



Out of Sight – Out of Mind

supporting hard-to-reach groups to participate
in decisions that affect their lives

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September 2008

ISBN 978-1-90548-588-8

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Preface

Combat Poverty is a statutory advisory body on poverty. The Combat Poverty's *Having Your Say* Programme was s a three-year Programme, launched in November 2005.

Supporting groups/people who are hard to reach or marginal in communities to have 'their say' in Irish public policy about issues that are of concern to them and that affect their lives was of particular interest to the Programme. This research report is an output of the Programme and will contribute to increased understanding of the barriers to participation for so-called 'hard to reach' groups. It also will contribute to the debate on how to create conditions to support groups to have their voices heard in decisions that affect them.

We are sincerely grateful to the research team for their work on this project and their engagement and commitment to giving voice to the experiences and issues of groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion. We are also very appreciative of the participation of the project's Advisory Committee who offered useful guidance and direction on the development of the report.

Combat Poverty
September 2008

Authors' Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for the guidance offered by Joan O'Flynn and Michelle Griffin, Combat Poverty, in the course of this research. The Advisory Committee to the research was especially helpful in offering both practical and analytical advice, through participation in meetings and by engaging in additional discussions on the topic.

The involvement of Eugene Byrne EXPAC Monaghan and the 'You're Equal Project' in County Cavan and Monaghan added to the research case studies. We were pleased that Rev. Haskins of St Anne's Church, Dawson Street, Dublin, could give some of his scarce time to present the work of the Mission to Seafarers.

The work of People with Disabilities Ireland in Dublin and County Clare brought additional insights to the report's understanding of barriers to participation. We are grateful to those who agreed to share their insights from their long-standing experiences with and of the Traveller Community in North Dublin, as well as from the Dublin North East Task Force on Drugs. OPEN, the national network of lone parents groups, provided a strong community development perspective to the research thinking and kindly arranged for us to have direct contact with service users in a direct provision centre of the Reception and Integration Agency in Leinster. The Irish Refugee Council and the Refugee Information Service were most helpful in providing a complex understanding of the circumstances facing asylum-seekers in Ireland in the course of meetings.

We are pleased to acknowledge the moral support and time provided to engage with the research process by ATD Fourth World, The Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Reception and Integration Agency, the Family Support Agency, TASC, the Irish Penal Reform Trust and the Social Inclusion Unit at

the Department of Social and Family Affairs. Any views or opinions, which are, or appear to be, attributed to the above mentioned organizations are those of the authors and should not be presumed to be the view of any public body or department of government.

A number of individuals kindly offered their views on the research topic in general and we include here Cllr Killian Forde, Dublin, Julie Smyth of Combat Poverty, Sr Joan Roddy, DMJ, and the Society of St Vincent de Paul in Cork.

We would like to express our appreciation of the voluntary time and support provided by individuals, including some seeking asylum, others who are mobilising people with disabilities, and those seeking to settle after a period of imprisonment. Their agreement to share their stories and opinions with the research contributed to the core knowledge base on the subject of poverty and exclusion.

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Chapter 1 Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

Despite economic growth and development in both Ireland and the European Union, there is still poverty. The marginalisation of people who are poor remains a serious issue. At the same time, a growing reliance by society on qualified 'experts' in framing policies and programmes puts an even greater distance between the 'expert' policymaker who has no personal experience of the issues being addressed and the person who is directly affected by the policies thus shaped.

This study comes at the end of Combat Poverty's Having Your Say programme, which focused on strengthening the voices of people affected directly by poverty in framing policies designed for them or that affected their lives.

The people who are most poor or excluded are often invisible and overlooked, through geographic isolation, living circumstances or other obstacles. The study examines such hard-to-reach groups, the barriers to participation they face at present and how they might be supported to play a full part in deciding policies that affect them. The study was carried out by evaluating previous examples of social consultation that had been documented and by preparing and analysing a number of case studies.

Outline of the study

Chapter 1 describes the policy concepts and initiatives around consultation and participative government that provide the context to the study and which helped identify the issue of isolation of the poorest people in society as a problem that had to be addressed.

In Chapter 2 the approach and methods of the research are explained. Chapter 3 discusses consultative processes with reference to a number of analytical frameworks that enable levels of participation and citizen empowerment to be graded and compared. Chapter 4 then examines in greater detail three national consultation processes that were conducted in the formulation or review of social strategies, and assesses the levels of participation that each afforded. This is followed by an account of a consultation initiative held in the UK that aimed specifically to put people who were experiencing poverty at the centre of the process. The lessons that were derived from this project are then examined.

Chapter 5 takes two specific groups, people with disabilities and asylum-seekers in the direct provision system, and examines the life and environmental factors that affect their ability to contribute to making decisions that affect them. Chapters 6 and 7 use case studies to focus on hard-to-reach groups. Chapter 6 focuses on displaced Travellers and overseas seafarers and examines the issues and factors that influence their ability to participate in policy decisions. In Chapter 7 the life experiences of three former prisoners are recounted to throw light on the difficulties facing them before and after prison.

The social factors and other obstacles that are brought out in these life accounts need to be addressed by bodies aiming to provide services and supports to hard-to-reach groups. Some of these organisations and projects are described and some of the methods they have developed that have helped to make their work effective are identified.

Chapter 8 summarises the concepts and issues that have been discussed, the barriers that inhibit the participation of hard-to-reach groups in policy-making and some methods that have been devised to engage them. Two appendices list the members of the Advisory Group that helped guide the study and an information note sent to prospective participants explaining the reasons for the research.

Background to the Study

It has become almost fashionable to include a reference to social inclusion in speeches and plans for the future. For some, it remains just that, a discourse of words. For others, be they analysts, activists or people experiencing poverty, there is more to be said. Having got rid of large-scale poverty, it might be imagined that there is only small-scale misery, isolated pockets of deprivation left.

This was not the view of Pierre Bourdieu when he took a team of analysts to report on the *Misery of the World* in France in the 1990s by reporting on a series of case studies articulated by the 'poor' themselves over a period of three years.¹

Bourdieu was not alone in his concerns. In the very differently constructed welfare regime of the United Kingdom, Will Hutton was hoping that New Labour would remedy the damage to the poorest third of society '*...marginalisation, deprivation and exclusion have proved economically irrational*' he wrote.²

This study is about just one aspect of these large-scale frameworks. It addresses the difficulties and opportunities that those on the margins of society might experience in becoming part of the policy process.

Combat Poverty has a long history of researching and investing in the participation of people affected by poverty in decisions that affect them and in the wider policy arena. A part of this interest formally dates back to its association with the First European Community Action Programme to Combat Poverty (1974–1976), with the establishment of pilot schemes to combat poverty and the formation of a national committee to oversee the pilot projects.

¹ Bourdieu, P. and others (1993) *La misère du Monde*, Editions du Seuil, Paris.

² Hutton, Will (1995) *The State We're In*, Jonathan Cape, London, p.175.

Today it is manifest in the *Having Your Say* programme, which provides a variety of opportunities for participation in social policy by those experiencing poverty, discrimination or disadvantage. As far back as 1981, the European Commission identified '*the exclusion of the poorest*' and the '*isolation of the poorest people in society*' as a serious problem of poverty risk in Member States.³ The resources devoted to the issue remained, however, minimal.

During the German Presidency of the European Union in 2007, the sixth European meeting of people experiencing poverty took place. These meetings, the first of which took place in 2001, sustained a forum of exchange between people experiencing poverty and policy-makers. The meetings have '*helped over the years to deepen the understanding of the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion and to illustrate this on the basis of personal realities.*'⁴ Key to the event was focusing on the inclusion of those working with and those affected by poverty. Bishop Maria Jepsen extended the phrase '*Europe needs faces*' further by directing the comment to the poor that '*You are someone! We are aware of you and respect you in your situation.*'⁵

The most recent meeting took place in Brussels on 16–17 May 2008. It was organized by the European Commission and assisted by the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN). Four pillars to fighting poverty and social exclusion were identified. These were:

- housing
- minimum income
- services of general interest

³ Commission of the European Communities (1981) *Final Report from the Commission to the Council on the First Programme of Pilot Schemes and Studies to Combat Poverty*, COM (81) 769 Final, Brussels, 15 December, pp. 136-137

⁴ Boeckh, J. (2007) *Sixth European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty: Progress Made, Future Steps. Conference Report*. Brussels: European Commission, p. 14.

⁵ Boeckh, J. (2007) *Sixth European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty: Progress Made, Future Steps. Conference Report*. Brussels: European Commission, p. 9.

- social services.⁶

To address the importance of these four themes, workshops were organized for all who attended. These were subsequently used to generate a number of reports to assist dialogue.

It is of concern to Europe that, despite the levels of economic growth that have taken place, a large proportion of men and women still remain in poverty. This situation is becoming more difficult to change due to increased disadvantage and stigmatisation.⁷

Ireland has had a similar experience and, despite major levels of economic growth and development since the mid-1990s, approximately seven per cent of the population remain in consistent poverty.⁸

1.2 Participation and Consultation

It is almost a quarter of a century since the theme of participation by poor people in poverty reduction appeared on the European agenda. Over the last 25 years in Ireland, consulting with the population at large on social and political issues has intensified through the use of the constitutional provision for referenda. The perspective of developing more consultative forms of governing the country has developed with the rise of social partnership from the late 1980s.

The practice of consulting the general population, or certain organizations, on social issues has accelerated in Ireland under the influence of United Nations social programmes. Many Irish non-governmental organizations had positive experiences of participating in formal consultations on women's affairs, social

⁶ European Commission (2008) *Newsletter outlining programme of the 'Seventh Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty'*. Egmont Place, Brussels, May 16 – 17 2008.

⁷ Boeckh, J. (2007) *Sixth European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty: Progress Made, Future Steps. Conference Report*. Brussels: European Commission.

⁸ Combat Poverty Agency (2007) *Annual Report 2006*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency, p. 15.

development, population and environmental issues at UN fora from 1970s onwards.

The emergence of national programmes of community development, and of education and training in community development, has underlined the significance of concepts such as empowerment, participation and self-organization by communities and projects. However, it is the view of this research, in line with findings from Craig, Mayo and Taylor, that efforts to increase participation by the community in consultations do not allow for consequences or dilemmas for such groups entering the policy process for the first time.⁹

With rising prosperity and levels of education, specialised knowledge and expertise has taken on greater importance in all domains; from medicine to political science. The ever-increasing reliance on experts, with qualifications that are both specialised and certified by accredited bodies, creates a social and economic distance between the experts and their subjects of study or expertise. Therefore, the trend towards 'expertism'¹⁰ or the valuing of expertise can devalue the opinions and views of those who are poor or less educated, who have experience but lack formal qualifications.

Some forms of expertise have inbuilt or associated forms of relationship with their public as clients, customers, tenants, residents or patients.¹¹ These relationships may be conditional on certain behaviours or consumption of a specific array of services, which may, in turn, exclude the very group with whom a service is supposed to engage. For example, methadone clinic users who stop and linger at the clinic chatting to other users may be excluded from the service. Homeless street sleepers who refuse to enter hostels can end up outside service provision from which others benefit.

⁹ Craig, G., Marjorie, M. and M. Taylor (2000) 'Globalization from Below: Implications for the Community Development Journal', in *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 35 (4), pp. 323 – 335.

¹⁰ A theme addressed by Pat McDonnell in his 2007 book *Disability and Society: Ideological and Historical Dimensions*. Dublin: Blackhall Publishing.

¹¹ For example, tenants of the new regenerated housing estates in Limerick, such as Moyross, will be 'certified' as fit to be tenants by their Local Authority as landlord.

Croft and Beresford¹² argue that for hard-to-reach groups to become more involved a sufficient level of support, confidence, and resources is required. This would allow these groups a chance to influence policy-making decisions that affect their lives. To resolve this paradox of participation, the authors outline supports at a number of levels:

- personal development
- skill development
- practical support
- support for people to get together and work in groups¹³.

1.3 The Unobserved Economy

Accepting that there are hard-to-reach groups or individuals can be compared, in relation to social policy or service provision, to an economist's concern with measuring the unobserved economy. Mainstream economics now accepts that certain categories of people or commerce are not captured by statistical and other methods of survey.¹⁴ The unobserved economy may be composed of informal commerce or trading, illegal or underground activities, non-declaration of activity and the evasion of small-scale economic activities from large-scale studies.

Studies of the shadow or non-observed economy estimate the size of the shadow economy in Ireland to be 15%–16% of Gross Domestic product.¹⁵ If economists can accept and attempt to measure shadow economies, then social scientists have to question whether their own studies sufficiently

¹² Croft, S. and P. Beresford (1996) 'The Politics of Participation', in D. Taylor (ed) *Critical Social Policy: A Reader*, London: Sage Publications, pp. 175–198.

¹³ Croft, S. and P. Beresford (1996) 'The Politics of Participation', pp. 175 – 198.

¹⁴ OECD (2002) *Measuring the Non-observed Economy*, Statistics Brief, November 2002, No.5. Paris.

¹⁵ Schneider, S. Enste, D. (2000) *Shadow Economies Around the World: Sizes, Causes and Consequences*, International Monetary Fund, IMF Working Paper 26, Table 7.

capture the phenomena of the societal 'underground' in which many hard-to-reach groups choose, or are compelled, to accept.

1.4 Context of the Study

This study, commissioned by Combat Poverty, comes at the end of the 'Having Your Say' programme. The 'Having Your Say' programme aimed to '*strengthen the voices and practices of people and communities living in poverty in the development and implementation of anti-poverty policies.*'¹⁶ At a local and national level it identifies a range of opportunities for policy participation, primarily through the social partnership process and structures. These are underpinned by national, European and international frameworks. These include:

- National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPinclusion)
- European Union's Open Method of Co-ordination (2000)
- Irish Government White Paper Supporting Voluntary Activity (2000)
- United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development (1986).

The Having Your Say programme initiated or supported a wide range of publications, discussion, conferences and local community-based actions. The goal was to promote greater participation in policies and programmes set up to counter poverty, exclusion and disadvantage by those who are affected by them. While discussions and ideas on social partnership, governance and disaffection are factors in the background of hard-to-reach groups, the 'Having Your Say' programme was very specific. It was about those who actually experience poverty and exclusion entering the discussions as subjects and stakeholders in their own right. It was also concerned with organizations that work with people in poverty.

¹⁶ Combat Poverty Agency (2005) *Having Your Say: Strengthening the Policy Voices and Practices of people living in poverty*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

The programme highlighted two central issues that arose during the consultation process. The first of these was the gap in knowledge of the policy process.¹⁷ The second issue identified was supports required in order to engage in the policy process. These included:

- training
- mapping policy arenas
- mapping key times to influence decision making
- mapping the community and voluntary sector.¹⁸

One outcome was to identify some of the barriers faced by disadvantaged groups in terms of their participation in decision-making on issues that affected them.

In a marketised society like Ireland, products and services compete daily and simultaneously for our attention. Their logos and brands are placed before us and what is momentarily not within our sight does not exist. This applies as much to people as to products. The invisibility of the poor and the living conditions of specific groups pose major difficulties in highlighting barriers to participation. By contrast, the homeless sleeping rough and persons begging on the street are visible. Out of sight can mean out of favour for funding and off the shortlist for support.

Ralaheen Ltd, a research company, was commissioned to carry out a study of how hard-to-reach groups could be supported to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Ralaheen's proposal was to use existing published material on social consultations and to prepare specific case studies of challenges to participation faced by some categories of individuals who are at a distance from decision-making bodies.

The approach to the study is discussed in Section 2.

¹⁷ Combat Poverty Agency (2005) *Having Your Say: Strengthening the Policy Voices and Practices of people living in poverty*. Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency.

¹⁸ Combat Poverty Agency (2005)

Chapter 2 Approach to the Study and Method

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the approach and methods used in the research. The study concentrates on hard-to-reach groups including those who are in extreme poverty or least heard in poverty debates. The concepts of distance in terms of hard-to-reach groups and of exclusion are defined.

The study is approached from a viewpoint that believes respect for the dignity of the person is as necessary as dealing with material deprivation. People living in poverty are acknowledged as the experts in discussions on how poverty affects their lives. The theoretical basis for this viewpoint is outlined.

The methods are qualitative, involving interviews and meetings with participants as well as case studies and re-analysis of written sources. The contexts for the case studies and the way in which they were conducted are explained. The case studies examine five hard-to-reach groups and reflect ways in which they might be supported to participate. Differing interpretations of the meaning of social exclusion and their implications for public policy are clarified.

For each group, the level and role played in their lives by family support are assessed. These groups are:

- Travellers
- Seafarers/fishermen
- Former prisoners
- Rural and isolated people
- Asylum-seekers.

A number of people from hard-to-reach groups, plus members of voluntary organizations, took part in the research process, which guaranteed participants' anonymity.

Documentary sources were examined also for information they might provide on hard-to-reach groups and the barriers they faced to participation.

2.2 Approach to the Study

This research has attempted to include some groups who are at a distance from usual consultation processes. The concept of distance, as applied to all of the groups we included in the research, was related to their participation in decision-making processes.

Underlying the study was an understanding of poverty as expressed in the work of Peter Townsend. In his seminal study of poverty in Britain, Townsend (1979) redefined poverty from being an absolute concept to an objective condition of relative deprivation, whereby individuals, families and groups not only lacked sufficient resources to participate in customary life of society but that those resources were:

*'So seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities.'*¹⁹

Townsend proposed a redistribution of wealth as a means of overcoming the gross inequalities in British society at that time.

Almost two decades later, the Irish government's *National Anti-Poverty Strategy 1997* adopted Townsend's definition of poverty but without an accompanying strategy for the redistribution of wealth. Townsend's definition carries within it the concept of exclusion from resources, as the Combat

¹⁹ Townsend, P (1979) *Poverty in the UK*. London: Penguin Book and Allen Lane.

Poverty Agency and the Economic and Social Research Institute underlined in 1996.²⁰

The concept of *extreme poverty* is increasingly employed in western Europe as a useful way of distinguishing between those who are in a continuous state of poverty compared to those at the margins of risk of falling into poverty. This risk may be due, for example, to loss of health, job loss or loss of a family member. Extreme poverty as a concept enables us to focus our attention on those who are most abandoned by public and private policy and whose concerns and voices are less heard when poverty debates are averaged out.

2.3 The Respect for Dignity of the Human Person

In approaching the subject of hard-to-reach groups, a human rights perspective is frequently advanced as the best way to focus on who is in or out of the exclusion framework.²¹ This implies a respect for the dignity of the person and the promotion of their self-respect. The opposite of dignity and respect are forms of service provision or delivery that are degrading or humiliating.

Avoiding an over-preoccupation with material deprivation was advised by Nolan and Callan (1994) when they wrote:

‘We believe that avoiding poverty means not only being able to sustain minimal participation in society but also being able to do so in a way that allows one’s dignity and self-respect to be maintained.’²²

Their insistence on dignity and self-respect is a view shared by members of the movement against poverty, in particular ATD Fourth World. For the latter,

²⁰ Tim Callan et al (1996) *Poverty in the 1990s –Evidence from the Living in Ireland Survey*, Dublin, Oak Tree Press.

²¹ Council of Europe (1994) *In or Out? Social Exclusion and Human Dignity: The Right to Self-Respect*. France: Strasbourg.

²² Nolan, B. and T. Callan (eds.) (1994) *Poverty and Policy in Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, Ltd., p.316.

the starting point of an analysis and strategy to combat poverty is an acceptance of the subjects themselves and respect for the knowledge they bring, as living experts, on how poverty works and how people develop strategies to survive at the margins of society.

The concept of the inherent dignity of the human person as a basis for human rights is strongly associated with Christian thinking, and Catholic thinking more particularly; this is supported in the work of Rev. Dr. Donal Murray of Limerick,²³ and others seeking to explore a clearer theological basis for their work in human rights.

This concept has re-emerged in recent discussion particularly by the European Commission. The Commission identified adequate social protection as a route to supporting people in poverty as well as providing for a dignified life.²⁴

The Advisor to the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Lauri Sivonen, expressed his concern for the human rights of those in poverty at the 2007 European meeting of people experiencing poverty when he said:

*'Human rights are not merely the luxury of a small, privileged elite (...) poverty is inherently an assault to human dignity. But it also serves as an insurmountable hurdle to the enjoyment of civil and political rights.'*²⁵

2.4 Rationale for Selection of Groups

Some hard-to-reach groups have been at the centre of the government funding agenda, for example as part of consultations focused on Travellers, drug users and asylum-seekers. However, the agenda may have been

²³ D. Murray. *The Theological Basis for Human Rights*, see also: John Paul II (1979) *Encyclical Redemptoris Hominis*, Vatican City.

²⁴ European Anti Poverty Network (2006) *Voices from the Poverty Line: Jobs and Unemployment in the EU*. Brussels: EAPN and European Commission.

²⁵ Boeckh, J. (2007) *Sixth European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty: Progress Made, Future Steps. Conference Report*. Brussels: European Commission, p. 15.

unimportant for many of these groups and they may not have been interviewed at all in the process. Some hard-to-reach groups may have more than one focus, which might not be dealt with. In addition, it has to be presumed that some hard-to-reach groups may wish to remain anonymous.

We have taken account of criteria where the person’s civil status and related capacity to be economically independent impinges on the presence of their voice in decision-making about their lives. This can be the case for people who are actually uncertain and insecure in relation to their own identity and citizenship, and former prisoners or offenders who lack the educational capacity to become socially and economically independent.

Table 1 Level of support from families for each of the case study groups used in this research

Hard-to-reach group	Level of family support
Travellers	High
Seafarers/Fishermen	Low/High
Former Prisoners	Low
Rural and Isolated	Low
Asylum-seekers	Low

Source: Compiled by Ralaheen Ltd. based on meetings with individuals and with support or associated groups, March 2008.

For each of the case studies in Table 1, the level of family support is indicated.

For **Travellers**, family plays a huge role in their live, such as deciding on where they live. However, for those who are displaced, their level of support is low.

In comparison to Fishermen, **Seafarers** are invisible in policy terms and have little access to support even from their families while away at sea. Supports

for this hard-to-reach group, however, have been made available by the community and voluntary sector, as will be discussed in Section 6.

Former prisoners may lose contact with their family while in prison and, on release, they may have difficulty in regaining their support.

The **rural and isolated** are generally characterised by ageing single persons. **Asylum-seekers** usually come from broken or lone-parent families or may be placed in accommodation centres for specific sexes, which may break up the family.

2.5 Social Exclusion – A Contested Concept

Irish government attempts to tackle 'social exclusion' form part of a broader 10-year European Union social inclusion strategy aimed at making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010. The National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion or *NAPinclusion* was the Irish government's response, which was informed by the social partnership process. The current National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2007–2016) is committed to building an inclusive society, with an overall policy goal of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016.

