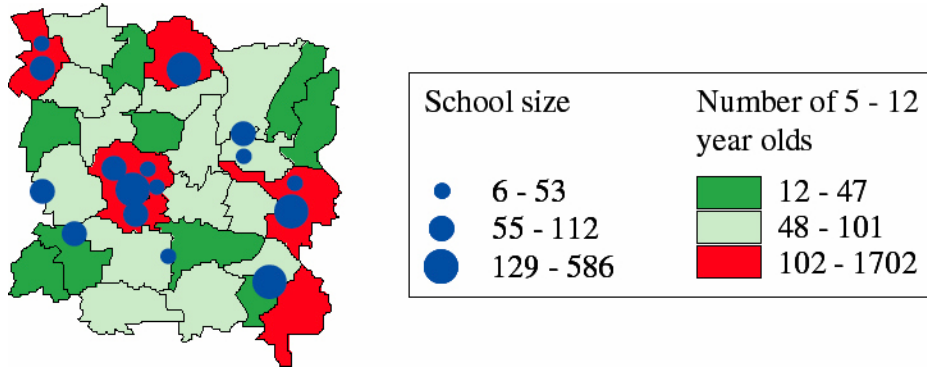
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<sup>14</sup> Kurtz, Norman R. 1983 *Introduction to Social Statistics*, Japan: MacGraw Hill International Book Company.

instance, scaled to reflect school size - overlaid on area-level information (the relevant school-going population of children based on national Census figures).

### MAP 1

#### Combining locally sourced point data and nationally sourced area-level information in an overlay map



### Choosing Categories and Cut-Off Points

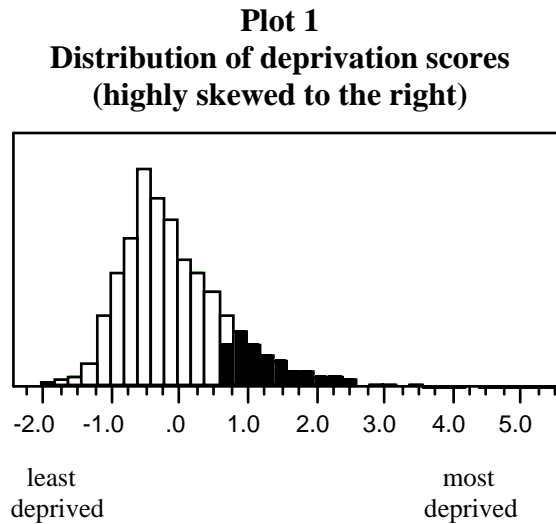
In most instances it is not possible to map every issue or dataset. For example, consider the issue of income distribution. For pragmatic and analytical reasons it is neither possible nor desirable to map every person by their exact income. This would lead to an unwieldy and confusing picture of income distribution. One of the key tasks in graphically presenting data, particularly in map form, is the grouping of data into categories, each of which has a number attached to indicate the degree to which something occurs or is absent. Examples of this are a three point scale that shows income distribution as 1 = low, 2 = medium and 3 = high. In choosing categories, careful consideration should be given to the number of categories used. Two few will over-simplify the picture but too many will result in the map becoming unwieldy and difficult to interpret. In addition, consideration should be given to the choice of colours or forms of shading used to represent the categories or indicators. If these are not clearly distinguishable from each other the map will again be difficult to interpret.

To accurately reflect the distribution of any given indicator, a series of cut-off points must be chosen between the highest and lowest values that arise for that indicator. These cut-off points help to group indicator values into low, average or high levels. Choosing the most appropriate cut-off points helps to show the occurrence of an indicator in different areas across the Local Authority. This is an important issue that requires careful consideration, as can be illustrated by the following example.

In creating a national deprivation index, selected indicators were statistically weighted and combined to produce a score value for every DED.<sup>15</sup> For the 1996 index this score was found to range from -2.2 to +5.4. A decision was made to transform this score to a simpler five-point scale to facilitate mapping and ease of interpretation. This scale runs from 1=least deprived to 5=most deprived.

<sup>15</sup> Details of this index may be found as a PDF file on the SAHRU web server at <http://www.sahru.tcd.ie>.

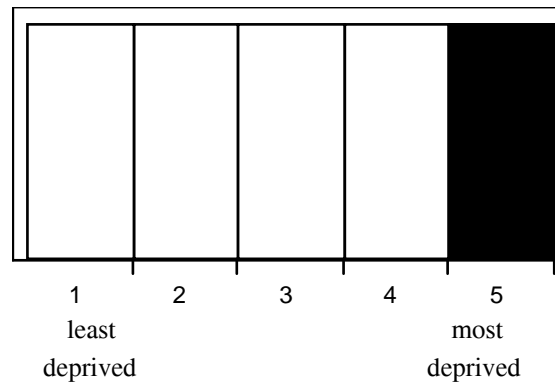
In deciding on suitable cut-off points for the five categories, the original scores were first plotted as in Plot 1 below. This shows the actual distribution of deprivation scores – that is, a small number of not very deprived DEDs on the left hand side, the majority of DEDs showing moderate levels of deprivation in the centre, and a further minority of very deprived DEDs on the right. This is the distribution that the five point scale is trying to capture. Plotting scores in this way is a good starting point when considering cut-off points.



In the first instance, it might be considered reasonable to divide the distribution of scores into five equal parts (called quintiles) as illustrated in the Plot 2 below. This is done by ordering the score values for each DED from lowest to highest and then assigning the first fifth or 20% of the scores to the lowest category of the new scale, the second fifth or 20% to the second category and so on. Each category of the new scale will have the same number of DEDs assigned to it, that is, one fifth of the total. Therefore one fifth of cases will appear in the first category, that is as least deprived, and one fifth will also appear in the fifth category, that is, the most deprived.

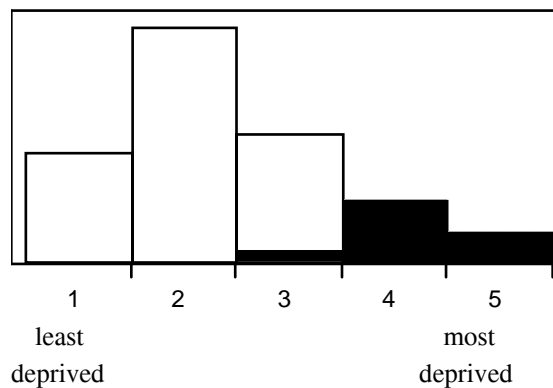
This simplistic approach can be very misleading. If we look at Plot 1 again, we see that the majority of DEDs form a reasonable progression from very low scores (least deprived) to higher scores (neither deprived nor affluent), but only a comparatively small number of DEDs (appearing in the very right hand tail of Plot 1) actually have scores in excess of about 0.8 and are therefore severely deprived. The percentage of such very deprived DEDs is not 20% as the use of quintiles would suggest, but rather about 5%. However, based on the quintile method, a Local Authority seeking to target scarce resources to the most needy DEDs would require such resources to be distributed across as many as 20% of the DEDs in the region, even though only a minority of these are experiencing high levels of deprivation.

**Plot 2**  
**Scaling of the deprivation scores using**  
**quintiles**



Plot 3 shows a more accurate reflection of the distribution of scores on the deprivation index across the five-point scale. Cut-off points here have been chosen to reflect the actual distribution of scores seen in Plot 1 as opposed to dividing the number of cases equally into the five categories. This more accurately reflects the fact that the majority of DEDs experience little deprivation, but that there are a small number of DEDs with very high levels of deprivation. Decisions to prioritise may be made in a more sensitive and informed manner thereby ensuring that scarce resources will be directed specifically where they are needed, i.e. in the case in point, to the most deprived 5% of DEDs.

**Plot 3**  
**Preferred scaling of the deprivation scores**



Choosing cut-off points and categories may be based on expert local knowledge or, as in this case, on statistical considerations. The choice of cut-off points is always important and should be undertaken with due consideration of the evidence represented by the observed data.