Considerable discussion, research and publications have developed over the years into agreed definitions of poverty. This has led to the use of more specific terms and concepts such as: 'individuals who are at at risk of poverty', 'income poverty', and 'relative' or 'consistent poverty'.

This report has identified absolute poverty among hard-to-reach groups. Absolute poverty means the absence of basic elements for human survival such as a permanent shelter or sufficient and assured supplies of food.

The very term 'social exclusion' is, for Levitas (2005:7)²⁶, '*intrinsically problematic*' leading to an '*overly homogenous and consensual view of*

²⁶ Levitas, R. (2005) *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*. London: Palgrave.

society.' Large-scale inequalities that exist in society are buried under a discourse that suggests poverty is pathological and merely affects a residual minority.

This analysis has resonance in Ireland where it is argued that the term 'socially excluded' is often used '*to denote the interests of the poor as being conceived to be in opposition to the majority of society*' (Allen, 2000: 36)²⁷. For Allen '*the booming economy is supposed to have benefited the majority and left behind a residual category*' referred to in official discourse as the 'excluded' or 'marginalised'.

Combating social exclusion in public policy is now described as promoting social inclusion. This is an unfortunate but European-wide confusion and fusion of the concepts of exclusion and inclusion. The opposite of exclusion is access to, and exercise of, the rights of citizenship.

It is common for the two phenomena of poverty and social exclusion to be linked together. This implies that social exclusion occurs for groups in the absence of economic equality and poverty. Frequently, social inclusion measures involve offering to poor people or poor neighbourhoods what other groups in society already have, such as access to education, transport and ease of opening bank accounts.

Confusion in Terms

The argument has been made that social exclusion is a distinct phenomenon to poverty and inequality and, if grouped together in policy terms, there may be a concern that the specific needs of the hard-to-reach could be overlooked. In order for the focus of the hard-to-reach to be more effective in consultation, these two terms need to be unbundled.

²⁷ Allen, K. (2000) *The Celtic Tiger: The myth of social partnership in Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

What is required in Ireland is further research to ensure that the levels of measurement used include all the population, including the hard-to-reach. To employ such standardised measurement is inadequate for the population living in poverty. In addition, there is too much reliance on a presumption of what the criteria are to decide if a person is living in poverty. This does not allow for persons who are not already included and who need to be identified.

2.6 Method of Study

Qualitative methods were the chosen method used in this study. This provided an opportunity to gain in-depth information from the respondents, and the possibility of new concerns and issues being raised, as the meetings were not focused on a particular set of questions that could leave little room for manoeuvre. The chosen methods for this study were a re-analysis of secondary sources as well as case studies. Each of these will be explained in greater detail below.

Table 2 Research phases of the project

	Area of work	Goal	Method
Phase 1	Defining hard-to-reach	1	Literature on hard-to-reach groups applied to Ireland, examining reports of consultation processes undertaken in Ireland in the last five years using a participation continuum.
Phase 2	1 Supportive/Inclusive conditions for hard-to-reach groups	2	One-to-one interview and discussions with NGO networks, community organizations and

	2 Barriers to participation	3	associations, public bodies and government departments on goals two to four.
	3 Participation Strategies	4	This segment will involve a form of 'field work' of discussions and exchanges and will in itself be a participative exercise.
	4 Methods – Case studies arising	5	Selection of a minimum of three case studies of which one will be from the UK and related to Irish conditions and strategies.
Phase 3	Identify the professional competencies and other resources required to support and facilitate the implementation of inclusion strategies and methods	6	Desk-based work. Drawing conclusions from goals one to five. This segment will be written up in a format that allows it to be separated from the body of the report.

The specific methods of consultation used were guided by some of the following criteria in order to get a reasonable spread of types of consultation or participation processes:

- The conditions were especially difficult and the problem poorly defined
- The scale of the consultation in numbers and costs
- There was a significant or critical mass of host organizations and intermediary bodies facilitating the process

- Persons concerned rely on advocacy for their voice, such as former prisoners, persons with mental health difficulties, women in the sex industry, including prostitution, or persons addicted to legal or illegal substances or homeless
- Organizations or processes are using specifically trained facilitators or cultural mediators
- Rural areas were central to the results or outcomes.

Identifying barriers that are structural or attitudinal is an important part of clearing the ground for more promising or interesting practices. Barriers can be as large as providing information in the wrong language to hosting events in locations that are locally rejected.

2.7 Engagement with Hard-to-Reach Participants

A small number of participants who engaged in the research process, 12 men and women, were from hard-to-reach groups. This was possible thanks to the involvement of intermediary contacts, voluntary groups or by peer interviewing.

Some of the participants in voluntary groups had experienced personally the conditions in which the research was interested and recounted their own perspectives and views. It is of note that the research provided an opportunity for a few participants to be visited at 'home', which they appreciated from a privacy point of view.

One participant became distressed when recounting his story but nevertheless wanted to continue as he had so few opportunities to discuss his 'outsider' status and the negative effects on the children in the family.

2.8 Concern for Participants

The anonymity of participants is a core element of this research and vital in promoting the integrity of the research. It is particularly important in dealing with vulnerable groups to ensure that their responses are not used to put the group at further risk.

The research was conscious of the need not to make participants recognisable through the research, including being identifiable to other agencies outside of the research, once the project had been completed.

The process of informed consent ensures that the research participants are informed of the purpose of their involvement. The potential risks of the study, if any, are explained and any form of covert method is avoided.²⁸ This is well described by Ali and Kelly:

*'gaining informed consent is a procedure that aims to support the principle of individual autonomy and is widely agreed to be a safeguard for the rights of human subjects participating knowingly and voluntarily in research.'*²⁹

A number of research participants welcomed the approach of listening carefully to their stories and opinions, expressed in their own words, without them having to write or having to move off their own territory to do so.

2.9 Documentary Research

The research assembled and examined a large number of reports and other written material in the area of poverty, as well as in the areas of the case

²⁸ Covert methods are 'usually deemed to be violations of the privacy principle on the grounds that participants are not being given the opportunity to refuse invasions of their privacy' from Bryman, A. (2001) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁹ Ali, S. and M. Kelly (2004) 'Ethics and Social Research', in C. Seale (ed) *Researching Society and Culture*, London: Sage, pp. 115 – 127, p. 120.

studies and consultations. They were examined for the light they might shed on the subject of hard-to-reach groups and obstacles to their participation.

2.10 Case Studies

Case studies are a useful method of research as they allow the study of social action in its natural setting. Information gathered using a case study can be rich, detailed and in depth, as opposed to a large-scale survey that is thin in content. Case studies may focus on an individual, group or community, and provide an opportunity to gather enough information to permit the researcher to understand how the subject operates or functions.³⁰

Case studies carry the advantage of an exploratory and not overly prescriptive approach:

‘A form of qualitative descriptive research which looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that particular group and only in that specific context. Researchers do not focus on the discovery of a universal, generalisable truth, nor do they typically look for cause–effect relationships; instead, emphasis is placed on exploration and description.’³¹

It was intended that the case studies chosen should reflect some of the different hard-to-reach groups and the potential for enhancing participation through various avenues of engagement. Such engagement involved initial respondents, based on their knowledge, recommending for interview further contacts that were suitable for the research. This proved to be particularly adaptable to the research. However, it was important that the cases be

³⁰ Berg, B. (2004) *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Boston, London: Pearson. 5th Edition.

³¹ Becker, B. et al (2005) ‘Case Studies’, writing at Colorado State University Department of English.

selected carefully so as to maximise what could be gained from the research within the time constraints.³²

The use of peer interviewing proved successful in dealing with hard-to-reach groups. MORI state that '*this technique is useful when researching groups who may be more likely to share information with a peer than with a professional researcher.*'³³ Through the participation of groups or individuals directly involved in working with each of the hard-to-reach groups featured in the case study section, research analysis was strengthened, as it allowed the participants to open up and reveal their experiences.

The use of case studies was central for this research study, as it allowed a number of interviews with individuals or groups in an exploratory fashion before drawing conclusions.³⁴

2.11 Case Study Contexts

The study examined the residential location (2006) of people with disabilities in Co. Clare and found that the population is highly dispersed across scores of individual locations, rendering conventional meetings and participation very problematic. People with disabilities in general have low uptake of broadband or Internet and website access, according to the CSO.³⁵ In addition people with mental health issues experience considerable stigma, according to the National Disability Authority (NDA). These factors complicate both consultation and planning for people with mental health issues in rural areas.

The right of people to participate in public policy decisions not only makes for better democracy but also for better service delivery. Previously there has been an over-emphasis on the civil servant or professional view in certain

³² Tellis, W. (1997) 'Application of a Case Study Methodology' in *The Qualitative Report*, Volume 3, Number 3.

³³ MORI Social Research Institute (nd) *Researching hard-to-reach and vulnerable groups.*

³⁴ Soy, S. (1996) 'The Case Study as a Research Model' in *Uses and Users of Information*, LLIS 391D.1.

³⁵ CSO (2006) *Information Society and Telecommunications 2006*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

issues, particularly in the area of drugs, where an over-use of the medical model is employed.

Corr's study (2004)³⁶ on new community drug use revealed that many social providers were unaware of the implications of such a lifestyle or that the users in the study often were living already in a twilight zone of asylum, illegal or over-staying migration that rendered them relatively invisible.

Ex Prisoners Assistance Committee (EXPAC) staff and board agreed more than three years ago to diversify their interest in prisoners to a broad range of prison and prisoner-related issues. It is often the case that former prisoners require assistance with resettlement into the community or away from it. Unfamiliarity with life outside of prison, as well as a sense of loneliness due to loss of connection with their family and experiences of discrimination, may prevent former prisoners from 'shaking off' the attitude that in time they would inevitably be back in prison.

NECVA – the Network of Ex-Prisoner Voluntary Agencies – was founded as a result of some of these issues. EXPAC recently completed a review of integration strategies and integration studies for and with former prisoners, including many community-based initiatives.

Asylum-seekers living in temporary communal accommodation under a scheme of direct provision are a category that is shrinking in number. They may be the subject of potentially more stringent conditions of residence under the proposed Immigration, Protection and Residency Bill, 2007. Their day-to-day living arrangements, which are governed by formal rules, are currently under review. This provided an occasion to examine participation by non-citizens in their daily life and their conditions of living.

Overseas seafarers were invisible to the Irish population until the Irish Ferries dispute of 2006 highlighted the recruitment of overseas seafarers, on country

³⁶ Corr, C. (2004) *Drug use among new communities in Ireland: an exploratory study*. Merchants Quay Ireland, NACD, Dublin.

of domicile wages, to shipping companies operating across Europe and the western world. Service outreach to overseas seafarers provides an example of effort to connect to hard-to-reach groups.

2.12 Case Study Development

Members of the Advisory Group to the research offered direct and interesting contributions to the research itself, and represented several distinct perspectives.³⁷ An information note was sent to each respondent before attending a meeting to inform them of the terms of reference of the study. A copy of this information note can be found in Appendix 2.

Case studies aimed to reveal:

- Attempts that did not quite work but for which there was a learning experience for others
- Participatory events or initiatives or programmes that showed a promising capacity to be easily replicated
- Case studies that reveal the costs of democracy – participation is expensive
- Initiatives that benefited from others or from wider social movements. Examples illustrating the use of community development and citizenship
- Explicitly participatory frameworks.

Overall, 22 meetings, visits and interviews were conducted. Interviews consisted of two types: face-to-face and telephone. As well as service providers, a number of meetings took place with individuals and groups directly involved in policy.

³⁷ See Appendix 1 for a list of members.

2.13 Conclusion

The chosen research methods proved useful in accessing information and identifying new areas of concern for certain groups. This might not have been possible with alternative methods, such as quantitative surveys. The research deliberately excluded the use of focus groups or round tables as unsuited to the level of anonymity and privacy appropriate to the study.

Documentary research provided the opportunity to report on previous national and local consultation reports. The use of case studies allowed for the identification of new and unreported themes, related to specific hard-to-reach groups, through the use of peer interviewing. A weakness in the research method was the difficulty in drawing general conclusions from particularistic approaches.

Chapter 3 The Concept of Hard-to-Reach

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report will examine the concept of hard-to-reach, outlining its use in various contexts. Varying interpretations of the term 'hard to reach' may colour how issues are defined or where responsibility for problems may lie. The way in which the concept of 'hard to reach' has been employed to date is explained, and issues in identifying the hard-to-reach, for research or service purposes, are discussed. This includes problems of under-representation and under-service.

In this chapter models of participation and consultation, and related degrees of power or non-participation, are examined. The study raises the case for going beyond standard consultation techniques to include the hard to reach.

The models of participation described below are employed later in the report to assess levels of participation in Irish community-based projects and in the consultations or planning by public bodies on policies, programmes and services. Analysis based on these models allows conclusions to be drawn as to the barriers faced by hard-to-reach groups and what conditions, resources and supports may make it possible for their inclusion in decision-making processes.

3.2 Identifying the Hard to Reach

The concept of 'hard to reach' has only recently emerged in practice in Ireland. It has been employed for some time in the United States and other international contexts, most frequently in relation to service delivery. This implies that hard-to-reach groups are under-represented in the use of a particular service, though they may benefit from that service.

Broadly speaking, hard-to-reach groups could be defined as those who face certain barriers to participation in society, such as a physical or mental disability, language difficulties, or those who may be disinclined to participate. Others may fall under this heading of non-participation, and be similarly hard to reach, particularly in a research context. These include people who are time-poor, or who are apathetic about social and civic engagement. However, the assumption with this latter group is that they have access to a certain level of resources, are able to exercise certain choices if they wish to, choices that are closed to others in hard-to-reach groups.

The focus within this report is on those who face disadvantages or barriers to participation in society and in the research process. In operational terms, the process of engagement with groups for whom non-participation is common, has been described as *'consulting the disinterested and the disillusioned'*, with the point being made that such groups are not harder to reach, but more expensive to reach.³⁸

3.3 Differing Interpretations

The term 'hard to reach' can be applied in a number of contexts, and gives rise to criticisms about its application in potentially misleading ways. Cook³⁹ states that *'this loose and ambiguous term is both misleading and counter-productive when used in a pejorative way'*.

One example, that of policing and crime prevention, illustrates where a clear difference in interpretation of the term between officials and the public is evident. In a consultation process, hard-to-reach groups are defined by police as those who have 'problematic' relations with them. In the case of a

³⁸ Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association Seminar (2001). 'Consulting Hard-to-Reach Groups', 15th November. UK: LARIA.

³⁹ Cook, D. (2002) 'Consultation for a change? Engaging users and communities in the policy process', in *Social Policy and Administration*, 36 (5), pp. 516–531, p.523.

Community Safety Partnership Programme, the list of the hard to reach includes:

- young men,
- the homeless,
- drug users,
- the gay community,
- members of minority ethnic communities,
- children,
- those who suffer domestic abuse,
- the elderly.⁴⁰

The definition is purely from the police perspective, and implies the problem lies with the groups.

The argument is made that, although hard-to-reach groups may possess characteristics that reduce their likelihood of participation in decisions that affect their lives, the consulting authorities must attempt to apply alternative and appropriate methods, which help in overcoming these barriers to participation. The suggestion is that the consultative approach '*should extend beyond standard techniques.*'⁴¹

3.4 Researching the Hard to Reach

Targeting hard-to-reach groups for the purposes of exploratory research presents its own difficulties in that they have, by virtue of their particular situation:

- withdrawn themselves from any possibly identifiable sample population (for example, ceasing to use a service that might flag them as hard to reach)

⁴⁰ Cook, D. (2002).

⁴¹ Brackertz, N. et al. (2005) *Community Consultation and the 'Hard- to-Reach'; Concepts and Practice in Victorian Local Government*, Australia: Swinburne Institute for Social Research, p. 27.

- not yet been recognised (because conceptually we have failed to do so)
- been characterised as ‘threatening’, for example, homeless persons, drug addicts, prostitutes, former prisoners⁴²
- when ‘recognised’, a low social visibility exists
- become not actually hard to reach, but rather faced with services that are structurally closed to them
- become unable to communicate effectively as they may not speak a mainstream language such as Irish Sign Language or English as first language
- become reliant on closed institutions such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons.

Overlooked and Under-served

A number of related terms to the hard to reach have been used in recent international studies and policy papers. A US study based on observation and interviews with 10 project high schools and middle schools in five districts of the United States provides some background to a definition of the term ‘overlooked and under-served’.⁴³

The rationale for the study was based on language challenges faced by immigrant students in US schools. Overall the population of immigrant students has experienced high levels of rapid growth, high poverty levels and high levels of school segregation. The study concluded that immigrant students overall are under-schooled and that there are high numbers of students with limited proficiency in English.⁴⁴

⁴² Faugier, J. & Sargeant, M. (1997) ‘Sampling hard-to-reach populations’, in *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 26, pp. 790-797.

⁴³ Ruiz-de-Velasco, J., M. Fix and B. C. Clewell (2000) *Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in US Secondary Schools*. The Urban Institute in association with The Mellon Foundation Program in Immigrant Education.

⁴⁴ Ruiz-de-Velasco, J., M. Fix and B. C. Clewell (2000)

A 'parent-school disconnect' persists for these students because their parents have generally lower English skills than their children. Consequently, the school is unable to communicate with the parents about their child's progress.⁴⁵ In conclusion, immigrant students in the US have become overlooked in terms of educational provision. As a result they remain an under-served group of the population. This phrase, when used to describe the hard to reach, bears similar results.

3.5 Cultural, Class and Language issues in Participation

Some groups are continuing to experience a level of distance from the policy-making process. These groups are often referred to as hard-to-reach groups. In order for public consultations to take place, a high level of information needs to be available to all citizens. It is generally the case that hard-to-reach groups do not involve themselves in these consultations or that no conscious effort is made to involve them. This may lead to a situation whereby only those who understand or have been contacted about the consultation are involved.

Despite best efforts to narrow the gap or the chasm, there will remain some cultural, social class and language issues, which are present in consultations. Language itself can be inclusive or discouraging. The use of accessible English can be significant here. Some groups may avoid consultations if they believe words will be used or questions asked that they cannot understand and they will be made to look 'foolish' or 'dim'. Some hard-to-reach groups demand special consideration and their views may not be possible to canvass or elucidate directly. This can be the case with individuals who:

⁴⁵ Ruiz-de-Velasco, J., M. Fix and B. C. Clewell (2000)

- Have mental health issues which might inadvertently or unintentionally be disclosed
- Groups who are interviewed repeatedly for other purposes (some asylum-seekers)
- Persons who cannot give full consent (prisoners)
- Persons for whom participation would not be beneficial to them as individuals.

3.6 Ladder of Participation

Accepting that the issue to be addressed is the design and provision of public services to members of hard-to-reach groups, the principal conceptual considerations relates to ideas of participation and consultation.

One of the classic models of participation is the continuum model proposed by Arnstein.⁴⁶ This conceptualises participation in terms of eight levels, arranged in the form of a 'ladder', with each rung corresponding to increasing (or decreasing) extents of citizens' power in decision-making. At the bottom level, participation is absent. At the middle level, citizens are provided with information and are listened to, but do not have any guarantee that their views will be acted upon. At the top level, citizens have some control and decision-making power.

At all levels, there is the inherent limitation of government being in a position to exercise power over final decisions, consequently re-emphasising the supremacy of the government in all forms of participation.

⁴⁶ Arnstein, S.R. (1969) 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', in *Journal of American Planning Association*, 35 (4), pp. 216-224.

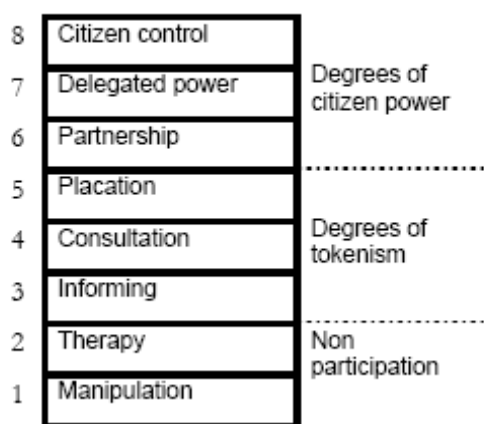


Chart 1: Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation

Source: Arnstein, 1969

3.7 A Continuum of Participation

Another continuum model, devised by Shand and Arnberg,⁴⁷ does not imply progression along a continuum, but rather suggests a series of choices that government makes, depending on the decision to be taken.

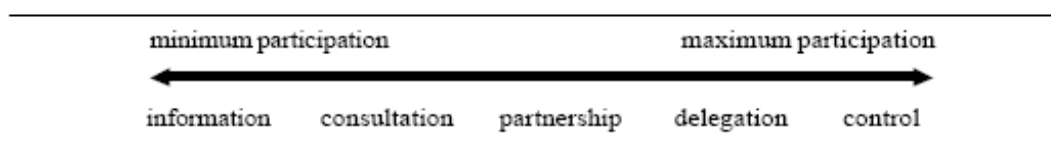


Figure 3: The Shand-Arnberg Participation Continuum

Chart 2: The Shand-Arnberg Participation Continuum

Source: Shand and Arnberg, 1996

This participation continuum has been built on by Bishop and Davis⁴⁸ who suggest some suitable techniques to link to varying levels of participation. Both models are combined to produce a matrix illustrating the possible levels of participation that can be envisaged through the methods employed, and accompanying levels of potential influence on decision-making.

⁴⁷ Shand, D. and Arnberg, M. (1996) *Responsive Government*. Paris: OECD.

⁴⁸ Bishop, P, and Davis, G. (2002) ‘Mapping public participation in policy choices’ in *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 61(1) pp. 14-29.

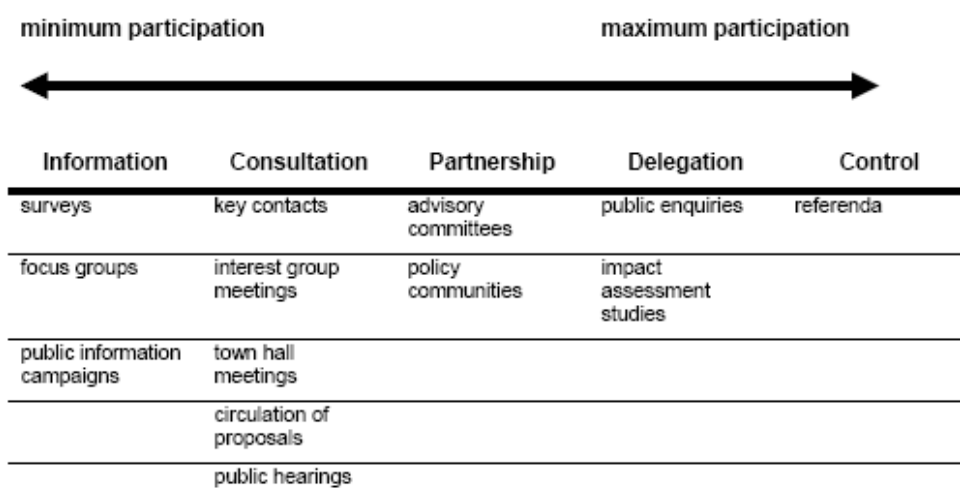


Fig 2: Purpose of consultation and appropriate consultation instruments. Adapted from Bishop and Davis (2002: 21) and Shand and Arnberg (1996: 21).

Chart 3: Appropriate Consultation Instruments

Source: Brackertz et al., 2005.

If this model is extended to conceptualise the position of hard-to-reach groups, it is evident that the mechanisms are not provided for their inclusion in the consultation process. This refers back to the notion that consultation with hard-to-reach groups must extend beyond ‘standard techniques’.

This is particularly the case for groups reliant on the State for income and other supports. If such groups do not believe (or no longer believe) that the relevant state institutions and organizations are interested in their status, they will (not least in research terms) also become harder to reach as their preference will be to avoid contact with them where possible.

Such an understanding of hard to reach draws conceptually on notions of institutional trust, whereby citizens lose faith in the State and its institutions to represent them in a fair and impartial manner.^{49 50} The issue is a more

⁴⁹ Levi, M. (1998) ‘A State of Trust’, in: V. Braithwaite and M. Levi (Eds.) *Trust and Governance*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

⁵⁰ Rothstein, B. and Stolle, D. (2003) ‘Social Capital, Impartiality and the Welfare State: An Institutional Approach’, M. Hooghe and D. Stolle (Eds.) *Generating Social Capital; Civil Society and Institutions in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

specific and subtle one than that of social exclusion, as many persons that we could define as socially excluded are not hard to reach and in fact may suffer from an over-exposure to research activity. In contrast to the concept of social exclusion, which carries some overtones of value judgements, the concept of hard to reach is relatively neutral in that it makes no comment or judgement on the population in question other than to signal a large barrier or gap in relationship or communication.

However, there are some similar and contrasting features of the concept of hard to reach and social exclusion, which are worth exploring.

3.8 'Hard to Research'

In terms of participation in research, two levels seem to present themselves:

- Individuals or groups who do not make themselves available for research, or are not known about
- Those of whom we are aware and who may already have been researched, but where the study has been 'about' them rather than 'with' them. This latter group could be conceptualised as hard to reach in that their needs have not been established adequately via the research process, due to inadequate approaches.

Hard-to-reach populations can be geographically, culturally or socially remote from research or consultation promoters. This leads to under-reporting of their circumstances in sample surveys or failure to capture the full range of experiences and opinions of the target population. This level of under-reporting potentially leads to under-serving.

The extra distance between research promoter and potential interviewee can be reduced by taking additional steps to bring the researcher closer to the spaces and places which potential interviewees find acceptable, by the addition of incentives or other trust building measures.

3.9 Hard to Reach and Welfare Programmes

Hard-to-reach populations have been a concern of US social and political science since the mid-Nineties when the Democratic Party government pledged to 'end welfare as we know it'. Federal welfare programmes such as aid for dependent children were drastically reduced and funding made contingent on the individual states taking steps to reduce welfare roles so welfare claimants would have a fixed amount of lifetime years during which they could claim federal benefits.

It took little time among analysts, politicians and programme managers to observe that many specific populations could not come off welfare and make the transition to work due to their circumstances. These circumstances included:

- neighbourhood and ethnicity
- drug and other substance abuse
- lack of qualifications and school completion
- low wages
- absence of affordable childcare
- the presence of a child or adult with disabilities in the household
- their own mental health issues
- experience of domestic violence.

Evaluation of anti-poverty and welfare-to-work programmes have zeroed in on the hard-to-reach populations. Of particular interest for researchers have been the studies in Mathematica Policy Research based in Washington, which undertakes large-scale federal level studies across the United States, using the hard to reach concept.

3.10 Conclusion

The concept of hard to reach has not featured extensively in Irish social policy research. It is a model more familiar in an international context, particularly in

the United States. Analysts in Ireland are familiar with terms such as 'marginalised' and 'excluded'. However, these are terms often used pejoratively or in a 'catch-all' manner.

Hard to reach offers the researcher a value-free concept that denotes distance or barrier in relationship or communication. There are many potential barriers, with the level of distance varying between groups. Being able to identify the barriers, measure the distance from relationship or communication, and seek out ways to overcome these barriers is aided by the 'participative continuum'.

These models will be employed later in the research to assess the levels of participation in Irish community-based anti-poverty and social inclusion projects and in the consultations or planning by public bodies, on policies, programmes, and services.

Chapter 4 A Review of the Processes of Some Consultations

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is arranged in three sections, each of which looks in detail at a national public consultation in an area of strategic social policy. It assesses their respective strengths and weaknesses and examines whether existing consultation systems are sufficient to embrace the hard to reach. In addition, national guidelines for consultation by Irish public service bodies are outlined.

The public consultations examined are:

- The National Women's Strategy 2007–2016
- National Anti-Poverty Strategy
- National Drugs Strategy 2001–2008.

The level of participation in each process is rated using the models of participation described in Chapter 3.

The study's analysis of the NAPS consultation concludes that the social inclusion process in Ireland is very complex and allows little opportunity for people on the margins to input directly into policy. The social partnership structures, through which the revision of the NAPS was primarily conducted, do not engage the hard to reach. Ways of bridging gaps in consultation processes in order to include the hard to reach are discussed.

In looking at the process of developing the National Drugs Strategy and drugs taskforces, the success or otherwise of the participative approach, and the degree to which drug users, their families and communities were included, are examined. The research then identifies a participatory model that might engage drug users. It raises the issue of follow-through by government on

agreed strategies and resources, or failure to recognise the need for a community role, as factors that could undermine participation.

A successful public consultation carried out in the UK, called Voices for Change, is discussed next. This consultation put people who directly experienced poverty and those working with them at the centre of the process. The lessons derived from the consultation, and the implications for future participation structures in terms of inclusion and communication, are drawn out.

Guidelines

A consultation is defined as ‘*a structured public engagement, which involves seeking, receiving, analysing and responding to feedback from stakeholders*’ according to *Guidelines from the Department of the Taoiseach*.⁵¹ These Guidelines were published to provide advice to public bodies seeking to hold consultations with stakeholders. It is now government policy that consultations should become more widespread and that, in targeting the audience for public consultations, the process should involve all stakeholders who may be interested or affected by the topic of concern.

A number of different consultation formats are available to public bodies and many use more than one. These include:

- consultations,
- use of the Internet,
- advisory committees,
- comment or suggestion schemes,
- questionnaire-based surveys,
- face-to-face interviews,
- focus groups
- public meetings⁵².

⁵¹ Department of the Taoiseach (2005) *Reaching Out: Guidelines on Consultation for Public Sector Bodies*, p. 7.

⁵² Department of the Taoiseach (2005).

The Department of the Taoiseach recommends that all submissions received should be acknowledged and published, if possible, and that the views and suggestions of those participating in public meetings be published. The question then arises as to whether consultation systems are sufficient to embrace the hard to reach.

During the period January to March 2008, 16 consultations were launched or were under way by various public bodies and departments of government.

These were by the:

- Department of Social and Family Affairs (Customer Action Plan, Pensions and National Carers' Strategy)
- Department of Transport (Sustainable Travel and Transport Action Plan)
- Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Bathing Water Quality and Official Languages Act Draft Scheme)
- Department of Community, Gaeltacht and Rural Affairs (National Drugs Strategy and Section 11 of the Official Languages Act, 2003)
- The Pharmacy Regulator (Pharmacy Ireland – 2020)
- National Forum on Europe (The Treaty of Lisbon)
- Department of Health and Children (Independent Body on Pharmacy Contract Pricing)
- Mental Health Commission (Consumer Code and Review of the Mental Health Act, 2001)
- The Financial Regulator (Voluntary Consumer Protection Code)
- The Commission on Taxation
- Dublin City Council (Planning and Economic Development).

The consultations requested 'submissions', 'feedback', 'views', 'opinions' or 'comments'. The time duration for submissions ranged from two to seven weeks.

4.2 National Women's Strategy

4.2.1 Introduction

Over the last decade two key strategies have been developed to tackle gender inequality and advance the position of women in Irish society. Both the National Plan for Women (2002) and the National Women's Strategy (2007) were devised following very different forms of consultation. This section will outline the process involved in formulating these plans. It will demonstrate that while the consultation process for the National Women's Strategy relied heavily on the social partnership model, the comprehensive nature of the consultation for the National Plan for Women facilitated a much wider participation of women.

An awareness of the issues that prevent groups from engaging in the public policy process and the employment of initiatives to overcome these barriers are central to any genuine consultative programme.

4.2.2 Context to Development of National Women's Strategy

The idea of strategic planning in public policy in relation to gender developed during the preparations for the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 (Beijing Conference). At the Beijing Conference, the Irish government signed up to the *Beijing Platform for Action*. This highlighted the global dimension of the position of women in society, and was later addressed in both at a European Union and national level.

In adopting a global framework, which was intended to appeal to developing countries, the Irish government made a commitment to address an agenda known as 'The 12 Critical Areas of Concern'. The agenda was markedly different in sequence from what might have been expected in Ireland. Themes like poverty, health and education were at the top while the economy ranked only sixth.

The Beijing 12 Critical Areas of Concern are as follows:

1. Women and Poverty
2. Women and Education and Training
3. Women and Health
4. Violence against Women
5. Women and Armed Conflict
6. Women and the Economy
7. Women in Power and Decision-making
8. Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women
9. Human Rights of Women
10. Women and the Media
11. Women and the Environment
12. The Girl-Child.

The National Plan for Women, published by the Irish government in 2002, was presented to the United Nations in support of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Key to this report was the recommendation of a National Women's Strategy, which would provide a gender equality framework. Consultation meetings were held to discuss a National Plan for Women. However, the National Women's Council declined to participate following failure to agree on targets and budgets within the plan. The consultation meetings were analysed and written up in a distinctive report.

4.2.3 National Plan for Women 2002

The National Plan for Women consulted widely in identifying the key issues for women in Ireland and the consultation process was quite extensive in comparison to that of the later National Women's Strategy.⁵³ The consultation process of the National Plan for Women involved a Steering Committee, which had the role of overseeing the consultation process and reported to the

⁵³ Draft 1 of the National Plan for Women (2001 – 2005), was used to open the consultation process for the National Plan for Women. This was also divided into three sections on the 12 Areas of Concern.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The Steering Committee comprised a number of government departments, social partners, and statutory and non-statutory agencies.⁵⁴

The second step involved an information campaign, which presented a draft plan of the document to women and their representative groups, as well as connected documents available on a web page. These documents included; the Beijing Platform for Action and Political Declaration and summary; the Political Declaration and Outcome Document and summary; the Development of Mechanisms to Monitor Progress in Achieving Gender Equality in Ireland; and a discussion document entitled 'Reflecting at the Crossroads'.⁵⁵

The next stage was an invitation to all stakeholders to make written submissions, including women's groups across the country. A financial grant of four different levels was made available to groups to assist in consulting and preparing their submissions.

A number of criteria were used to provide the appropriate level of funding for each group. These included:

- identifying the area covered by the applicant group;
- the number of people involved in the consultation process;
- any particular difficulties of the area;
- characteristics of the group being consulted;
- evidence of a significant research effort or input or extensive consultation;
- focus on those critical areas that would not be the subject of much comment;

⁵⁴ These included the NDP Gender Equality Unit; The Equality Authority; City/County Development Boards; The National Economic and Social Forum; The Irish Farmers Association; Irish Congress of Trade Unions; Irish Business and Employers Confederation; The National Women's Council of Ireland; The Community and Voluntary Pillar; Women in the Home; The National Traveller Women's Forum; NEART and The Conference of Religious in Ireland.

⁵⁵ Extracted from the Report to the United Nations on the National Plan for Women 2002 on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, p. 56.

- level of grant sought.⁵⁶

A total of €277,729 was provided in grants to over 200 organizations across the country and a total of 335 submissions were made.

The consultation process involved 10 regional public fora held around the country in March 2002. Women were invited to discuss a number of issues; including the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform, as well as:

- issues on diversity and equality
- diversity among women
- women as unpaid carers
- institutional mechanisms or supports for the advancement of women.

Meetings took place in west Dublin, Monaghan, Mullingar, Donegal, Galway, Kilkenny, Dún Laoghaire, Cork, Limerick, and Dublin City. Approximately 1,000 women attended.⁵⁷

To complete the consultation process, two interim reports and a final report were prepared by Genesis Consultants. A report entitled *Aspirations of Women*⁵⁸ was published to provide a full account of the various contributions collected in the course of the consultation process.

4.2.4 Consultation Process for National Women's Strategy

The National Women's Strategy (2007–2016) was launched in April 2007.

Reversing the Beijing agenda, it focused instead on three themes:

- ensuring equality for women in society through socio-economic opportunity,
- promoting well-being,

⁵⁶ Extracted from the Report to the United Nations, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Extracted from the Report to the United Nations, p. 57.

⁵⁸ Genesis (2002) *Aspirations of Women collected in the course of the Consultation Process on the National Plan for Women 2002: Towards a National Women's Strategy*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

- ensuring women as active and equal citizens.

The vision of the National Women's Strategy is:

*'An Ireland where all women enjoy equality with men and can achieve their full potential while enjoying a safe and fulfilling life.'*⁵⁹

The first theme of the Strategy is 'equalising socio-economic opportunity for women'.⁶⁰ Its second theme, of 'ensuring the well-being of women', aimed to improve conditions for women in all areas of health and well-being, both in and outside of the labour market.⁶¹ The third theme aimed to engage women as equal and active citizens. This was targeted at those involved in politics, state and public sector boards, overseas development aid, and the media and arts. Measures to tackle gender violence in overseas conflicts were also advanced.⁶²

An Inter-Departmental Committee oversaw the formulation of the National Women's Strategy, which was chaired by the Assistant General Secretary at the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The committee included one member from each government department, and a number of bodies, including the National Women's Council of Ireland.

Its role was to consult with the consultation groups, which consisted of the social partners, including two trade union representatives, one from the employer's organization IBEC and one from the National Women's Council of Ireland. The primary role of this consultation group was to receive draft proposals from the Inter-Departmental Committee, to advise on the development of the strategy and to contribute to the development of a communications plan for the publication and the eventual launch of the

⁵⁹ Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2007) *National Women's Strategy 2007–2016*, p. 2.

⁶⁰ These elements included addressing the conditions surrounding the entry of women to the labour market such as measures to address their further advancement in employment through training programmes.

⁶¹ Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2007)

⁶² Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2007)

strategy. In addition, throughout the consultation process the Equality Authority contributed to the guidance process.

Formulated primarily by representative bodies, the National Women's Strategy placed little emphasis on the direct involvement of hard-to-reach groups.

To complete the consultation process, the data that was compiled from the consultation process of the National Plan for Women (2002) was used to inform this later Strategy.⁶³ It stated that '*it draws together the wishes of women in Ireland in all their diversity and has been an input to the development of this National Women's Strategy.*'⁶⁴ However, the earlier plan was devised in the context of the social, economic and cultural conditions of the late 1990s, which may not have been entirely appropriate in projecting a strategy to 2016.

4.2.5 Assessment of Processes

A number of organizations and parties have been critical of the National Women's Strategy. The National Women's Council argued that it lacked mechanisms to remove inequalities and that it emphasised short-term rather than long-term measures to address inequality. Public consultations were not used for the National Women's Strategy 2007–2016, as it was based on consultations carried out for the National Plan for Women 2002.

Consequently, it is probable that the experiences and aspirations of numerous women have not been included in the National Women's Strategy, 2007 – 2016, regardless of their own particular struggle.

The National Women's Strategy tends to renew and replicate existing initiatives and objectives of policy documents such as NAPS reports, the National Development Plan, and Social Partnership documents, as well as

⁶³ Compiled in *The Report on the Aspirations of Women – Aspirations of Women* (2002).

⁶⁴ Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2007) p. 16.

individual reports by various government departments. Although the Strategy addresses issues of concern to women, it does not however devise new actions and developments to revise targets. In particular, targets in relation to childcare, or increasing the number of women in decision-making positions on public bodies, are overlooked.

4.2.6 Conclusion

The consultation process for the first National Plan for Women contained a number of very specific initiatives that allowed for a much deeper consultation process compared with the later National Women's Strategy. The former emerged from an international process, carrying with it the imprimatur of the United Nations, which accorded it a high degree of legitimacy.

A comprehensive consultation plan was put in place, involving:

- a steering committee representative of all the stakeholders
- an information campaign providing background material and discussion documents
- a fund to assist local groups in submitting written proposals
- public consultations
- two interim reports that could be discussed in advance of a final report being prepared.
- This allowed for entry into the process at various levels.

This research estimates that the consultation process was at the upper end of Arnstein's ladder of participation, whereby groups are provided not only with the relevant information but also a direct input into the process. As the continuum of participation suggests, once a person has received sufficient information they are capable of being involved with others in a genuine consultation.

The provision of support to prepare submissions was a positive development and recognition that not all groups had equal access to either information or resources. Women are not a homogenous group, and it is important to recognise that some groups of women will require additional supports to enable them participate. An awareness of the issues that prevent women from involvement in such processes was crucial.

This process of consultation demonstrated that those responsible for its preparation were keenly aware of the need to devise different methods and strategies to engage as broad a range of opinion as possible.

In the case of the National Strategy for Women:

- It relied almost exclusively on the social partnership process.
- It took little account of how those who were uninvolved at this level of governance could gain access.

At the level of professional competencies, those involved in devising a consultation process must be made aware of the fact that many groups are positioned at the edge of social partnership. As such, distinctive strategies are required to involve hard-to-reach groups. Social partnership should not be considered an adequate mechanism in which to engage hard-to-reach groups.

Finally, the practice of recycling previous consultations in order to devise contemporary strategies or policies needs consideration. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the consultation process, utilised for a particular strategy, would be a useful exercise.

4.3 National Anti Poverty Strategy

4.3.1 Introduction

This section of the report will explore the complex process involved in devising a National Anti-Poverty Strategy. While use of public consultation in influencing public policy has been developing in Europe since the 1960s,⁶⁵ some groups are continuing to experience levels of marginalisation from the policy-making process. With its origins in the United Nations Social Development summit of the mid-1990s, the National Anti-Poverty Strategy has developed into a policy-making process that includes government departments, agencies, bodies, the social partners and, to a much lesser extent, those who actually experience poverty.

4.3.2 United Nations and Social Development

The United Nations World Summit for Social Development⁶⁶ committed national governments to the goal of '*eradicating poverty in the world, through decisive national actions and international co-operation, as an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind.*'⁶⁷

Commitments made at this summit formed the basis for the Irish government's National Anti-Poverty Strategy, launched in 1997.

⁶⁵ Iredale, R. (1999) 'Public Consultation and Participation in Policy Making', in G. Kiely, A. O' Donnell, P. Kennedy and S. Quin (eds) *Irish Social Policy in Context*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, pp. 178 – 194.

⁶⁶ Held in Copenhagen in 1995.

⁶⁷ United Nations (1995) Commitment (2) *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen*. A/CONF.166/9, p. 13.

4.3.3 National Anti Poverty Strategy

The National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS) *Sharing in Progress* set a 10-year target aimed at '*considerably reducing the numbers of those who are consistently poor from 9 to 15 per cent to less than 5 to 10 per cent.*'⁶⁸

The development of NAPS '*involved wide ranging consultation and participation with the voluntary and community sector, the social partners, users of services and those with first hand experience of poverty.*'⁶⁹

As part of this process nine regional public consultation seminars were held and attended by over 1,000 people. In addition, over 300 written submissions were received from a host of groups and individuals. The NAPS identified the groups at greatest risk of poverty as being:

- the unemployed - particularly long-term unemployed
- children, particularly those living in large families
- single adult households
- households headed by someone working in the home
- lone parents
- people with disabilities.

A key principle underpinning the National Anti-Poverty Strategy was ensuring equal access and encouraging participation by all. Its publication marked the beginning of a process that has dominated social policy for over a decade. It has become, arguably, a highly complex process, creating a superstructure that can be difficult to penetrate or gain access to, specifically for those experiencing poverty.

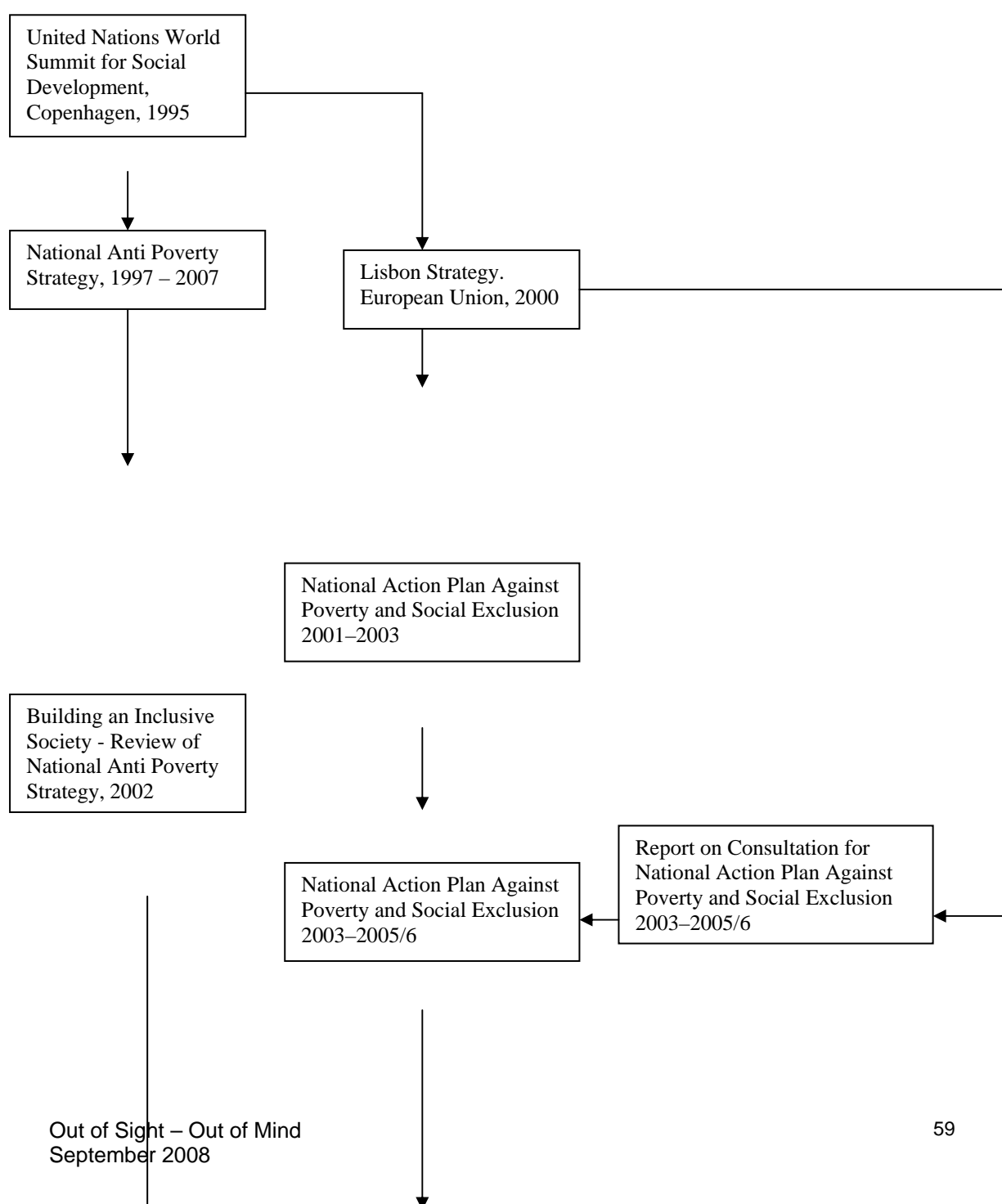
⁶⁸ Government of Ireland (1997) *Sharing in Progress National Anti Poverty Strategy*, p. 9.