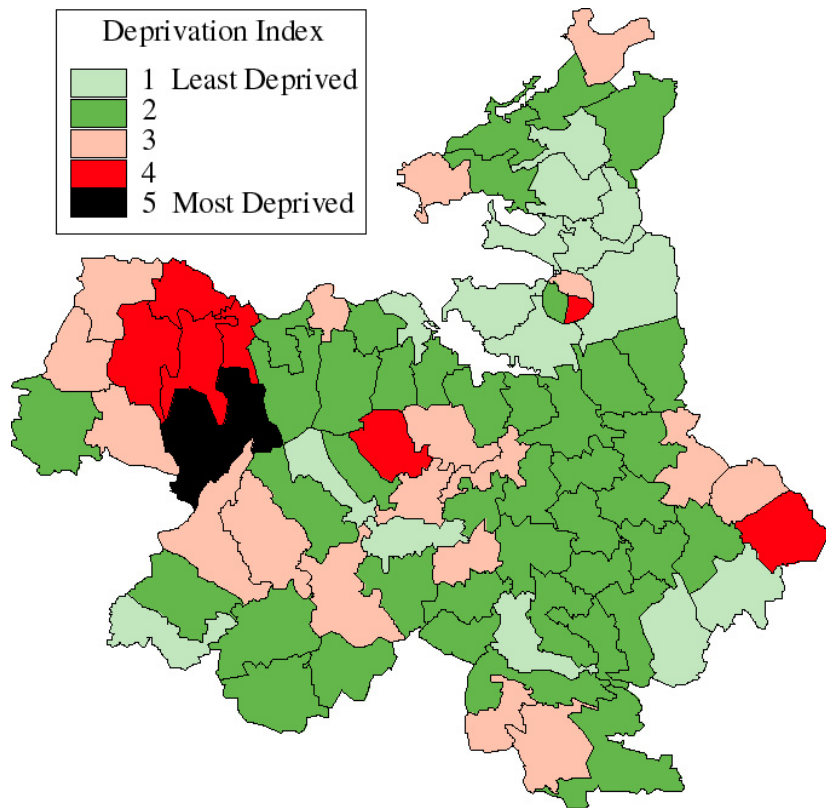
An example of a mapped five-point scale can be seen in the Map 2 below of area-based material deprivation for Sligo County Council. This map shows data at five distinct levels with level 1 representing 'Least Deprived' and level 5 representing 'Most Deprived'. Although the cut-off points will vary for different indicators, this style of representation may be applied to any data at DED level.

Again, it is important to consider whether to map actual numbers (for example, of elderly persons) or percentages or rates (for example, number of elderly persons as a percentage of the population). In many cases it may be appropriate to map both as they may each provide a different picture (see Map 3 below). Both may be needed for planning purposes in that rates may well be relatively high but the numbers of persons affected may still be low. This

is often the case in rural DEDs that may be considered very deprived, but have a small and possibly very dispersed population. Once again, the critical role of appropriate measures as well as local knowledge in sensibly interpreting indicators is obvious here.

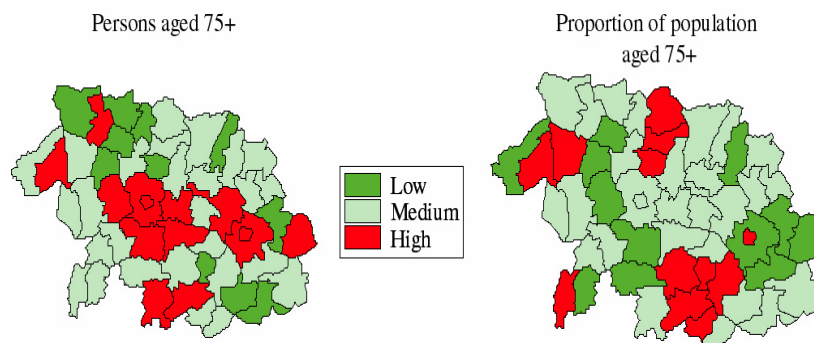
### MAP 2

#### Local Deprivation Index for Sligo



### Map 3

#### Mapping numbers and percentages



## An Indicator Table

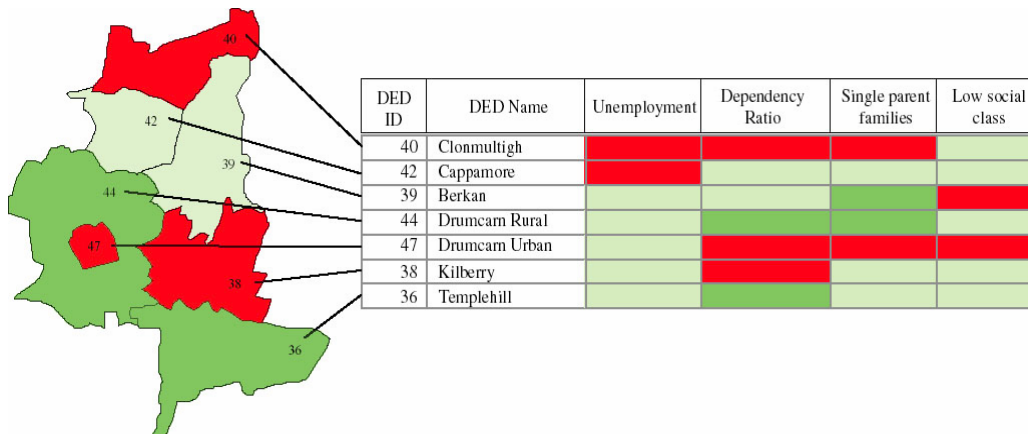
Most maps used in profiling will show the distribution of two to three discrete indicators in one or more geographical areas. However, local users may wish to compare the information provided on a number of different maps in order to determine spatial trends or patterns of deprivation, or to create a more comprehensive picture of a specific domain or geographic area. While overlay maps can be used to achieve this to a limited degree, an indicator table provides an alternative means of comparing a range of indicators across areas.