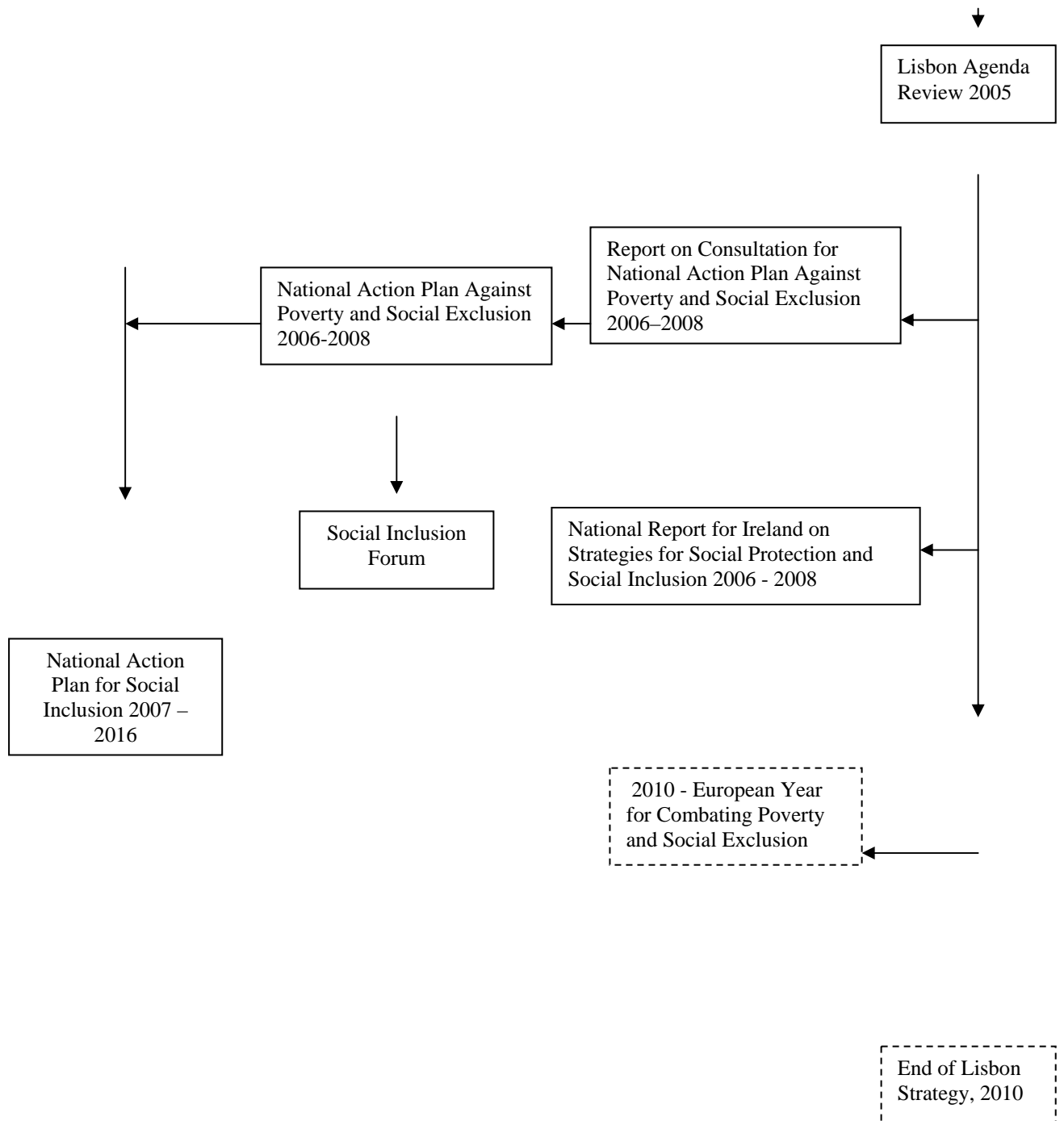
⁶⁹ Government of Ireland (1997) p. 2.

4.3.4 A Highly Complex Process

Chart 4 illustrates an interpretation of the social inclusion process in Ireland based on proceedings, both Irish and international, since 1995. It contains the main landmarks in anti-poverty-social inclusion policies and strategies.

Chart 4: Interpretation of the Social Inclusion Process in Ireland based on Irish, International and European developments from 1995 – 2010





Source: Compiled by Ralaheen Ltd, May 2008.

At first glance Chart 4 looks similar to a maze due to the complexity of the social inclusion process. For those experiencing poverty, it does not provide easy access points to influence the decisions being made. Any substantial shift in policy depends on power levels being redistributed from the dominant to marginalised population.

4.3.5 The Lisbon Strategy

The Lisbon Strategy of 2000, in the top centre of the chart, was to become the starting point for a number of key developments in Irish social inclusion policy, but it carried within it a 'job' oriented analysis of poverty solutions.⁷⁰ It committed European Member States to produce two-year national action plans against poverty and social exclusion. The Irish government produced its first of these in 2001, entitled the *National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, 2001–2003*.

Following commitments made in the social partnership agreement, *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness*, a review of the National Anti Poverty Strategy was initiated, resulting in the publication of *Building an Inclusive Society* (2002). The *National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Exclusion, 2001–2003* was revised in 2003. There was a number of consultation seminars and, to complement the findings, written submissions were received from stakeholders and individuals were used to inform the subsequent National Action Plan.

A 2005 review of the Lisbon Agenda expanded its themes to include social protection measures, and recommended that each Member State produce a report to the European Commission on its strategies for social protection and social inclusion. Commitments to the European Year of Eradicating Poverty and Social Exclusion were also re-emphasised. Subsequently, the Irish government submitted its *National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion* (NSSPSI), for the years 2006–2008.

4.3.6 Consultation Processes

To review the third National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion (NAPinclusion) 2006–2008, a consultation process was devised involving:

⁷⁰ Commission of the European Communities (2002) *Communication to the European Spring Council. Working together for growth and jobs. A new start for the Lisbon Strategy*. Brussels, 2.2.2005, COM (2005) 24 Final, p. 3.

- seminars and the gathering of submissions
- a number of regional and national seminars were held across the country
- submissions from various public bodies, voluntary and community organizations, as well as individuals.

This consultation coincided with the revision of the National Anti Poverty Strategy (1997–2007). Consequently, the Office for Social Inclusion decided to use this one consultation process to inform both the NAPinclusion and the new 10-year Social Inclusion plan. However, advertisements for the consultation referred only to the NAPinclusion (2006–2008) and not the new ten-year plan.

In total, 500 people attended the seminars and 81 submissions were received. These significantly lower numbers, compared to the consultation process of the National Anti Poverty Strategy, suggests that the overall consultation process of the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion (2007–2016) could not have been as informative or inclusive as the previous 10-year plan.

It is the view of this research that those who are experiencing poverty or hard-to-reach groups are most likely not to be included in the overall report. Although this was not intended by the Strategy, it was an unintended outcome of a complicated process, which was complex even for those who are aware of and follow closely social developments such as voluntary bodies, social analysts and social partners.

In addition, the report on the consultation process of the third national action plan formed the basis for the third Social Inclusion Forum, which took place on 15 February 2006, incorporating key themes mentioned in the consultation process.

4.3.7 Social Inclusion Forum

Opportunities to engage in preparing social inclusion initiatives exist within the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF), which is primarily aimed at consulting with people active in the field of poverty, including those working with and directly affected by poverty and social exclusion. The Forum is part of a wider participation and consultation process aimed at providing an opportunity for people at local level to listen to information on poverty and social exclusion, as well as providing suggestions at public meetings.

The Office for Social Inclusion state that consultation with people experiencing poverty and those who work with or support them is vital for the improvement of quality of life.⁷¹ This type of consultation, however, needs to take place on a local and national level to ensure greater participation. The first Social Inclusion Forum meeting was attended by over 300 people from a wide range of backgrounds, meeting one of its core aims, which was to provide an opportunity for people outside of the social partnership process to share their views on the progress of NAPS, and suggest possible recommendations.⁷²

To prepare for the Social Inclusion Forum in recent years, the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) and the Combat Poverty Agency have organized a number of regional capacity building exercises with smaller groups in an effort to get to the root of their experiences of poverty and facilitate Forums in the future. This initiative is critical in ensuring that hard-to-reach groups are included in consultation.

4.3.8 NAPinclusion and Peer Review

A further process of consultation related to the NAPinclusion is the system of Peer Reviews, organized in the form of seminars. The aim of these seminars is to assist with the implementation of effective social inclusion and protection

⁷¹ Office for Social Inclusion (2007) *Social Inclusion Report: Ireland 2007 – 2007*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.

⁷² Daly, M. (2003) *NAP/INCL 2003: First Background Report on Ireland*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.

policies through assessing the effectiveness of policies and institutes across Member States.

The NAPinclusion Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) held the Irish Peer Review on the 15 and 16 November 2007. Peer countries included at the Irish event were Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Spain and Britain. It focused on the possibility of establishing a NAPinclusion Social Inclusion Forum in other EU member states. Overall, the SIF in Ireland received a positive review from all member states, with specific reference to the 'political engagement' with social inclusion, and the 'quality of the dialogue' during its proceedings.⁷³

Following the review of the SIF for the Irish Peer Review, ATD Fourth World was of the opinion that the use of the SIF had brought decision-making closer to the realities of people's lives.⁷⁴ However, there was concern expressed that decisions being made on how to eradicate poverty would not have an input from those most directly affected, as they may have education difficulties and no experience of SIF. Despite the capacity building meetings that took place as part of the SIF, ATD Fourth World concluded that more effort was needed for the inclusion of those directly affected by poverty.⁷⁵

4.3.9 Open Method of Co-ordination

Peer Reviews are a key element of the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) as they focus on best practice models of combating poverty and social exclusion. The Open Method of Co-ordination is a form of governance used by the European Union member states to share policies that are not enforced through legislation but that offer best practice solutions to achieving social inclusion. This approach to combating social exclusion was formulated during

⁷³ Swinnen, H. (2007) *Peer Review: The NAP/Inclusion Social Inclusion Forum Dublin 15 – 16 November 2007. Synthesis Report*. Not available in hardcopy form.

⁷⁴ Swinnen, H. (2007) *Peer Review: The NAP/Inclusion Social Inclusion Forum Dublin 15 – 16 November 2007. Synthesis Report*.

⁷⁵ Swinnen, H. (2007) *Peer Review: The NAP/Inclusion Social Inclusion Forum Dublin 15 – 16 November 2007. Synthesis Report*.

the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union in 2000. Social inclusion is the main policy area in which this form of governance is applied.

The overarching role of the OMC is to provide policy for social protection and social inclusion. Since the adoption of the Lisbon Agenda, there is an increased emphasis on the goal of promoting employment and growth in the economy. The aim of the Lisbon Agenda is the eradication of poverty by 2010, as well as making the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economies in the world. This outline assumes that the position of the marginalised will be improved through increased access to the labour market.

4.3.10 Conclusion

While engaging all of the social partners remains a key element in tackling poverty and social exclusion, Irish government spending on social protections is below the EU average. There has been little opportunity afforded to those experiencing poverty to input directly into the policy process. The European Anti Poverty Network, amongst others, has expressed concern about the lack of participation from those who most directly experience poverty.

The social partnership process is not a sufficient mechanism in which to engage hard-to-reach groups. It is a process that is balanced in favour of those who already wield a significant level of power in Irish society. There are substantial sections of Irish society that have no engagement in social partnership but who must be allowed entry into the public policy process.

There were many positive aspects, including the large volume of submissions received for the first NAPS as well as the substantial amount of people that attended the consultations. However, a number of weaknesses have been identified. They include:

- As no specific initiatives were undertaken to directly include those directly experiencing poverty it is difficult to assess their level of engagement in the process.
- The implications of using a consultation process, initially intended for a two-year action plan, to inform a 10-year social inclusion strategy, remain unclear.
- The stark differences in the numbers of those who participated in the seminars (1,000 as compared with 500), as well as the number of submissions received (81 as compared with 300) demonstrates that much lower numbers involved themselves in the consultation process for the NAPinclusion (2007–2016).
- While on paper hard-to-reach groups and those directly experiencing poverty may have been informed of consultation processes, there were no specific initiatives taken, in the earlier processes, to directly engage or provide opportunities and supports to hard-to-reach groups.

Many of those who experience poverty may not be aware that meetings are taking place or may perceive them to be of little relevance to their lives. While advertising these meetings may tick the box of providing information and opportunities for consultation, it is tokenism as described by Arnstein. According to the ladder of participation it is a considerable distance from citizen control.

What is required is a much more comprehensive engagement, one that considers the barriers to participation and devises comprehensive measures to involve hard-to-reach groups.

Those agencies and bodies working in the poverty field might be said to be one step further on the ladder, involved as they are in a partnership process. Within the Shand-Arnberg and Bishop-Davis participation continuum they are involved in advisory committees and policy communities. This provides a level of involvement in both consultation and implementation.

So, while minimum participation issues have been addressed, partnership involves only those working within the poverty field, not those experiencing poverty, and overall, maximum participation has not been achieved.

It is not sufficient merely to provide information and presume that consultation will take place. Recognising this shortfall, the Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) is a step in the right direction, offering opportunities for people directly experiencing poverty to engage in processes aimed at eliminating poverty.

Equally important is the use of a peer review mechanism, which offers the example of international good practice. While the European Anti Poverty Network and Combat Poverty Agency's capacity building initiatives are an important step in providing the competencies to people experiencing poverty to engage in the policy process, much work remains to be done.

An important component in any new approach involves the shifting of mindsets. The involvement of those experiencing poverty should not be an afterthought but a pre-requisite of social inclusion programmes, both at consultation and implementation levels.

4.4 The National Drugs Strategy

4.4.1 Introduction

This section of the report will consider the process of developing a national drug strategy, the extent to which those directly affected had been involved, and, crucially, how failure by the State to implement agreed strategies undermined the participative approach.

Drug misuse is an issue that affects individual users, their families, and the wider community. From the early 1980s heroin abuse became a major problem, primarily affecting Dublin working-class communities. The state response was completely inadequate. When working-class communities began to organize an effective response to both supply and treatment issues, they did so on their own initiative and relied on their own resources. Their demand, however, was for a comprehensive, multi-agency response that would be adequately resourced and involve a partnership approach between state agencies and those most directly affected by drug misuse.

4.4.2 Community Response to Drugs Crisis

In the early 1990s the drugs problem in Dublin reached crisis point, characterised as it was by:

*'large numbers of drugs related deaths (especially amongst young people), by open and visible drug dealing, by the absence of treatment and rehabilitation services for drug users and by entire communities being ravaged and destroyed by the drugs problem.'*⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Citywide – *Drugs Crisis Campaign: The Story so Far*.

In the absence of a state response to this growing crisis, communities organized themselves, with local people becoming directly involved in tackling the problem. Through the organization of mass meetings, demonstrations, and pickets on the homes of drug dealers, the media and politicians began to take notice. In 1995, Citywide was established, to co-ordinate the activities of various local community organizations that had emerged across the capital.

In response, a Ministerial Taskforce on Measures to Reduce the Demand for Drugs was established in 1996, to deliver an '*integrated range of services covering the areas of treatment, rehabilitation and education/prevention.*'⁷⁷ In this case study, the position of groups representing drug users, their families and neighbourhoods is explored.

4.4.3 Local Drugs Task Forces Established

The successful campaigning of local communities resulted in the first report of this ministerial taskforce, recommending the establishment of Local Drugs Task Forces (LDTF), in areas with the highest level of opiate misuse. Consequently, 12 LDTFs were established in the greater Dublin area, one in Cork, and, following a review, a further one was established in Bray.

The role of the LDTF is to co-ordinate the delivery of drugs projects in the designated areas with a focus on treatment, rehabilitation, education, prevention, and curbing local supply. This was a significant step, recognising as it did, the central role of local communities had to play in tackling the issue. Reflecting the growing importance accorded to the drugs problem, it became a feature of the social partnership process, and the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000) called for a review and evaluation of the overall operation of the then National Drugs Strategy.

⁷⁷ *National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 Building on Experience*, p. 46.

4.4.4 The Consultation Process of the National Drugs Strategy, 2001–2008

The development of the National Drugs Strategy (2001–2008) followed what was described as ‘*an extensive public consultation process*’.⁷⁸ An Inter-Departmental Group, with representatives from key government departments, was responsible for conducting this process. It was assisted in its work by the National Drugs Strategy team along with a group of independent consultants. The consultation included:

- Advertisements in national newspapers inviting submissions and state agencies were written to separately. A total of 189 written submissions were received.
- Public forums advertised prominently in the national newspapers for a total of eight regional meetings, which were held in Cork, Kilkenny, Galway, Limerick, Dublin (where two meetings were held), Athlone and Sligo.
- Some 600 people attended these forums, involving a broad spectrum of groups and individuals.
- 134 different groups, representing government departments, agencies, and service providers, were invited to make a presentation to the Review group.
- A debate was held in the Seanad, and the Minister of State visited Sweden, Australia and Switzerland to look at treatment and rehabilitation facilities in those countries.

This was undoubtedly a successful mobilisation of participation across different forms of consultation. The high-level engagement of government departments and agencies perhaps indicated the seriousness attached by the State to the problem. The preparation and roll-out of the consultation reflected the necessity of a co-ordinated approach to tackling the drug problem. In fact, a common theme that emerged from the consultation was the necessity for

⁷⁸ *National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 Building on Experience* p. 82.

greater co-ordination within and between agencies, alongside the important role the community could play in delivering the strategy.

The community sector was represented on the review team (as part of the National Drugs Strategy Team); it submitted a large number of the written proposals, was well represented at the public fora and made oral presentations to the review team. However, it is unclear what steps were taken to include and involve drugs users themselves and their families.

4.4.5 Content of National Drugs Strategy

The National Drugs Strategy *Building on Experience* was launched in 2001. With a seven-year timeframe it was built upon four pillars. These were:

- supply reduction
- prevention
- treatment
- research.

This was based on a partnership approach, in which the communities affected, statutory agencies, and the government worked together to tackle the issue of drug supply, alongside the planning and co-ordination of treatment, rehabilitation, and prevention strategies. Specific targets were set for each pillar of the strategy. It drew up terms of reference for the National Drugs Strategy Team (NDST).

However, the allocation of just two representatives from the community and voluntary sector to the NDST proved contentious, with Citywide arguing that this sector's representation should be increased to four.⁷⁹ The Regional Taskforces were given responsibility for developing a regional and integrated response to tackling the drugs problem. Of the 14 members of the RDTFs,

⁷⁹ Citywide (2006) 'Meeting with LDTF and RDTF Community Representatives' in *Background to the Crisis in the National Drugs Strategy*.

there was just one place allocated to the community sector. At local level the National Drugs Strategy endorsed the work of the Local Drugs Task Forces and recognised the role users could play in advancing this strategy. It recommended that user groups be enabled to *'play a role in the generation of a greater societal understanding of drug mis-users and drug misuse issues.'*⁸⁰

Drug Users and Their Families

The RDTF recommendation made no provision for those most directly affected by the crisis, drug users themselves and their families. The Citywide network was critical of the failure to recognise the central role of drug users, their families, and communities in tackling the drugs crisis, arguing that, *'supporting and resourcing the involvement of drug users, families and communities must be seen as a core element of a National Drugs Strategy and not as an optional extra.'*⁸¹

A mid-term progress review of the strategy was conducted in 2004. A consultation process was conducted comprising written submissions, regional public forums, and oral hearings. A positive addition to this consultation was the five separate consultations held with young people, ranging in ages from 12 to 20, in communities affected by the drugs problem.

Despite earlier recommendations that drug users and their families should play a central role in the development of strategies to deal with the drugs issue, there appears to have been no direct or specific attempt to engage them in the review process. The neglect of parents and families of drug users was raised, both in terms of their needs and their potential to act as a support and resource. Furthermore, there was a perception that the drugs problem had slipped down the list of government priorities.

⁸⁰ National Drugs Strategy 2001-2008 p.123

⁸¹ Citywide Policy Document 2002

4.4.6 Union for Improved Services, Communications and Education (UISCE)

Looking at participative models which might be attractive to drug users, the research identified the group UISCE. The Union for Improved Services, Communications and Education (UISCE) is a drug users' forum comprised of drug users, ex-users, and professionals, whose aim is to ensure that those in need of services are represented at the policy-making process. It originated through an initiative of the North Inner City Local Drugs Task Force, to represent the issues of people using drugs or accessing drug use services in the North Inner City.

A part of this area is adjacent to Dublin Port. Through its magazine BRASS MUNKIE founded by the late Tommy Larkin,⁸² it gave a voice to local drug users and offered practical information on a range of services, including harm reduction and needle exchange, as well as evaluations of methadone clinics.

In order to articulate the views of drug users directly at local drugs task force meetings, UISCE conducted a survey asking questions on issues such as homelessness and prejudice, prison conditions and treatment programmes. The process of compiling this report highlighted the fact, that for the vast majority of drug users this was the **first time** they had been asked their opinion on issues of concern to their lives. As the report indicates '*many of the issues related to how powerless people felt about decisions taken in relation to their drug treatment.*'⁸³

An equally important aspect of the research conducted was the fact that drug users themselves were directly involved in both the design of the questionnaires for the survey and the facilitation of focus groups.

⁸² Tommy Larkin 1951-2004.

⁸³ Union for Improved Services Communication and Education (2003) *Methadone: What's the Story?* p. 9. Dublin: UISCE

UISCE strongly advocates the need to have drug users represented at Local Drugs Task Forces.⁸⁴ While acknowledging that major advances had been achieved in the provision of drug services, a report commissioned by the organization stated '*there is still room for the voice of drug users to be heard within the Irish health system.*'⁸⁵ This report gave a voice to drug users and outlined their experience with issues such as the lack of confidentiality, feelings of not being cared about and a sense of exclusion. The example of UISCE reveals that users have very specific and identifiable views at odds with what the public perceives and some services provide.

4.4.7 Crisis in the National Drugs Strategy, 2005

While consultation is an important part of an overall process, equally important is the implementation of agreed plans and strategies. Consistent concerns were raised by the community sector in relation to government commitments in implementing the National Drugs Strategy. During a Dáil debate on the issue in December 2005, Pat Rabbitte, TD⁸⁶, expressed concern at the sidelining of the community sector. He argued that when the State, for thirty years, had allowed 'professionals' to take charge of the drugs problem, it took hold in communities. He argued that:

*'only when we stopped the exclusion of the community sector did we begin to get a grip on matters and replace conflict with co-operation between the statutory agencies and the community sector.'*⁸⁷

The lack of government funding for local and regional taskforce initiatives and the perceived withdrawal of the government from a serious engagement with the drugs problem led to the resignation of the community representative from

⁸⁴ Bennett, J (2007) *Conference Report 'Developing Drug and Service User Forums' Local Drugs Task Force Service User Conference November 2006.*

⁸⁵ O'Reilly, F, Reaper, E and Redmond T (2005) *We're People Too: Views of drug users on health services.* Dublin: UISCE.

⁸⁶ Pat Rabbitte, TD was the Minister for State with Responsibility for Drugs, who in 1996 initiated the establishment of Local Drugs Task Forces.

⁸⁷ *Tithe an Oireachtas* (2005) Dáil Adjournment Debate National Drugs Strategy. 15th December 2005. Vol. 612 (4).

the national drugs strategy team. While the government was content to support representation, it failed to implement agreed strategies and took the involvement and support of the community for granted.

4.4.8 Conclusion

Working-class communities in the State have not often organized to the extent of forcing themselves into a national policy-making process. The development of the National Drugs Strategy 2001–2008 was driven by the response of working-class communities in Dublin to a growing drugs crisis. A determined community, acting on its own initiative in dealing with a major social problem, could not be dismissed. Mass meetings, demonstrations, marches on the homes of drug dealers, and the forcing of some drug dealers from their homes brought an issue previously neglected to the very heart of political debate.

However, while communities had much greater awareness and experience of the issue, they lacked the resources to adequately respond to a problem that required a multi-agency approach.

What supported this group, who are not hard to reach, in having their voice heard was their own activism and commitment to tackling an issue that was destroying their communities. Their engagement has covered almost the entire spectrum of Arnstein's participative continuum. It ranged from the early days of being entirely voiceless right through to a partnership approach, wherein they exercise a degree of power in relation to the implementation of a national strategy.

While there have been undoubted positives in this process, significant challenges remain, particularly in relation to the involvement of drug users and their families. They have been absent from the process despite being the core subject of the National Drugs Strategy. Organizations such as UISCE have sought to equip drug users and their families with the tools or resources in which to engage in public policy formation. Government renegeing on

commitments, particularly in relation to the funding of the strategy, has undermined the overall partnership approach.

It must be recognised that NGO governance and representation is unlike other forms of governance. Agencies engaging with this sector must have an ability to communicate with articulate and committed activists, and to understand the role of family as advocates. Furthermore, there must be an awareness of the positioning of some groups on the edge of the social partnership process, and recognition that they have an equal right to be heard. Equally important are a technical knowledge of the drugs problem and an appreciation of the need to identify not just prosecutorial approaches but also preventive, treatment and educational approaches.

Notwithstanding the advances that have been made over the last decade, a significant community drugs problem remains, and one that has grown in complexity. Heroin use is now a major issue outside of Dublin, and poly-drug use is more prevalent. Significant levels of violence between drug gangs and inflicted upon those in debt to drug dealers, along with the intimidation of communities, highlight the degree to which drug misuse continues to adversely affect working-class communities. While they are not hard to reach, they have battled hard to have their voices heard.

4.5 Voices for Change – Participation in Action

4.5.1 Introduction

This section will discuss a model of successful public consultation in Britain. The initiative was successfully pioneered through placing those experiencing and working with those in poverty at the heart of its participation process.

The Voices for Change initiative was developed as a result of a Campaign Against Poverty (UKCAP) initiative to include the views and experiences of those previously excluded from policy debates, particularly those experiencing poverty. The significance of the initiative was that it responded to the apparent exclusion of people living in poverty from decision-making fora that affected their lives. It involved people experiencing poverty and aimed to recommend ways to tackle barriers to participation, which would in turn lead to a healthier democracy.

Established by a voluntary alliance and supported by social foundations, it involved people at the core of the hard to reach dilemma, who were put in the driving seat of the initiative. It attracted a number of experts usually associated with public policy formation such as citizenship expert Prof. Ruth Lister and organizations like Oxfam as well as the influential Church Action on Poverty. Representing people living in poverty were community activists from Bristol and Easterhouse estate in Glasgow.

4.5.2 Background Context

In late 1996, a UKCAP initiative brought together 30 people living in poverty to share their experiences and provide a forum to influence anti-poverty organizations. It was on the recommendation of this forum that Voices for Change came into being with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The aims of the project were:

- To find out how communities experiencing poverty and exclusion are involved in decisions which affect their lives
- To use a variety of participatory techniques to encourage the involvement of communities in the process
- To encourage communities to enter into dialogue with decision makers to ensure greater participation in decision making
- To set up a Commission comprising people from local communities and public life The Commission itself was made up of 12 persons, of whom, half were people from local communities living in poverty.⁸⁸

4.5.3 Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power

A 12-member Commission was established to examine why people experiencing poverty did not influence policy or decision-making. It comprised a 50/50 membership comprising six people with direct experience of poverty or 'grassroots' activists and six involved in 'public life'. The Commission found powerlessness at the root of poverty and discovered a '*stark division between the government, the policy and decision makers and the people they claim to represent.*'⁸⁹ Given previous experiences of interfacing with power holders, many were left cynical about the entire concept of 'social inclusion'. Furthermore, the Commission was '*overwhelmed by the extent of scepticism, mistrust and eventual disillusionment reported by people experiencing poverty who feel their voices are being ignored.*' Too often those in poverty have been:

*'treated as specimens to be examined and displayed, not as human beings with rights and capacities to participate in public debate.'*⁹⁰

⁸⁸ University of Bristol (2000) *Listen Hear The Right to be Heard Report of the Commission on Poverty Participation and Power*. Bristol: Policy Press and the UK Coalition against Poverty

⁸⁹ University of Bristol (2000) p. 10.

⁹⁰ Lister R (2004) 'A politics of recognition and respect: Involving people with experience of poverty in decision-making that affects their lives' in J. Andersen and B. Sims (eds) *The politics of inclusion and empowerment*. New York: Palgrave.

Indeed the Commission found that those experiencing poverty are treated with a lack of respect, believe their views don't matter and that their lives were unimportant to those in power, or worse they were viewed as '*lazy or shiftless, or scroungers who won't get a job.*'⁹¹

This experience of powerlessness is pervasive. With few choices and little respect from those with power, many have resigned themselves to facing a future in poverty having no faith in the system's ability or willingness to respond to their needs. This phenomenon has been recognised by Lister (2004) in the '*non recognition, misrecognition and disrespect [as] the typical experience of those in poverty especially when labelled pejoratively as an 'underclass' or as inhabiting a 'dependency culture.*'⁹² As one participant to the process outlined:

'People with little or no power are made to believe that there is no point in raising their voices, as it will make no difference. That they will not be listened to by those who have power and control. This habit becomes so strong that some people almost forget that they have opinions of their own, and so they just endure the hardships they suffer...'

Cathy McCormack, at the People's Parliament, Voices for Change, Scotland Conference.

4.5.4 Experience of Participation

The Commission found that genuine participation by those experiencing poverty had many advantages, resulting in a much improved quality of decision-making, and that empowering individuals and communities promoted a healthier form of democracy.

⁹¹ Comments from participant.

⁹² Lister R (2004) 'A politics of recognition and respect: Involving people with experience of poverty in decision-making that affects their lives' in J Andersen and B Sims (eds) *The politics of inclusion and empowerment*. New York: Palgrave.

However, there is a cynicism about consultation, bred of experience of countless shallow initiatives that ‘listened but did not hear’, and whose findings were for the most part pre-determined. As the Commission pointed out ‘*participation in a meaningless forum is meaningless.*’⁹³ According to former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, ‘*participation and active involvement in the determination of one’s own destiny is the essence of human dignity.*’⁹⁴ This of course presents challenges to those who have traditionally wielded power, determining as it does a potential shift in the balance of power.

A genuine shift in power requires new ways of doing things and a genuinely participative process. As Cook has argued ‘*it is essential to conceive of consultation as a process and not a one-off event and so acknowledge that it needs to be negotiated, sustainable and strategically managed.*’⁹⁵

4.5.5 Barriers to Participation

Many community representatives expressed frustration at the lack of real intent to share information, let alone power, and at the fact that those people encouraging ‘participation’ had complete control over the process and were reluctant or unwilling to relinquish it.

Those living in poverty were critical of the homogenisation of poverty, with communities and groups thrust together despite having many and varied needs and experiences. Thus, for example, those living in rural areas had to contend with a lack of access to public transport, while asylum-seekers with no entitlements and vouchers in place of money were concerned about basic survival.

⁹³ University of Bristol (2000) *Listen Hear The Right to be Heard Report of the Commission on Poverty Participation and Power*. Bristol: Policy Press and the UK Coalition against Poverty.

⁹⁴ Robinson, M (2002) ‘Foreword’ in *Participation and the Practice of Rights Insider/Outsider – Changing Relationships*. Committee on Administration of Justice. pp. v-xiii, Belfast.

⁹⁵ Cook, D. (2002) ‘Consultation for a Change? Engaging Users and Communities in the Policy Process’, pp. 516-531 in *Social Policy and Administration*, Vol. 36 (5) Oct 2002, p. 525.

As the Commission discovered, if communities are treated as a homogenous group, only the strongest voices will be heard.

Moreover, whilst the political system and political representatives pay lip service to the concept of participation, it rarely goes beyond a rhetorical flourish. Of greater concern is their desire to protect their own position.

The experience of the Commission was that many local political representatives displayed a level of disrespect to the process of participation, regularly turning up to meetings late, registering their presence with a few words of support before quickly rushing off. A number of groups also complained that money earmarked for community groups did not reach them either as a consequence of bureaucracy, or being allocated to larger voluntary sector groups who are not necessarily in touch with grassroots concerns.

4.5.6 Making it Happen

If real and meaningful participation is to take place, the Commission recognised that it must be inclusive and reach out to those experiencing poverty. It set out a number of principles in relation to a participative process, among which were:

- Participation in the decision-making process of people with experience of living in poverty must be recognised as a basic human right
- All engaged in the process must be prepared to change in order that participation is genuine and effective
- Participation should be a strategy, not a device, and should take place throughout the process – not just at the beginning, but also in implementation and in evaluating the impact of policies and practices

- Those who hold power must learn to listen properly to the voices of people living in poverty, to understand, to communicate in ways that everyone can understand, to respect people's contributions, and to act on their voices
- Unpaid voluntary and community work must be recognised and valued.

In compiling their report, the Commission conducted an extensive engagement with those experiencing poverty across Britain and the north of Ireland. Interestingly the Voices for Change participants in Scotland⁹⁶ voiced their scepticism of the British government's focus on work as a route out of poverty and wanted a shift to focus on improving people's quality of life. Their contention was that if the Government promotes work as the best way out of poverty and social exclusion, then employment options should reflect the right to a quality of life and level of happiness equal to that of the rest of society.

Furthermore, they did not want to be forced into employment or written off as unimportant for not contributing to the economic 'machine', and they wished to see recognition for unpaid or voluntary work.

4.5.7 Participatory Approaches

The Commission recommended that the real experts on poverty should be included in programme design. People living in poverty should be asked to contribute to many policies and not just those on poverty. School children should get participatory experience at school.

If there was a sense of ownership over the process, policy effectiveness is improved. However, there are limitations:

⁹⁶ Burnett, L. (2006) *Dignity Should not have to be earned! Get Heard Scotland*. Glasgow: Poverty Alliance.

*'Participatory forms of research and inquiry are unlikely in and of themselves to achieve social change, or to remove major conflicts of interest or inequalities. But they can be used by existing organizations to strengthen their own voice, understanding and influence. And they can be part of the groundwork to help create partnerships and relationships for bringing about changes in policy and practice.'*⁹⁷

An evaluation of the Commission's work was conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Trust. It found some degree of difficulties in the conduct of its work particularly in the early stages. These difficulties were based primarily on differing expectations and experiences of the membership and a lack of adequate funding for the project. However, by its close those who had participated on the Commission believed it to have been a genuine participatory process. As one of the Commissioners noted *'the experiential nature of the process distinguishes this from other commissions – it was empowering.'*⁹⁸ Writing of her personal experience on the Commission Ruth Lister observed that:

*'the message that came across loud and clear from our consultations was that people in poverty are neither listened to nor respected. Phoney participation, we were told, is experienced as the ultimate disrespect. No one promised that participation would be easy, as we learned on the commission. But the prizes are worth it: stronger democracy and citizenship, together with better-informed policy-making.'*⁹⁹

The Commission recommended that the British government and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and the north of Ireland, establish a Task Force comprising people with direct experience of poverty and people with experience of participatory processes, to draw up recommendations on ways

⁹⁷ Burnett, L. (2006), p. 57.

⁹⁸ del Tufo, S. and Gaster, L. (2002) *Evaluation of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power*. York: Joseph Rowntree Trust, p. 78.

⁹⁹ Lister, R. (2004) 'Participation should be a reality, not just a buzzword'. in *The Guardian* Dec 7 2000.

of ensuring that people experiencing poverty can participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.¹⁰⁰ Further recommendations included:

- establishment of a framework to ensure that people living in poverty and their organizations were fully involved in the design and implementation of anti-poverty programmes and strategies
- developing ways to monitor and assess the impact of anti-poverty programmes and strategies at local, regional and national level
- 'poverty proofing' policies in a way which involves people experiencing poverty themselves.

Ultimately, the Commission believed that if people experiencing poverty were fully involved in decision-making and policy processes; it would succeed in creating a new form of knowledge and a different kind of democracy.

4.5.8 Conclusion

The experience of the Commissioners and the evaluators of the Commission is that participatory working on poverty is not easy; it can be stressful and difficult. It requires openness, commitment, time and readiness to adopt a new way of working.

If governments are genuine in their commitment to tackling the root cause of poverty, there must be a consequent recognition of both the power imbalance within society, and the reality that at the root of poverty is powerlessness.

Opening up agendas and working parties to people living in poverty changes the meaning of 'expert' and 'expert knowledge', dividing knowledge into two types: expert knowledge and expert knowledge acquired from living in

¹⁰⁰ del Tufo, S. and Gaster, L. (2002) *Evaluation of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power*. York: Joseph Rowntree Trust.

poverty. A shift in power balance is imperative for those experiencing poverty to have their voices heard in decisions affecting their lives.

The Commission recognised the importance of not treating groups experiencing poverty as homogenous. In order for participative processes to be effective, they must include those who are the real experts, people actually experiencing poverty. Participation itself should be viewed as a process that requires inclusion from start to finish. Communication is vital for participation; therefore the language used should be inclusive and should reach out to those at the heart of the process.

The Commission attributed the success of the Voices for Change Programme to the full and active involvement of people living in poverty and their organizations in the design and implementation of anti-poverty programmes and strategies. If people experiencing poverty are fully involved in decision-making and policy processes, a new form of knowledge and a different kind of democracy can be created. Publishing a similar 'street style' version of the Final Report to make it more easily accessible may prove an advantage in providing information to these groups.

Chapter 5 Closer to the Process: People with Disabilities in Co. Clare and Asylum- seekers Resident in Accommodation Centres

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presents two case studies of two very distinct hard-to-reach groups. Due to varying differences, significant barriers remain to their full participation in policy-making decisions that affect their lives. Although the study will focus on their efforts and the outcomes of participating in public consultation, it will also discuss the day-to-day barriers they face.

- The first group discussed are those with a disability located in rural areas of Co. Clare. This group are not hard to reach in a physical sense but are often shut off from access to local services, due to inadequate transport and communication services.

The barriers to participation, how these come into being, and how they are perpetuated are examined from a range of spatial and social perspectives. The disempowering effects of inadequate transport, inaccessible environments, lack of employment opportunities and of internet access are described. The point is made that a worldview that sees able-bodied people as the norm can create barriers to participation by those with disabilities. In addition, design and delivery of programmes fail to allow for the complexity of conditions in rural areas.

- The second group discussed are asylum-seekers in direct provision accommodation centre. The direct provision system and the dispersal of asylum-seekers set the context for discussion of participation in policy decisions by this hard-to-reach group.

The role of the Reception and Integration Agency and the direct provision system in meeting asylum-seekers basic needs but with little in their living circumstances is described.

The research examines how asylum-seekers are classified in communal establishments for census purposes and describes the current review of house rules for accommodation centres. Finally, the study finds that trust is an important factor in determining asylum-seekers' participation and notes asylum-seekers' preferences as to how they might progress to representative structures.

5.2 Rural and Isolated - Spatial Exclusion in Co. Clare

5.2.1 Introduction

This section discusses the situation of persons with disabilities as a hard-to-reach group. Although recognised at national policy level, and in spite of a range of legislative initiatives, this group remains significantly outside of mainstream society, and continues to experience considerable difficulty in participating meaningfully in decision-making at this level.

5.2.2 Context – People with Disabilities in Rural Areas

Almost 10,000 people in Co Clare described themselves as disabled in the last Census in 2006. However, these 10,000 are residing in 155 different locations across Co Clare in towns, villages and townlands. More than a third of people with disabilities in Co Clare (37%) are over the age of 65. Like many rural areas, the population of people with disabilities is dispersed across a large territory. This is illustrated in Chart 5.

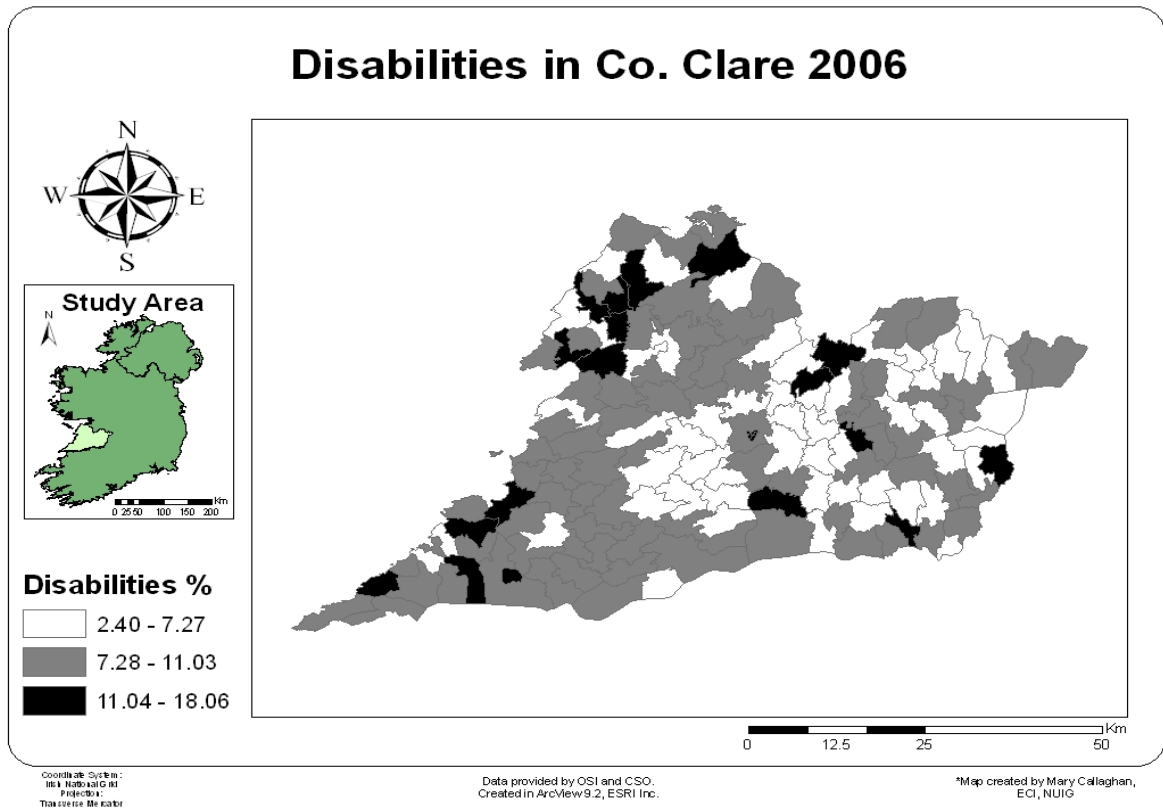


Chart 5: Map outlining the dispersion rate numbers of people with a disability residing in Co. Clare, in 2006.¹⁰¹

At the suggestion of the national organization People with Disabilities Ireland (PWDI), Co Clare was identified as a location to explore some dimensions of spatial exclusion that concern and affect people with disabilities in rural areas who want to participate in decision-making.¹⁰² PWDI is a national voluntary body organized on a county basis with a headquarters in Dublin and a growing network of local offices. People of all ages and backgrounds join PWDI, which crosses over the various specific disability bodies and associations.

¹⁰¹ The map is based on the small area populations districts used on the Central Statistics Office website.

¹⁰² See the extensive research of Professor Rob Imrie on the interrelationship between environment and disability, building regulation and control, and the geographies of disability.

The following section is based on discussion between Dr Marie Mahon of the National University of Ireland, Galway, and Mr. Dermot Hayes of PWDI. It explores some of the challenges faced to involving people with disabilities in decision-making on policies that affect their own lives and identifies how people with disabilities are not, either by choice or by implication, participating in decision-making.

5.2.3 Disability and the Reality of being Hard to Reach

The range of situations and processes by which people with disabilities have become hard to reach are complex and operate at a number of different levels. However, most of these are ultimately linked to issues of power and authority, which translate into feelings of powerlessness, apathy, loss of confidence, and possibly even fear about trying to participate in decision-making or to effect meaningful policy change.