LPP indicator tables are intended to complement maps and help in assessing the ‘bigger picture’. It is not easy to view and interpret a large number of maps at the same time. A tabular presentation allows the user to inspect a large number of indicators simultaneously in a single electronic or paper based table (that is, a spreadsheet layout). A map draws attention to an individual piece of information and allows comparison between high and low levels. It allows for comparisons between many pieces of information for the same geographic area. Each approach has its particular strengths.

Indicator tables can use colours or shadings to provide an immediate and simple snapshot (although numbers, percentages or rates may be presented with these for greater detail). For example, if a three-point scale is used in determining the level of unemployment, a high rate (say, over 50%) may be coloured black, a medium rate (between 26 and 50%) grey and a low rate (25% or less) white. The relevant cell in the table is then coloured accordingly, either in place of or in addition to, the numbers, percentages etc. The shading chosen may be the same as that used in the corresponding indicator maps. An example of the link between a map and the corresponding table is shown in Map 4 below.

**Map 4**

### Linking Indicator Tables and Maps



Constructing an indicator table obviously requires judgements to be made in respect of appropriate cut-off points for the grouping of distributions and the points arising in the discussion of this above should be considered here again. In using indicator tables and associated maps, it is also useful if the same number of categories is used for each indicator. This is three in the example above (illustrated by the three colours used).

## Indices

An alternative means of combining indicators is to construct an index. Put simply, an index is a summary measure (percentage, rate or ratio) arising from the statistical weighting and combination of a number of indicators. For example, in Ireland the Haase Deprivation Index weights and combines data on 13 variables from the Census of Population (including unemployment, level of education, social class, housing tenure and car ownership).<sup>16</sup> Much use has been made of this index and the resultant mapping of deprivation at the DED and county level. SAHRU has also developed a Deprivation Index for the Irish context using five census-based variables: car ownership, social class, unemployment, overcrowding and living in rented accommodation (see Footnote 12 above) that has primarily been used by the Health Boards. At the international level, the United Nations Human Development Index and Human Poverty Index are among two of the most widely known indices of deprivation, poverty and exclusion.

The design, construction, use, advantages and disadvantages of indices of development, poverty and deprivation has generated much discussion among statisticians, researchers, planners and policy makers. What is generally agreed, however, is that their construction requires a certain level of statistical expertise along with a good knowledge of the particular subject area. It is sufficient here to note that indices exist and have the potential to be developed and used at the local level if sufficient expertise is at the disposal of the Local Authority. However, the Local Authority should carefully examine the strengths and limitations of indices prior to substantial investment in their construction and use.

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<sup>16</sup> Haase, T., 'Affluence and Deprivation: A Spatial Analysis Based on the 1991 Census of Population' in Pringle, D. G., Walsh, J. and Hennessy, M. (eds.) (1999) *Poor People, Poor Places: A Geography of Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland*: Dublin: Oak Tree Press

## **6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

With changes in the role of local government and the roll out of the NAPS to Local Authorities, poverty and social inclusion are becoming more central concerns of Local Authorities. Local Poverty Profiles can make a significant contribution to the knowledge that Local Authorities have of poverty in their area and to the formulation of well-informed anti-poverty policies.

Local Poverty Profiles are based on indicators of poverty that are grouped into broader domains. Careful consideration needs to be given to the identification and selection of these domains and indicators, to the identification, collection and analysis of data and to the presentation, mapping, interpretation and use of the final profile. The process requires the development of relationships between the various departments within the Local Authorities as well as with external local, regional and national organisations. Clearly, all of this requires the commitment of sufficient resources, both human and technical, as well as a significant investment of time.

The LPP process is designed as a dynamic or 'live' tool rather than a once-off assessment of local conditions. An important advantage of LPP is the continuous nature of the process, through which local conditions are monitored and updated over time. Specific areas or aspects of poverty can be analysed over time, and the effect of local and national policy initiatives may be judged accordingly. This in turn may help to produce an improvement in the timeliness and appropriateness of policy decisions, and in targeting resources to tackle poverty and social exclusion. Local knowledge is essential in this process.

LPP is a barometer of local conditions. The process allows for the input of new and relevant data at any stage to help to improve the overall assessment of the local environment. Because of this facility, the quality of the LPP process improves continuously in time as a more comprehensive picture of local conditions is created. Local Authorities and organisations are encouraged to consider LPP as an inclusive and dynamic process suited to a wide range of uses internally and in partnership with local statutory, community and voluntary organisations and, not least, for advocacy at the national level.

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