Drawing on classifications of oppression, a range of processes, rooted in various power relations, operate particularly against disabled persons.^{103 104}

- First, power relations between able-bodied and disabled persons are maintained through political means. They are rendered 'powerless' through being denied access to important decision-making positions within society.
- Second, power relationships are maintained through social means. People with disabilities are denied access to private and public transport and excluded from 'mainstream' social activities. This is reinforced through poor service provision and weak or poorly enforced legislation.
- Third, power relationships are maintained through material means, through exploitation within the labour market, and through

¹⁰³ Young, I.M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰⁴ Kitchin, R. (1998) Space, Power and Exclusion of Disabled People. *Disability and Society*, 13:3, 343-356.

discriminatory practices which include social attitudes but also poor physical access. A number of these issues are being named in the Disability Sectoral Plans and Disability Strategy.

- Fourth, power can be maintained through violent means, through repression, through the use of asylums and prisons, which also serves to keep them out of sight.
- Last, power relations are maintained through the use of ideology, through the cultural practices of the dominant group in society (i.e. the able-bodied), which are promoted as the norm.

People with disabilities thus come to accept the logic of their oppression and marginalisation. Imrie¹⁰⁵ refers to attempts over the past two decades by people with disabilities to overcome dominant values and practices of society in favour of able-bodied people. He describes these struggles as being fought on two fronts through challenging:

- the powerful and persistent nature of a paternalist welfare state and how people with disabilities are treated by the state, seen as 'dependent' and kept there through the levels of state support they receive and
- the socio-cultural perceptions of disability as somehow 'deviant'.

Both of these imply a situation that seeks to endorse and ensure that people with disabilities are out of our consciousness, that we do not seek them out, that we do not seek their views. In this regard, people with disabilities are not hard to reach in Clare – they are in every location – but they are invisible and often unheard.

5.2.4 Transport Problems Faced by People with Disabilities

In more remote, rural areas where many PWDI members are resident, and where accessible public transport is normally unavailable, individuals who do

¹⁰⁵ Professor Rob Imrie and his work on the interrelationship between environment and disability, building regulation and control, and the geographies of disability.

not own a car must either rely on a family member or neighbour, or possibly hire a taxi, to attend meetings. In this context calling a meeting is a very complex operation.

In the urban centre, a similar situation may also prevail. The minimum taxi fare in Ennis is now €6.50. For someone relying on state benefit, this may be unaffordable.

The PWDI pays a mileage rate for its committee members to attend other (non-PWDI) meetings, for example meetings on which the PWDI may be represented, such as Local Authority Access Audit committees, in acknowledgement of the costs involved. However, apparently this is not the case with all disability organizations. Those who do not have access to suitable transport or cannot afford to pay for it, are effectively rendered 'hard to reach'.

On the question of Internet or email usage, it was felt that this could provide a means of making and maintaining contacts. However, those on low incomes would not be in a position to pay for broadband.

PWDI meetings are arranged to enable persons with disabilities to discuss issues that affect their lives, and to draw up strategic approaches to addressing them. This might include lobbying at national and local government level, or other measures. At special policy committee meetings of the local authority, disability groups would be up against councillors and officials, and they had to be well prepared. Attendance at meetings due to inadequate transport is thus a major problem, which in turn means effective exclusion from a forum for participation.

It takes a huge amount of energy and determination to lobby and protest in a sustained way. Many persons who had been very active in this regard were now extremely disillusioned and cynical about the possibilities of effecting change. There was a sense of disillusionment and disempowerment on the part of many persons with disabilities.

5.2.5 Social Oppression

The inability of persons with disabilities to take part fully in society, due to lack of accessibility to the built environment and to adequate transport, also renders them hard to reach. Poor enforcement of legislation reinforces this.

The requirement for all local authorities to carry out accessibility audits within their administrative areas would in theory bring significant improvements in this regard. However, in reality, implementing such adaptations is overlooked in favour of cost reduction. An example was given of two local national schools in the county that were also used as polling booths for local and general elections. Both of these are inaccessible to a number of wheelchair users, who refuse to make use of a postal vote as they feel they should be in a position to use the public booth. However, they also wish to avoid an undignified fuss. The result is that they do not vote at all.

In this and similar cases, a hard to reach situation is being facilitated and enforced, although it is clearly not the choice of those being affected.

5.2.6 Economic Oppression

In Clare and elsewhere, persons with disabilities who cannot access employment or education are effectively excluded from power; and that economic power is what brings the ability to make choices. Lack of education and poverty were cited as the two key issues that faced the majority of persons with disabilities in their ability or willingness to participate in decision-making processes. It was felt that there was much rhetoric about employment of persons with disabilities, particularly on the part of state agencies, but the opportunities were not there in practice.

Persons with disabilities in vulnerable circumstances may find themselves accepting situations that are not appropriate to their needs or wishes. For example, those living alone and not in a position to avail of a personal

assistant may find themselves placed in an institutional setting against their wishes.

Such practices not only raise serious human rights issues, but the fact that they may take place at all implies that the question of individual choice receives very low priority consideration.

5.2.7 Ideological Oppression

People with disabilities lack confidence in their abilities to force those in authority to implement the rules and regulations that are in place to protect them. An example is a fast-food outlet in Ennis, in which the toilet facilities are inaccessible. Technically, the outlet in question is in breach of Health Service Executive regulations. However, affected patrons are unwilling to complain.

Other examples relate to individual issues raised at PWDI meetings. It was reported that even those who did attend meetings and who raised issues of concern, were often disinclined to pursue an application through the HSE or the local authority, as there was felt to be 'no point', because they would 'get nowhere'. It was remarked that the Equality Authority sees very few cases being brought by persons with disabilities, for the same reasons, as well as a lack of trust in the institutions that they will receive a fair hearing, or the prospect of a protracted dispute process. This erosion of confidence and trust, and a sense that the system has systematically failed them, has left people with disabilities strongly doubting the value of participation to effect change.

5.2.8 Disability Organizations – Perpetuating a Hard-to-Reach Situation?

Charities and rehabilitation agencies are often the dominant institutional forces in organizing the daily experiences of people with disabilities. This has had two main effects, both positive and negative.

The first relates to the 'apolitical' status of these organizations, which may be positive in terms of public perception and fundraising, but can be negative when trying to challenge and overturn the 'ableist' values and practices of the state and of society.

Ultimately, it must be possible to influence decision-making at the highest possible level, at government level, where national policies are formulated. At the same time, disability-oriented organizations themselves have often projected and cultivated less than positive images of disability as a state that is somehow 'tragic' and 'pitiful'. Reproducing an image of those with disabilities as people to be pitied or requiring charity was as damaging as it was inaccurate, and it undermined the notion of a rights-based approach to disability issues.

Whilst disability organizations may adopt an apolitical stance, this apparently does not imply that they work to support each other, and ultimately their members. There are 525 disability organizations currently operating in the state, some very profitably. However, when it comes to sharing resources, this does not always happen. Thus, in a remote rural area in which a number of organizations may have members, there can be a failure to pool a resource such as transport, which would effectively provide persons with disabilities with the means to attend meetings, build a more effective network, pool resources, and activate more strategically for changes.

The individual members appear to remain fragmented, unaware of one another's similar circumstances and experiences, possibly unaware of their rights, and thus frequently afraid to challenge those in authority.

Persons with disabilities were described as facing many difficulties in terms of becoming organized in this regard. Issues relating to their level of education, mobility, health and access to transport all influenced their ability to organize and protest effectively. Lack of power and co-ordination were key factors in unsuccessful efforts.

5.2.9 The Digital Divide

It cannot be presumed that people who are hard to reach can be accessed easily through web sites. This can be deduced from the data series of the Central Statistics Office on access to computers in the house and access to Internet, which indicates the existence of a strong digital divide.

The digital divide is the concept used to describe the social differences between groups in relation to electronic communications. Evidence from the most recent CSO studies of the use of computers and the Internet in Ireland reveal a strong and visible digital divide between those who are in the work force and those who are economically inactive.¹⁰⁶ Those who are economically inactive are less likely to have a computer in the house, if they do, they are less likely to have an Internet connection, and if they do have the Internet, it is less likely to be Broadband.

In 2007, the Commission for Communications Regulation undertook a study of the take-up of electronic communications by people with disabilities. The study found huge gaps in knowledge among people with disabilities about the already existing accommodations and adjustments that could be made to enhance their communication.¹⁰⁷

In 2007, only 20 per cent of households headed by an unemployed person had a computer permanently in the house, compared to 74 per cent of households headed by an employed person. Persons who are not economically active such as the sick, retired, disabled, and people doing unpaid care work in the home, were very much less likely to use the Internet than people at work in 2007. There was a difference of twenty-three percentage points here: 39.5 per cent compared with 62.6 per cent.

¹⁰⁶ CSO (2008) *Information Society and Telecommunications 2007*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

¹⁰⁷ COMREG and the NDA (2007) *Phones and Broadband – a Guide for People with Disabilities and Older People*.

Table 3 Access to computers and use of Internet by economic status, Ireland 2006 and 2007

	2006 Computer in household	2007 Computer in household	2006 Persons Have used Internet	2007 Persons Have used Internet
	%	%	%	%
In employment	68.2	74.6	55.7	62.6
Unemployed	16.9	20.5	45.8	59.0
Not economically active	45.1	53.9	34.6	39.5

Source: CSO (2008) Extracted from: *Information Society and Telecommunications 2007*, Stationary Office, Table 4.2 and Table 4.3.

An over-reliance or presumption that face-to-face contact can be dispensed with for hard-to-reach groups is likely to exclude the very population groups whose opinions are sought. An over-reliance on electronic communications can also indirectly discourage site visits and visits of observation to the housing estates and environments where hard-to-reach groups are to be found.

5.2.10 Barriers to Driving

Persons with a physical disability are, in practice, assessed far more stringently and frequently for their driving licence than able-bodied persons. Tests include those for both physical and cognitive impairment, and they must justify their application for a license to a much higher level. A person with a

cognitive impairment could hypothetically apply for and pass a 'conventional' driving test, without being assessed for necessary skills such as peripheral vision. Anyone who attends a centre for specialist training in a modified vehicle must undergo all of these tests. The driving test itself encompasses the particular suitability of the vehicle to the disabled person.

Two main financial instruments are available to persons with disabilities to assist them in procuring private transport. These are:

- Motorised Transport Grant
- Disabled Drivers' Tax Concession Scheme

5.2.11 Motorised Transport Grant

This is a means-tested support; available to those aged between 16-65 years. Individual applications are assessed by HSE Senior Area Medical Officers. This involves a medical assessment, and a requirement that the applicant is unable to access/avail public transport. On 27 March 2007, a change of wording in the eligibility criteria meant that the grant now only becomes available for persons already in employment, excluding those seeking employment. The upper age limit also precludes persons wishing to remain in some level of employment after retirement. It is reported that a number of HSE offices fail to notify applicants that they are entitled to an appeals process should their application be turned down.

5.2.12 Driving to Meetings – An Option?

Despite the existence the Motorised Transport Grant, Kenneth Fox, CEO of the Disabled Drivers' Association of Ireland, indicates that such a benefit is restrictive for people with disabilities with regard to their employment status, medical, means and age conditions. The scheme allows a maximum grant of €5,020.50 (2008) or up to 75% of the cost of a motorised vehicle to be paid to

the recipient. However, the criteria involved effectively ensure that the scheme is not readily accessible to all those who may wish to apply.

5.2.13 Disabled Drivers' Tax Concession Scheme

This is only available to an applicant who is unable to walk, for example, a wheelchair user. The Scheme is not available to persons with an amputated or non-functioning arm. The car must be modified in some way. It is a tax concession scheme so, like all tax relief schemes, it favours those who can spend more. In other words it favours the better off. To avail of it, you need a level of resources in the first instance. The scheme has scarcely been modified since it was initiated in 1968.

The maximum tax relief for a passenger is €15,875 but that for a driver is €9,525. The reason for this is that the scheme still assumes that vehicle modifications for a passenger are less than that for a driver, which is now not the case. Advances in assistive technology have meant that individuals with disabilities can be better equipped to drive themselves. However, the resale value of a car that is custom-modified for a driver is far less than one modified for a passenger. The scheme only gives back VAT and VRT on a vehicle, and takes no account of the severity of a person's disability, and the potential actual cost of vehicle modifications.

These maximum limits on the tax relief have not been adjusted since 1989. As a tax relief scheme it does not address mobility for people who have poor resources.

5.2.14 Implications

Despite the existence of such schemes, people with disabilities in rural or isolated areas experience a number of barriers regarding access to support for transport purposes. Although the lifecycle approach adopted in the

Developmental Welfare State (2005),¹⁰⁸ aims to ensure the protection of all groups of people of all ages, people with disabilities in rural or isolated areas, especially over the age of 65, are directly discriminated against in public policy.

It is the view of the Disabled Drivers' Association that this scheme needs to be modified to allow for all groups of people with disabilities, fitting under the hard-to-reach category, to gain assistance.

In Northern Ireland a more comprehensive scheme exists which provides all people with a disability or mental illness access to a state-insured and taxed motor vehicle should they wish to apply or to nominate a driver.¹⁰⁹ Although the recipient loses access to their mobility allowance, and can only travel up to a maximum level of miles within a given duration of time, the scheme is relatively successful. It does not discriminate in favour of applicants who are in employment or against those who are in other circumstances.

5.2.15 Conclusion

Reaching out to people with disabilities in rural areas poses considerable 'hard to reach' challenges.

- Barriers to participation in making decisions that affect their lives are underpinned by a complex and deeply embedded set of social processes that continue to promote an 'ableist' view of the world.
- Non-enforcement of legislation, and the effective undermining of 'assistive' measures, creates a sense of powerlessness, mistrust and apathy.
- Efforts by these persons to become organized and to participate in decision-making, are severely hampered by inadequacies in basic

¹⁰⁸ NESC (2005) *Developmental Welfare State*. Report No. 113. Dublin: National Economic and Social Development Office.

¹⁰⁹ The Motability Scheme under Disability Living Allowance. *Disability Alliance Factsheet*, F.17.London.

service provision, particularly transport and communications technologies.

The design and delivery of programmes and supports, particularly those that would facilitate mobility and thus encourage participation, fail to take account of the complexity of conditions in rural areas. Problems such as sparse populations leading to lack of physical help, additional costs incurred through distance, and reduced choices of services and goods all hinder effective participation.

The notion that 'one size fits all' in locational terms for persons with disabilities in rural areas appears to be the predominant approach, not only by government, but to some extent by organizations established to assist them.

5.3 Asylum-seekers in Direct Provision Participation

5.3.1 Introduction

The position in relation to asylum-seekers expressing their views on decisions that affect them in direct provision accommodation centres in Ireland is a highly contested area. The section below is based on recent NGO reports on this topic as well as meetings with organizations that are directly and regularly involved with asylum-seekers in the centres. In 2007 there were 3,985 asylum applications made to the State.¹¹⁰ This is almost higher than in 1997 when applications numbered 3,883. This compares with 10,000 to 11,000 each year between 2000 and 2002.

While theoretically asylum-seekers are in temporary residence in Ireland and in specified accommodation while awaiting the hearing of their claim for asylum, in practice some asylum-seekers are waiting two years or some even longer.

5.3.2 Context – Asylum-seekers in Direct Provision

The Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) is a public body under the auspices of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. According to RIA, the agency *'is committed to providing a safe, quality accommodation for asylum-seekers which promotes the well being of all residents.'*¹¹¹ It has a number of important functions, among which is its role in sourcing suitable temporary accommodation for asylum-seekers and their families throughout Ireland.

¹¹⁰ See speech of Mr Brian Lenihan TD, Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform, 31.1.08.

¹¹¹ Reception and Integration Agency (2007) *Direct Provision Reception and Accommodation Centre Services, Rules and Procedures*. Dublin: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, p. 2.

The RIA is responsible for the initial accommodation of asylum-seekers at reception centres in Dublin, where they are required to stay for a period of seven to 10 days. The agency is further responsible for the transferring of asylum-seekers from the reception centres in Dublin to various full board accommodation centres throughout the country.

Asylum-seekers and Prison

Up to now, Ireland has attempted to avoid the UK policy, also common in other EU countries, of detaining or interning asylum-seekers in prisons or other holding centres. The prospect of such a policy could revive echoes of internment without trial or detention without due process, and would be very legally and politically sensitive.

There is no great rainbow of best practice in this regard across the European Union. Indeed many European countries have foreign prison populations of extremely disproportionate rates. This is the case for Belgium, where 41.6% of the prison population are foreign prisoners, for Austria with 42.9%, Denmark with 18.9% and the Netherlands with 32.7%.¹¹² These compare with Ireland at 12.6%. In this sense, Ireland could be said to positively deviate from the European norm.

The more than 7,000 asylum-seekers within the dispersal and direct provision system receive three meals a day, accommodation and a payment of reduced Supplementary Welfare Allowance of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child. Asylum-seekers in full board accommodation centres have not been entitled to apply for rent supplement for individual personal accommodation since 1 April 2003.

¹¹² Council of Europe (2007) *Annual Penal Statistics –SPACE 1 – 2006*, Table 3, Strasbourg, 12 December.

Table 4 Capacity of all centres for asylum-seekers 2007 and 2008

Type of accommodation	March 2007	March 2008
Accommodation Centres	4,976	5,919
Reception Centres	310	294
Self-catering	233	494
Total	5,519	6,707

Source: Extracted from Sanctuary, March 2007 and March 2008

The Direct Provision scheme was launched in 2000, as a means of combating a shortage of temporary accommodation for asylum-seekers in Ireland. Accommodation is generally supplied and managed by private sector suppliers who make successful bids in response to public procurement tenders from the Reception and Integration Agency of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The actual management of accommodation centres is in the hands of private companies or enterprises, which are ultimately profit orientated.

5.3.3 Dispersal Policy

Direct Provision aims to complement the Dispersal Policy, which means that asylum-seekers are placed in accommodation centres in various parts of the country on a non-choice basis. This leaves little option for asylum-seekers to be placed in close proximity to their friends, family, and persons of similar ethnicity or religion.

It is commonly reported in international literature that a number of asylum-seekers eventually leave their allocated centres, in search of housing in urban

areas nearer to existing groups of immigrants; however the onset of homelessness is a recurring trend for these groups of people.¹¹³

The 61 accommodation and reception centres are of different types such as Guest Houses, Hostels, former Hotels, Mobile Homes on sites, former Holiday Centres, former Nursing Homes or Colleges. Some are self-catering (9). The reception centres (2) and accommodation centres (59) are dispersed across 22 of the 26 Counties.¹¹⁴ This is done in such a fashion that no one County has more than 0.45% of its population composed of asylum-seekers.¹¹⁵

This specific calculation, which is available to the public, demonstrates that the dispersal of asylum-seekers might be conceptualised or treated as a 'burden', which is nevertheless equally shared by each local authority area and for which there are quotas per local authority area.

The uses of Reception Centres and Direct Provision centres have both a positive and negative influence on the well-being of asylum-seekers. They offer a basic right to shelter, food, washing and showering facilities, laundry facilities, and bedding. However, prolonged use of such services on a communal basis may lead to such groups feeling institutionalised and reliant on state support.¹¹⁶ While the majority of asylum-seekers live in direct provision, a number live in self-catering accommodation or spend a period in a reception centre.

According to Mitchell and Russell, almost immediately on arrival, asylum-seekers are subject to harsh treatment based on negative stereotypical myths

¹¹³ FEANTSA (2002) *Immigration and homelessness in the European Union: Analysis and overview of the impact of immigration on homeless services in the European Union*. European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless.

¹¹⁴ Reception and Integration Agency statistics at 28.10.07.

¹¹⁵ Reception and Integration Agency statistics at 31 October 2007.

¹¹⁶ Mateman, S. (1999) *Good Practice Guide on the Integration of Refugees in the European Union the European Council on refugees and exiles. Task Force on Integration*.

in relation to benefit entitlement and access to services in Europe.¹¹⁷ A 'twin track approach' exists in numerous EU countries, one that Ireland follows, in restricting the social and economic rights of asylum-seekers in the determination process.¹¹⁸

5.3.4 Inadequacies of Current Provision

The question of whether asylum-seekers living in Direct Provision – a hard-to-reach group – are able to participate in decisions that affect their everyday lives is addressed in this section.

Mosney accommodation centre in Co Meath is one of the largest centres for housing asylum-seekers. It has a capacity of 800 residents. It is located approximately 30 miles (40 kilometres) from Dublin city and the largest towns in the vicinity are Drogheda in Co Louth and Balbriggan in Co Dublin. The centre provides its own catering and health provisions. However, as it is located some distance from the main road to nearby towns, lack of available transport and its cost are issues for residents.

Other centres in Clare, Westmeath, Kerry and Cork have from 250 to 300 residents. Some direct provision centres are located in remote areas far from a population centre.

The kind of issues cited that 'trouble' some Mosney residents and which they would like to raise with centre management, included:

- Too much reheated meals made up of previous days leftovers
- Not enough fruit to eat
- Too few working clothes washing machines
- Accommodation too cold

¹¹⁷ Mitchell, M. & D. Russell (1999) 'Immigration, citizenship and social exclusion in the new Europe', in R. Sykes and P. Alcock, *Developments in European Social Policy: Convergence and Diversity*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 75-94.

¹¹⁸ Bloch, A., T. Galvin & L. Schuster (2000) 'Editorial Introduction' in *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 13, No. 1, pp 1-10.

- Poor quality Christmas Day food
- Queuing for a shower¹¹⁹.

5.3.5 Asylum-seekers Expressing their Views

RIA has published a document entitled Direct Provision Reception and Accommodation Centre Services Rules and Procedures¹²⁰ specifically in relation to the House Rules of the accommodation centres and the managing of complaints. In the document, Part 1 under section 1.14, it reports that the accommodation centres are required:

*'to treat all complaints seriously and impartially; to provide a clear, fair and efficient procedure for dealing with complaints; and to keep a record of complaints made by residents and staff which are able to be resolved on an informal basis.'*¹²¹

Some accommodation centres do not permit or recognise any form of residents' committee or any representation system for residents. Following the formation of a residents' committee in one centre, the residents all received faxes from the Department of Justice Equality and Law reform advising them not to pursue this action.

A manager of three accommodation centres in the southern regions has stated that management would never allow asylum-seekers to set up committees. In one reception centre, a 'Comment' box was made available for residents but as it was under CCTV cameras, some residents feared to use it.

This restriction might make sense if residents spent only a short time in the centres but some are there for months or even years. Some children have been born and started school without ever having had a home. One resident

¹¹⁹ Communication with residents at Mosney Accommodation Centre.

¹²⁰ Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 5 July 2007

¹²¹ Reception and Integration Agency (2007) *Direct Provision Reception and Accommodation Centre Services, Rules and Procedures*. Dublin: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, p. 4.

in three in direct provision is a child aged 0 to 17 years. Almost 2% of those living in Direct Provision are Irish-born children.¹²²

One NGO reported that residents feel that they are in a detention centre. The same NGO reported being strongly discouraged from assisting residents in forming a small informal committee to address welfare issues, on the grounds that there were already committees and that it would cause confusion among the residents. This proved not to be the case.

5.3.6 Asylum-seekers Receiving Visits and Making Visits

In terms of access to the accommodation centres, it was reported in a number of meetings with organizations that deliver services to asylum-seekers that some of the accommodation centres have strict policies on who leaves and enters the grounds. As far back as 2001, some asylum-seekers have reported having a sense of being in 'prison' or 'caged' or 'living like chicken.'¹²³ One NGO staff member stated that it is the policy of some centre managers to require two weeks notice of their visit to the centre, despite being a regular visitor over the previous months. One centre forbade visits on Saturdays and Sundays. Another centre, in 2003, had a house rule that only allowed residents to be visited by prior arrangement.

It is the right of the manager of the accommodation centre to determine who may access the centre or not. This is necessary as management must exercise a duty of care to residents to prevent them being improperly approached, annoyed, canvassed to buy goods, solicited to switch religions, or engage in unwanted or irregular practices. However, this restriction appears to be implemented in some instances to make unreasonable restrictions on visits into and out of the centres.

¹²² Reception and Integration Agency, October 2007.

¹²³ Irish Refugee Council (2001) *Direct Provision and Dispersal – 18 months on, Report*, Dublin, p.16. October

Once an asylum-seeker decides to leave their reception centre without permission for any given time, or if a person is consistently absent from the centre, it is the policy of the Reception and Integration Agency, once informed by the centre managers, to deem that person unavailable for further assistance in terms of accommodation and in turn, any further access to benefits such as, the Supplementary Welfare Allowance.

These groups of people may, for a number of reasons, become undocumented within the system. As they are no longer entitled to benefits under direct provision scheme they have no other alternative but to find their own means of income through employment illegally in the informal or underground economy without any documents or protection. This may result in increasing numbers of asylum-seekers in need of emergency accommodation.

5.3.7 Complaints in Direct Provision

One member of an NGO reported to us that he had dealt with experiences of various asylum-seekers whose complaints have not been taken seriously by the Reception and Integration Agency (RIA) or management in the accommodation centres.

According to RIA, *'all complaints will be dealt with and it is expected that the complaints procedure will be used only in cases where a resident has a genuine grievance.'*¹²⁴ However, a section dealing with formal resolutions of complaints at the centre states that *'in circumstances of extreme gravity and urgency, the accommodation manager may expel a resident from a centre without prior approval of the RIA.'*¹²⁵

Residents are entitled to present grievances to management on a one-to-one basis. However, management have the right to consider the reported

¹²⁴ Reception and Integration Agency (2007), p. 8.

¹²⁵ Reception and Integration Agency (2007)

grievance as frivolous and as justifying a reprimand to the resident, a report to the Reception and Integration Agency or a mark is placed on his/her file.

There is no independent inspectorate of conditions of living in the 61 Reception and Accommodation Centres. The centres are frequently clients of the RIA, who simultaneously fix the standards. However, other communal accommodation centres such as Residential Children's Homes, Prisons, Private Nursing Homes and Psychiatric Hospitals do have their own independent corps of Inspectors and independently drafted standards. A definition of a communal establishment follows later in this section.

While there is no legal reason to believe the right to freedom of association is forbidden to asylum-seekers living in Direct Provision, the right to assemble peacefully and to form associations is specified in Article 40 (6) (1) and (2) of the Constitution. Case law would suggest that the fundamental rights of citizens to assemble, express opinions and to form associations should be interpreted as being applicable to non-citizens unless there are laws to the contrary.

The right to form associations, however, does not oblige any other body to listen, receive or negotiate with such associations. In practice these rights of assembly and the forming of associations are not vindicated in all cases for asylum-seekers in relation to their own living environment. This can arise either because the residents of direct provision do not believe that they have a right to form an association or committee or because centre managers believe that such a right does not exist for asylum-seekers. The active discouragement of residents in forming associations or expressing opinions or grievances was reported to the research.

The involvement of asylum-seekers in Direct Provision in the management of their own affairs can have very positive consequences. Speaking on key determinants of mental health for minority ethnic groups and asylum-seekers, Bríd Clarke, CEO of the Mental Health Commission, reported that the single most effective way to improve services was *'the personal involvement and*

*participation in one's care plan (and) including... service users in the planning and delivery of services.*¹²⁶

5.3.8 Definition of Non-Private Household in Census Publications

In order to find out how asylum-seekers are categorised for the purposes of inclusion in communal establishments, we contacted the Central Statistics Office. We were informed that it is difficult to classify asylum-seekers under one particular category of communal establishment. As a result, in 2006, asylum-seekers could be included in Table 11 'Persons enumerated in communal establishments by type of establishment' under one of the following categories: 'Shelter or Refuge (including accommodation for homeless persons)', 'Hotel, boarding house, guest house, Bed and Breakfast' or 'Other'.

In 2002, asylum-seekers would have been classified in similar categories in Table 12 'Persons enumerated in communal establishments by type of establishment', namely 'Guest house, boarding house and bed and breakfast', 'hostel', 'hotel' or 'other'.

Non-private Household (Communal Establishment)¹²⁷

A non-private household is a group of persons enumerated in a boarding house, hotel, guesthouse, hostel, barrack, hospital, nursing home, boarding school, religious institution, welfare institution, prison or ship. A non-private household may include residents and/or visitors. However, proprietors and managers of hotels, principals of boarding schools, persons in charge of various other types of institutions and members of staff who, with or without their families, occupy separate living accommodation on the premises are classified as private households.

Central Statistics Office

¹²⁶ HSE West (2006) *Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Minority Ethnic Groups and Asylum-seekers in Ireland, Report from the National Conference*, 31.1.06. p. 8.

¹²⁷ Central Statistics Office (2007) *Census 2006 Principal Demographic Results*. Dublin: Stationery Office, p. 107.

5.3.9 The Review of House Rules, 2007–2008

In 2007, the Reception and Integration Agency recommended a review of the House Rules for Direct Provision Accommodation. This review was ongoing in February 2008 and was due to complete in mid-2008. The Review is being undertaken by a separate Working Group with terms of reference to examine House Rules and Procedures and make recommendations as appropriate.¹²⁸

The working group consists of, amongst others:

- members of An Garda Síochána,
- the Refugee Information Service,
- Representatives of Accommodation Management,
- Commission for Justice and Peace,
- the Office of the Attorney General,
- the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform.
- Two non-governmental organizations are represented on the Working Group.

As part of the Review, the Working Group has met with management of accommodation centres and has made on-site visits of observation and listening to several centres where residents could speak to the Working Group in private.

5.3.10 Conclusion

Forming an association, forming a representative committee and forming a representative committee with a view to negotiation are three quite different types of civil society organization. The distinction between them is only weakly alluded to in discussion of asylum-seekers' issues in direct provision. Asylum-seekers are interested in their immediate living circumstances but would

¹²⁸ Text kindly supplied by the Reception and Integration Agency 2008.

prefer a slow community development style building up trust on a small and regular scale over a period of time rather than a rapid 'collective' mobilisation. The barriers to participation of asylum-seekers are less a matter of language, faith or culture than a matter of trust.

Chapter 6 A Considerable Distance to Travel? The case of Travellers and Seafarers

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 presents the findings and conclusions from two case studies of groups who, in terms of Arnstein's model of participation presented in Chapter 3, were further down the ladder of participation or more remote from participation strategies. These comprise:

- a sub-group within the Traveller community,
- overseas seafarers.

These case studies use the same methods as those presented in Chapter 5 but are presented separately because the conditions for their meaningful engagement in public decision-making or policy influencing is contentious. While it is possible to draw some conclusions from participation strategies and methods used to engage with hard-to-reach groups, it was not possible to highlight successful examples of engagement.

Members of the Traveller community, seafarers and former prisoners (discussed in Chapter 7) do not have a common shared sense of community or identity. However, following the completion of the case studies it emerged in analysis that there were indeed many similar conditions of life and barriers to opportunity, which raised particular issues for positive supports that might reach all three groups on the part of voluntary or statutory agencies. These conditions and opportunities are summarised at the end of this chapter and, in the case of former prisoners, in the next chapter.

In the case of each group the researchers made contact with specific organizations and individuals working with them and had discussions. In

addition, one or two persons from each group had discussions with the research team or persons invited by the research team, to conduct interviews with them.

6.2 Displaced Travellers – A case of a hard-to-reach sub-group

6.2.1 Introduction

This case study examines the situation of a sub-group within the Irish Traveller community who are hard to reach, those who are displaced from their usual area of residence through internal disputes. It explores some of the issues and complexities that impact upon this sub-group, which appears to prevent their participation in decision-making, and the conditions under which they become 'hard to reach.'

The Traveller community in general is disproportionately at the margins of Irish society. Among the reasons are low education qualifications which, along with the effects of discrimination, affect employment patterns. Living conditions, settlement patterns and nomadism also act to make the Traveller community not only different from the settled community but also distant from official policy-making.

Other aspects of Traveller life that increase their isolation, including the effects of feuding on individuals and families, are examined. The importance of family networks is highlighted and the implications when disputes displace members of extended family networks, widening the level of isolation and hindering participation in policy-making, are drawn out.

6.2.2 Context – The Traveller Community

The Traveller community has been accorded a particular status in equality law and a level of official recognition in areas such as housing, health, education

and training. In spite of a considerable number of grassroots and high-level policy initiatives to address the needs and rights of Travellers, the Traveller community remains at the margins. This is despite the successful efforts of Traveller-directed and Traveller support groups to provide a voice for Travellers in public policy and in decisions affecting Traveller living and working conditions.

*The Equal Status Act*¹²⁹ defines Travellers as:

'the community of people who are commonly called Travellers and who are identified (both by themselves and others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.'

There are 22,400 members of the Irish Traveller community in Ireland, representing 0.5 % of the overall population.¹³⁰ Almost 42% of Travellers are under 14 years of age, double the proportion for the population as a whole, with just 2.7% being 65 or over, compared to over 11% of the general population.

The educational status of the Travelling community is different to that of the general population:

- 77% of Travellers have completed only primary level education or less, and 22% having completed second level education.
- 0.8% had completed third level education, compared to over 30% of the general population.

Low educational attainment and a lack of qualifications impede conventional employment opportunities.

¹²⁹Government of Ireland (2000) *The Equal Status Act*, p. 7.

¹³⁰Central Statistics Office (2007) *Equality in Ireland 2007*. Dublin: Stationary Office, p. 6.

- Fewer than 14% of Travellers aged 15 and over reported being at work, compared to 57% of the general population.¹³¹
- A further 41% reported being unemployed.
- Another 45 % are recorded as not being in the labour force.¹³²

These figures reflect to some extent the preference for self-employment within the Traveller economy, as well as their nomadic lifestyle. They also reflect a lack of skills and qualifications, as well as discrimination and prejudice, which in turn can lead to, or compound, situations of poverty and reliance on benefits.

6.2.3 Dealing with Difference

The settlement patterns of the Traveller community, including the preference of many for a nomadic lifestyle, could be viewed not only as a measure of their difference from the settled community, but also of their distance in policy terms from government and decision-making that frequently favours sedentary and settled Traveller policies.

A significant deficit in implementing housing policies for Travellers has been identified, in terms of accommodation output failing to meet government targets and a consistent failure to reduce the numbers of Travellers living in unofficial encampments without running water, toilets or refuse collection.¹³³ Settlement of Travellers, particularly the choice of locations, either official or unofficial, is an extremely contentious issue both for Traveller families and the settled community, and tensions between the Traveller and settled community can lead to high levels of mutual mistrust.

¹³¹ Central Statistics Office (2007), p. 30.

¹³² Central Statistics Office (2007), p. 32.

¹³³ Norris, M. and Winston, N. (2005) 'Housing and Accommodation of Irish Travellers: From Assimilationism to Multiculturalism and Back Again' *Social Policy & Administration*, 39:7, 802-821.

A part of this of this mistrust relates to perceptions by the settled community of the Traveller community as being engaged in ongoing violence, particularly related to internal feuding.

6.2.4 Negative Portrayals

Feuding does exist and affects directly a number of Traveller families and localities. The perception of feuding is attributed to wide swathes of the Traveller community who have no experience or contact with feuding. Such perceptions have undoubtedly developed through negative media reporting that often portrays Travellers as violent and anti-social.

According to Fanning¹³⁴ Travellers have been identified as '*a deviant and dangerous underclass*'. Such stereotyping has undoubtedly contributed to their experiences of exclusion. In 1996,¹³⁵ a Pavee Point policy statement asserted that the media had assisted in altering the public's perception of the Traveller community.¹³⁶ Bhreatnach contends that overall the level of Traveller violence is disproportionately highlighted compared to incidences in the general public, and that the courts and police service tended to deal with Travellers rather leniently.¹³⁷

6.2.5 A Question of Displacement

The extended family is the centre of life for most members of the Traveller community. In the case of disputes, large extended networks can find themselves in opposition to other extended families. Displacement of entire extended families can occur, or families may be split, with some leaving and some remaining. For those who leave and those who stay, separation from

¹³⁴ Fanning, B. (2002) *Racism and Social Change in Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

¹³⁵ Pavee Point (1996) *Policy Statement on Violence and Crime*.

¹³⁶ 'Time to get tough on Tinker culture' in *The Sunday Independent*, 28th January, 1996. Extracted from Pavee Point (1996) *Policy Statement on Violence and Crime*.

¹³⁷ Bhreathnach, A. (2007) 'Policing the Community: homicide and violence in Traveller and settled community', in *Irish Economic and Social History*, Vol. 34, pp. 47– 64.

fellow family members can be deeply felt as a traumatic and inconsolable hurt. Where disputes or fear of disputes or displacement occurs, it may be extremely difficult for Travellers to participate in initiatives even when they are intended to improve their status and seek their direct involvement.

For example, there have been a number of families who were displaced following a conflict in 2004 in the northern part of the Greater Dublin area. This resulted in 22 families fleeing and dispersing across the country from Dublin to Cork and Belfast. It was reported that approximately 40 families have been displaced over the past five years in one area due to feuding.

The distress and loneliness of women and children or families separated from their relatives and wider kin group due to displacement is huge, according to discussion during this research. Levels of stress and depression rise with the isolation from their wider extended family on which the isolated family would have depended greatly for daily emotional and social support. Their children, it was reported to the research, have to change schools or travel long distances to their usual schools, a large interruption in a community where levels of educational attainment are not high. The research heard that:

'You can't even go to the Blessings of the Grave for fear of an argument breaking out'

'Travellers are forced to settle and not able to move wherever they want and they are forced into places they don't want to go'

Displacement, the research learnt, creates a high level of isolation and mistrust and undermines the conditions necessary for social solidarity.

Displacement or fear of displacement is one of the barriers to some members of the Traveller community securing an improvement of their living conditions, engaging with dialogue and consultative forums and participating in decision-making. Some families live on sites where they are 'locked-in' by a metal or steel barrier which can only be unlocked by the local authority key holder,

usually during office hours. Families who wish to flee violence in the evenings, at night or weekends can be obliged to wait hours or days to get the barrier open so that they can get their family, transport and property off a site.

6.2.6 Conclusion

The Traveller community have developed a number of successful strategies of self-advocacy, self-organization and management of social and cultural projects. Within the larger Traveller community, as with any identity-based group, power is distributed unequally. A sub-group of Travellers experience or witness violence, displacement and isolation that place them at the margins of Traveller society, without direct access to the routes to protection, services, education and health. Forced displacement and deprivation of the support of immediate family members contribute to the fragility of members of this sub group. This is one of the factors which discourage their participation in policy making.

Despite this fragility, members of the sub-group have confided their fears to members of the Traveller community and to settled persons from a range of backgrounds that are viewed as trustworthy and with a high standard of confidentiality. The availability and support of individuals, Traveller and non-Traveller, to listen sympathetically and non-judgementally to the fears and concerns of some members of the Traveller community is important, if not essential, in engaging with a hard-to-reach sub group.

6.3 Seafarers – An Invisible Community

6.3.1 Introduction

This section of the research looks at the experiences of overseas seafarers working in Irish waters. Because they spend so much of their time at sea, away from family and social or other contacts, they are a specific hard-to-reach group.

Since 2000, the share of overseas workers in the workforce and overseas residents in the population has grown rapidly. One particular group of overseas workers attracted attention in 2005, prior to the current social partnership agreement *Towards 2016*. This group was seafarers, Irish and overseas, employed by Irish Shipping. This in part prompted this study to examine the situation of overseas seafarers in collaboration with some of those who support them.

The factors that affect their circumstances, which those who work to provide services and supports have to address, and the success of some voluntary outreach services in maintaining contact with an increasingly isolated body of people, are examined.

6.3.2 Context – the Seafarer Population

Ireland has had a tradition of supporting good practice in relation to seafarers in general. Since the foundation of the State, Ireland has signed and ratified 10 International Labour Organization Conventions to protect the rights and health of seafarers. The most recent ratification was in 1999, on hours of work and manning of ships.

Seafarers, particularly merchant fleet seafarers, are a hard-to-reach population from a number of perspectives. They are away from home and

family for long periods of time, are often of non-European nationality or from developing countries, and are to a large extent invisible in Ireland in terms of their citizenship status. Agents in developing countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia undertake the recruitment of seafarers. The ownership of the ship may well be another company in another continent under a changing flag of convenience. The ship itself will be managed by a shipping agent, who appoints a captain of another nationality.¹³⁸

The wages of seafarers can be based on wages in their country of domicile, rather than collective agreements or the minimum wage of the country owning or managing the ship. Where the country of domicile is the Philippines or Indonesia, wages may be as low as €1 per hour. All this serves to place seafarers in a situation of social and economic deprivation and precariousness.

One service provider stated that seafarers from ships coming into Dublin Port were male and usually from outside the European Union. Irish Census figures indicate that there has been an increase in the numbers of people involved in occupations related to shipping. In 2002, there were 756 people categorized as '*seafarers, merchant navy, barge or boat operatives*', a figure that had risen to 927 by 2006.¹³⁹ However, only those seafarers on land or in port on Census night are recorded. Thousands of others pass through Irish ports during the year, without staying long enough to appear in official statistics, or without being able to leave their ship.

6.3.3 Support and Services – A Reflection of Hard to Reach?

The range of supports and services currently available to seafarers away from home for six months or more reflects in many ways the status of this group as hard to reach. Seafarers on Irish and UK connected ferries and freight services are represented by the Transport Section of SIPTU. The International

¹³⁸ International Transport Workers Federation (2007) *Seafarers' Bulletin*, No. 21, 'For human rights at sea,' English language. Publication in eleven languages.

¹³⁹ CSO (2007) *Census 2006, Volume 8. Occupations*, Table 8.

Transport Workers' Federation also has an active representative in Ireland. He has powers of inspection of ships and can interview seafarers if he suspects that certain minimum standards are not being complied with, such as lack of fresh food or wages not being paid.

The Lady Chiara

In 2008, International Transport Federation inspector Ken Fleming found 12 Filipino seafarers on board a Liberian registered tanker, The Lady Chiara, at Ringaskiddy, Cork, with no fresh food, and only contaminated water to drink. His union, SIPTU, took the men ashore to be fed. Mr Fleming said the crew were living in some of the worst conditions he had encountered as an ITF Inspector... *'The fridges were empty, literally empty'*.¹⁴⁰ It was reported that some of the men were crying when he came on board.

6.3.4 Voluntary Services Engage with Seafarers

Some of the services who support seafarers are run on a voluntary and informal basis.¹⁴¹ One such service is the Mission to Seafarers, based inside Dublin Port. This Mission was originally founded 150 years ago in the Port of Cork. St. Ann's Church of Dawson Street, Dublin is the Dublin chaplaincy to the Port and to the Mission of Seafarers. This is a missionary society of the Anglican Church, which cares for the spiritual and practical welfare of all seafarers, regardless of nationality or faith.

This is an outreach service, with no formal designated centre. It currently operates from a portacabin inside the port area, with a large lounge and a small shop with supplies including telephones and phone cards. The service is run and assisted by a number of volunteers, some of whom are retired Irish

¹⁴⁰ Report in *Irish Independent* and *Irish Times*, April 2008.

¹⁴¹ See also E. Healy (2003) 'Missions provide welcome to seafarers at home and abroad', *Journal of the Maritime Institute of Ireland*, Vol.1 No.2, p. 14.

seafarers. There is little advertising of the service; however it is well known among the service users. It would be common for the same individuals to use the service on a repeat basis.

Stella Maris (Catholic) is another international faith-based volunteer movement for seafarers regardless of faith. Stella Maris has a bus service which can take seafarers to the city from the port. A third service is that of the Seamen's Christian Friends Society (Evangelical). Co-operation between the services appears to be at a very cordial and friendly level.

According to the Mission to Seafarers, an increasing number of international seafarers are availing of the services – on average 100 seafarers per month.¹⁴² The majority of the service users are international including high numbers from the Philippines and Eastern Europe. It is not unusual for seafarers to be away from home at sea for six months at a time. In addition, turnaround times have become much faster, and crew sizes smaller, meaning less time onshore before returning to sea. This in turn creates increased difficulty in being able to contact family, leading to prolonged isolation from them. A further reason for the need for a Mission is that it is the policy of some ships not to allow their workers to use the telephone while at sea.

A report by Kavas, funded by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) Seafarers Trust, recognizes the growing welfare implications of these changes, and the importance of port-based welfare services for seafarers, particularly counselling services. However, it could be argued that such services are simply masking a more serious issue of growing social isolation within a group that is increasingly difficult to reach because of, amongst other reasons, the reduced time spent on land.

The voluntary services to seafarers, such as the Mission, are not trying to proselytise or convert seafarers from one religion or no religion to another religion. Their intention is to show humanity and caring to human beings who

¹⁴²Communication with the service.

may be alone and lonely in a foreign country. The view of the Mission to Seafarers is that the representation of seafarers is best done by trade unions nationally and internationally. They are the experts in minimum standards and working conditions for seafarers and can be relatively easily contacted by seafaring workers. This division of 'labour' between trade unions and voluntary organizations means that there is respectful recognition of each other's role and vision.

6.3.5 Conclusion

The successful role of volunteers in providing services to seafarers inside Dublin Port reveals the ingenuity in outreach to invisible groups on a systematic basis. The role of retired workers as volunteers is an example of interesting intergenerational solidarity. The solidarity arrangement between voluntary groups and trade unions is an example of promising efforts to maximise effect and impact for the benefit of users.

- Engaging with the large number of seafarers passing through ports, by placing their service as close to the users as is feasible, is one of the original approaches of the Mission to Seafarers.
- The fact of having the outreach service as the core service is a second interesting strategy.
- A service staffed by volunteers is a further point of interest during a period when so many services are developing as paid and professional services.

Chapter 7 Former Prisoners Trying to Integrate

7.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with former prisoners from the non-political population and some of the challenges they face on their release, with a strong emphasis on the voice of the prisoners themselves. A profile of prisoners shows that many of these challenges reflect the inequalities of their social background, with evidence that the degree of disadvantage they experienced is strongly linked to the difficulties they face after their release. These include barriers to participation and social stigma as a prisoner.

Drugs, alcohol and mental health issues are examined as other challenges prisoners must deal with. The stress and difficulties faced on release are then looked at. This is followed by three case studies of former prisoners, which highlight the barriers to family re-integration and to wider participation.

Some of the voluntary and statutory projects that have engaged with former prisoners are briefly described. Such bodies accept that the priorities of ex-prisoners are in the areas of employment and social integration rather than policy-making. The section concludes with a review of some steps that might help prisoners maintain social links or rebuild their lives.

7.2 Prisoners and their Organizations

There are two very distinct sets of prisoners and their organizations over the last decade and a half in Ireland. Since 1995, politically motivated former prisoners from a variety of backgrounds have successfully organized projects for former political prisoners. The projects have been supported by the European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties. In everyday language these programmes are

referred to as Peace 1, Peace 2, Peace 3 and Peace 3 Extension Programmes.

On the ground, the Combat Poverty Agency and Area Development Management Ltd (now Pobal) together with the Special European Union Programmes Body based in Monaghan have assisted a large number of support associations and projects for political prisoners. Over the years, the projects, usually supported by their own associated political parties or movements, organized interesting seminars, conferences, and publications of their work, both north and south.

Fifteen years on, many of these prisoner projects have wound down or no longer benefit from EU or public funding.

The position of former prisoners from the general prison population is more complex. The Network of Ex Prisoner Voluntary Agencies (NEVA), established four years ago, is a voluntary network of agencies, charities, associations, projects and statutory and voluntary services to prisoners and former prisoners. NEVA encourages the reporting of research, lobbying for improved services to former prisoners and exchanges of information and experiences between members. Their aim has been the provision of better services to former prisoners rather than the self-organization or autonomy of former prisoners.

7.3. Prison Population

Recent research has shown that Ireland has one of the lowest rates of incarceration in Europe with an imprisonment rate of 85 per 100,000 of population compared to 142 in England and Wales, 132 in Scotland, 140 in Spain and 134 in Portugal.¹⁴³ Notwithstanding this relative low rate of

¹⁴³ Irish Penal Reform Trust, Press Release 7th April 2004. 'McDowell Plan will make Ireland one of EU's top jailers and increase prison spending by up to €100,000 million annually'.

incarceration, the difficulties facing former prisoners upon release are substantial and varied.

The *Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2005*¹⁴⁴ indicates there were a total of 10,658 committals to Irish prisons. The number actually committed under sentence was 5,088 with an almost equal number 4,522 committed on remand, a further 951 under immigration law and 188 other committals. The total number of committals amounted to 8,686 persons, the overwhelming majority (90%) of whom were male. Over two-thirds of the male committals and three-quarters of the female committals were between the ages of 21 and 40 years.

Women are currently imprisoned in the Dóchas Prison located at the Mountjoy complex. Frequently this prison caters for up to 100 women.¹⁴⁵

The counties with the largest urban centres in the State were in the top three of home addresses given by persons committed in 2005, Dublin (3,478), Cork (815), Limerick (415). Some 25% of 2005 committals (2,185) were foreign nationals.

7.4 Context – Prisoner Profile

In a seminal piece of research into the profile of the population of the State's largest prison institution, Mountjoy, criminologist Paul O'Mahony presented a snapshot of the depth of inequality that persists in Irish society.¹⁴⁶ He found that the majority of prisoners came from a small number of districts in Dublin, all of which have suffered greatest in terms of poverty, unemployment, drug addiction and crime. In respect of the social and familial profile *'the results (of the survey) confirm the profile of Mountjoy prisoners as that of (a*

¹⁴⁴ Irish Prison Service (2006) *Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2005*.

¹⁴⁵ Carroll, E. (2008) 'Is there a need for the women's prison to move from Mountjoy to Thornton Hall?'. April, Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice.

¹⁴⁶ O'Mahony, P. (1997) *Mountjoy Prisoners: A Sociological and Criminological Profile*. Dublin: Stationary Office.

conspicuous) *group socially, economically, educationally and in terms of personal adjustment.*¹⁴⁷

Furthermore, O'Mahony found a strong correlation between the degree of disadvantage in a prisoner's background and the level of their current personal crisis. He sketched a profile of Mountjoy prisoners as follows:

*'...as a group [which] had a profile of stark disadvantage. The large majority of them lived in rented accommodation in poor working class areas of Dublin; came from very large families, where the father was usually employed as an unskilled manual labourer or was chronically unemployed; had left school before the age of 16 without any qualifications; were themselves unemployed before imprisonment; were users of hard drugs; and were never married but had fathered children. More than half the group grew up in a home where either no parent worked or only the mother worked in a menial job.'*¹⁴⁸

The very substantial difficulties facing former prisoners upon their release are illuminated in the above quote. Not only do they face the stigma of being an ex-prisoner, but also must try and overcome distinct social and personal barriers to participation.

Almost a third of Irish prisoners lack a primary education; 52% have low or very low literacy levels,¹⁴⁹ and a survey conducted on behalf of the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform found that 28.8% of the prison population had a learning disability.¹⁵⁰

Furthermore, many prisoners have serious drug dependency problems with 63% of the prison population being described as having a serious

¹⁴⁷ O'Mahony, P. (1997), p. 139.

¹⁴⁸ O'Mahony, P. (1997), p. 154.

¹⁴⁹ Morgan, M. and Kett, M. (2003) *The Prison Adult Literacy Survey Results And Implications*. Dublin: Irish Prison Service.

¹⁵⁰ Carey, S, Harrold M, Mulrooney, M, Murphy M, (2000) *A Survey of the Level of Learning Disability Among the Prison Population in Ireland*. Dublin: Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform

dependency on a hard drug, and heroin being the main drug of choice. In addition, there is a definite pattern of poly-drug use amongst prisoners.¹⁵¹ For those involved in this level of substance misuse, there are serious health implications. Indeed studies have found prevalence of the antibodies to Hepatitis C amongst 22% of prison inmates.¹⁵² Research has also found that a majority of women prisoners are more likely to be abuse alcohol or drugs than the general population.¹⁵³

7.5 Consequences of Prison Release and Re-Integration

Barriers to both employment, and the social and cultural life of their communities, exacerbate the difficulties faced by former prisoners in re-integrating. According to Cohen and Taylor (1972)¹⁵⁴ psychological studies to assess former prisoners fail to capture or address the full extent of the stress they experience upon release. The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) point out that for many prisoners their release is an extremely traumatic experience especially for those who have served substantial custodial sentences and that *'for many people, leaving prison is often the point where the judicial punishment ends and the real suffering begins.'*¹⁵⁵

For those released with little support, little money and no accommodation, their choices are extremely limited. Many drift back into a life at the margins. Former prisoners are by law prohibited from taking up employment in public service, local authorities, or any voluntary body receiving state supports.¹⁵⁶ The Probation and Welfare Service have undertaken many positive initiatives. The Linkage Programme, run in collaboration with the Business in the Community organization, seeks to place former prisoners in work.

¹⁵¹ O'Mahony, P. (1997), p. 161.

¹⁵² Carey, S, Harrold, M, Mulrooney, M, Murphy, M (2000)

¹⁵³ Carmody, P. and M. McEvoy (1996) *A Study of Irish Female Prisoners*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

¹⁵⁴ Cohen, S. and L. Taylor (1972) *Psychological Survival: the experience of long-term imprisonment*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

¹⁵⁵ National Economic and Social Forum (2002)

¹⁵⁶ McKearney, T. and S. Reddin and 'Ex-Prisoners: Is the Labour Market Forgiving?' Unpublished Paper for International Labour Process Conference held in UCD March 2008.

An additional problem faced by many ex-prisoners is the lack of accommodation available upon release. The Homelessness Preventive Strategy (2002) identified ex-prisoners as being particularly at risk of homelessness. It recommended that prison management and the Probation and Welfare Service ensure that appropriate accommodation be available for prisoners on their release and that the Prison Service build and operate transitional housing units as part of their overall strategy of preparing offenders for release.¹⁵⁷ The Fitzpatrick Report¹⁵⁸, which reviewed the progress of the Government's Preventive Strategy, noted a distinct lack of progress in this area.

For significant numbers of former prisoners, especially long-term prisoners, it is common for family ties to be broken during their sentence. For those who have served long-term prison sentences, the consequences are great: *'Many may have lost key relationships in the outside world, together with the decade of adult life when they would normally have been establishing themselves in their occupations, lifestyles, and bringing up young families'*.¹⁵⁹

7.6 Three Experiences of Former Prisoners

The following three sections contain accounts of the experiences of three former prisoners trying to reintegrate back into the community. The accounts were prepared and written by project members working with prisoners or former prisoner project workers.

¹⁵⁷ Government of Ireland (2002) *Homelessness A Preventive Strategy*. Dublin: Stationary Office.

¹⁵⁸ Government of Ireland (2006) *Review of the Implementation of the Government's Integrated and Preventative Homeless Strategies*. Dublin: Stationary Office.

¹⁵⁹ Jamieson, R. and A. Grounds (2002) *No Sense of an Ending: The effects of long-term imprisonment amongst Republican prisoners and their families. Report of a study commissioned by the Ex-Prisoners Assistance Committee (EXPAC)*. Monaghan: SEESYU Press Ltd, p. 6.

Joe's Story

Joe is a member of a large family who live in a big housing estate in a small, rural town that bears all the hallmarks of poverty and disadvantage.

Unemployment is rife and Joe cannot remember any of his family having had a job for any great length of time. People survive on state benefits, and debt is common for most families. Petty crime comes with the territory and in recent years drug abuse has become widespread.

Joe is now addicted and has been before the courts for offences, which have resulted in him doing several prison sentences. He is not frightened by the prospect of going back to prison and sees it as normal, although he has said that he could not do a long 12-month sentence.

He has made a few serious and genuine attempts to address his drug habit but Joe has been let down by the lack of services in the area. The nearest methadone clinic or programme is miles away, and there is no guarantee of receiving any when you get there, because it is run on a 'first come, first served' basis. The public transport system is poor and Joe had no other transport.

Joe's peers are all drug users and they too have been before the courts and some of them have also been to prison. Younger boys in the housing estate view them as hard men having survived prison. The downside to this is that they have to live up to this image by involving themselves in fights. This has resulted in the formation of gangs and Joe belongs to a gang.

The problems and barriers that existed for Joe before he went to prison have been compounded by his imprisonment. Local employers know of his criminal record and are not prepared to give him or his pals a chance. It is common for Joe and his friends to attract the attention of the law when they move outside their area. They often have been made turn out the pockets of their jackets

while in town centre. The doormen on the discos pinpoint them as potential troublemakers and refuse them entry. As a result, they socialise at home with house parties or in the local area.

There appears to be no help in the area to address the social deprivation and no preventive measures in place to tackle a range of problems from truancy to heroin addiction. For many like Joe in a small town, barriers to participation persist on a daily basis.

Michael's Story

Michael is now in his late forties. He grew up in a village close to the border and attended primary and secondary school in the same area. His Catholic education was strict but he did not often get into trouble. As a child of a large family, Michael remembers things were tough for the household. There were often arguments about lack of money as his parents constantly worried about and paying bills. He and his brothers and sisters wore 'hand-me-down' clothes.

Michael worked in various low-skill jobs. He earned just enough to get by and sometimes afford to go to dances. When he was in his early 20s, he was laid off work. He owed rent and was frustrated and angry and turned to crime. He served almost 10 years in prison as a result.

He believes he was deeply affected by the experience and was never able to adjust to the confinement. He missed his family and even sometimes longed for their arguments because they understood each other's ways. He says that a large piece of his life was stolen from him when he went to prison and feels angry that this time can't be retrieved.

On his release he returned to his village but found it had changed drastically. Many people he had known had gone and he felt like a stranger and out of place. He turned to alcohol and began to drink heavily to numb the pain from how his life seemed to have slipped away. He found a house to rent in an isolated rural area and has lived alone there ever since. He believes that prison affected how he relates to women. He has not had a close relationship since he was released.

Michael survives on state benefit. He has no savings and has a number of relatively small loans which he has difficulty repaying. His house is very basic and 'untidy'. It smells damp and is not adequately heated. He does not appear to have cooking utensils and seems to exist on a diet of tinned food, biscuits and snacks. He accumulates items that, on the surface, appear to be useless. He spent a few years drinking alone at home but manages to resist alcohol most of the time now. His appearance is unkempt and he appears not to notice.

Michael appears to be a virtual outcast. A nearby sister occasionally brings him for a day out at her home across the border. He enjoys these brief expeditions. Michael has extremely restricted social contact, yet he is funny, direct and strikingly honest.

His thoughts often return to his time in prison and the camaraderie among the prisoners. The bond he found there was the only thing he had experienced since childhood that replicated the bond in his family. Like brothers and sisters they were thrown together and forced to make things work out.

Michael has not been in trouble since he was released. His isolated and limited existence is perhaps a contributing factor in this. He says that if he were back living in his village, spending time in the pub and watching successful people prancing around, he might feel more resentful. He enjoys walking in the countryside and listens to the radio. He walks to get a bus into the village once a week so he can get books from the local library and buy

food. He appeared grateful that someone was interested in recording his story.

Seány's Story

Seány is a middle-aged man from a rural area who was imprisoned for a series of offences while under the influence of alcohol and prescribed medication. Whilst in prison he became separated from his wife and estranged from his children. He is now in a mentoring programme. He had indicated his willingness to try to change his life before leaving prison.

Although he had established a need for change he needed a lot of support and guidance as well as practical help and motivation. At case conferences for Seány, there were inputs from the Probation, Chaplaincy, Prison and Medical services. Such meetings are a very useful exercise in providing a framework for referral. The agencies involved provided the mentor with contact information for a number of outside agencies relevant to Seány.

Although accommodation was a priority, Seány also had poly-drug addiction, including alcohol, and these issues needed to be addressed prior to release so he could be released from prison into treatment.

Seány wanted to 'have everything all right' on release but couldn't prioritise his needs, wants and issues. Through regular sessions and an exercise where he wrote down his needs, wants and goals; he was able to set out his priorities. Having assessed himself, Seány presented his mentor with an overview of his needs and future plans. They went through this and decided priorities. One of his needs was accommodation. However, his alcohol and drug addiction meant that, if he secured accommodation, he was unlikely to keep it so we prioritised his addiction as pivotal to his success or failure.

Further sessions highlighted the need for accommodation so that his children could spend time with him. For this to happen, he needed the help of statutory agencies such as the Department of Social and Family Affairs, Health Service Executive and others. We then arrived at a plan for release.

When he was released he was brought directly to an assessment with the HSE addiction counsellor and a referral to a treatment centre. He then went to stay with his mother. Three weeks later he entered the treatment centre and completed a 30-day stay. Following this he managed to secure accommodation, rebuild relationships with his children and become gainfully employed.

Seány had trouble in quite a few areas; the concept of time and how long it takes to get things done caused him to become anxious and argumentative. He was interested in starting his own business but his impatience with statutory organizations such as Revenue and VAT was such that he threw in the towel numerous times. Through negotiation, we set up meetings with the County Enterprise Board and a business mentor and sourced grants. He did feel discriminated against as he did not meet the criteria for most of the grants and he felt that his offending background precluded him from many available resources as well as suitable accommodation.

Seany has overcome a lot of obstacles. He has relapsed twice and had a nervous breakdown. He has been banned from driving because of one of his lapses and so cannot operate as a business. He is now back on social welfare and picking up work here and there. However, he maintains that he is doing as well as can be expected. He now has accommodation and he has visitation with his children. He is working on his house and picks up work as required. He is sober at present and has no further convictions.

Mentoring, according to Seany, had 'given me the chance to change and with the support I need'. Seány had the space to deal with one issue at a time and he had support through meetings or telephone contact. He also had an

advocate and this back-up, often in the form of a telephone call and letter, gave him credence with his queries with statutory agencies.

7.7 Do Former Prisoners Have a Voice?

The direct voice of former prisoners from the general prison population is extremely weak. An important number of projects have engaged with former prisoners on a voluntary or statutory basis on a one-to-one basis in the course of service provision. Some, through the prison chaplaincy service or NEVA, act as advocates for prisoner issues and place prisoner issues on agendas when and where they can. This latter is the case of a number of Pobal projects within the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme or forming part of a special call for projects supporting prisoners and ex prisoners.¹⁶⁰

The great majority of services and projects recognise implicitly that former prisoners are remote and at a distance from the public policy arena and are not in a position to do more than attempt to integrate into the social and economic life of their disadvantaged communities. Support in this instance is on a one-to-one basis. Other prisoners seek anonymity and do not wish to have attention brought to their circumstances.

7.8 Conclusion

Some former prisoners live isolated lives, or live in actual remote isolation or in segregated housing estates. In some instances there might be an element of choice in this isolation.

- Outreach work to engage with former prisoners who desire contact will involve slowly building up trust. A mentoring programme can be

¹⁶⁰ Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners Measure 2007, Dormant Accounts Fund, Pobal acting on behalf of the Department of Community Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Irish Prison Service.

successful in outreach, including where the mentors are themselves former prisoners and appreciate the barriers facing former prisoners.

- Further research is required into the numbers and backgrounds of the lives of both men and women prisoners. By doing so, support and or counselling may be provided for prisoners during their prison sentences and may reduce the risk of prisoners drifting back into their old life when released.
- It is often the case that before women are incarcerated they are the primary care giver in the family. It is imperative that support is provided to these women and their children.
- Providing and promoting the use of visitation centres in all prisons may be key for prisoners to maintain links with family members. On release, such activities may prove invaluable.
- Provision for the expunging of some criminal records after a certain period would contribute to tackling the stigma associated with gaining waged employment.
- A resource for former prisoners is the time and patience of an individual relationship.

Chapter 8 Conclusions Arising from the Research

8.1 Introduction

This section deals with the conditions, resources and supports that make it possible for so-called hard-to-reach groups to have their voices heard in decision-making that affects them. Starting with a definition of terms, the concept of hard to reach and ways of engaging with such groups in providing services and promoting their participation are looked at. This is followed by a survey of some of the ways and means that have proven effective in supporting hard-to-reach groups to influence decisions that affect them.

Some methods that are specifically geared to engaging the hard to reach are itemised, followed by a summary of the barriers that inhibit their participation. A number of consultative processes or programmes that brought the voice of hard to reach groups into policy fora are documented and the factors that contributed to their effectiveness are identified.

The chapter concludes by listing a number of resources or elements that would be essential for initiatives that aim to help hard-to-reach groups have a meaningful policy input.

8.2 Definition and Context of Hard to Reach

'Hard to reach' defined in the context of people's participation on Irish community-based, anti-poverty or social inclusion projects and in the context of consultations or planning by public bodies on policies, programmes and services:

Defining Hard to Reach

The concept of hard to reach is useful as it signals a large barrier or gap in relationship

or communication for certain groups. The term hard to reach should not be viewed as a substitute for concepts such as social exclusion, poverty or marginalisation. While hard-to-reach groups have subjectively and objectively little in common, a number of circumstances are similar, such as absence of household or family life and high levels of uncertainty and insecurity in their lives.

Engaging the Hard to Reach

To date, research has demonstrated a limited experience of planned and high-level engagement with hard-to-reach groups. Giving a voice to views of hard-to-reach groups is not placed high on the first rank of priorities. The Having Your Say Programme of Combat Poverty is a positive step in this direction. Similarly the Social Inclusion Forum offers opportunities for groups to have their voice heard. Further research is needed into effective participation strategies with hard-to-reach services

Accessing Services

This research shows that hard-to-reach groups often access and wish to avail of services outside of their own area. Insistence on consumption of locally based services deprives service users of access to a range of services outside of their segregated lives. Some hard-to-reach groups from the perspective of service providers are not actually hard to reach at all, if a choice is made to encounter them. This is the case of users of methadone

clinics for example. Other groups are physically isolated in rural areas, while the research also found evidence that many hard-to-reach groups lived in forms of destitution or without family, household or security.

Continuum of Participation

Being able to identify the barriers and distances from relationships or communication assists in bringing those in poverty closer to positive participative outcomes. A continuum of participation is a useful tool to identify participatory actions for each group, which can be measured for approximate remoteness or closeness to public policy making.

8.3 Identification and documentation of conditions that support hard-to-reach groups to have their voices heard in decisions that affect them

The Importance of Testimony

The work of ATD Fourth World in promoting first hand testimonies of those experiencing poverty places a high value on their accounts and promotes more people in similar circumstances to speak up and offer their stories. An approach based upon the Voices for Change Programme in Britain, which values the accounts of those directly experiencing poverty, would prove beneficial. The importance of using participants' own words and formulations in testimonies needs to be recognised. Valuing the knowledge of those who live in

poverty as a form of expertise that adds to the body of knowledge in society enhances our knowledge base on poverty.

Welcoming Environments

Using alternative means of communicating information and recognising the existence of a digital divide would assist in informing and encouraging hard-to-reach groups to participate. Placing advertisements in local papers, and providing personalised invites should be considered when national consultations are being organized.

Furthermore, there needs to be an acceptance that some individuals have had damaging and traumatic experiences, so that they do not wish to participate in civil society and hope to rely on advocates to express their opinions and voices. It is important for those offering opinions not to feel intimidated by the environment or language used at the site of consultation.

Framework of Participation

The provision of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality are key to ensuring the participation of hard-to-reach groups. In many instances the organization of transport is essential in ensuring participation. Assistance in developing basic skills and competencies to speak up, speak out, run meetings and participate in managed meetings would prove beneficial. An international framework, for example UN Conventions and Treaty rights, can be invaluable in legitimising a minority issue.

Peer Support

Community activism is important in articulating the voice of previously unheard groups. This was demonstrated in the efforts of communities in Dublin during the drugs crisis in the 1990s. Social movements allow for issues to be raised that would otherwise remain below the public radar. Support is required for the establishment of service user groups such as UISCE in relation to drug use and recovery. Volunteers play an important part in reaching out to less visible hard-to-reach groups. Placing outreach services inside the site of hard-to-reach groups, for example the portacabin for seafarers placed at Dublin Port was deemed a success by both service providers and service users.

Legislative Framework

A legislative framework is important in providing a floor of rights for combating social exclusion. This, combined with a culture amenable to change, a substantial level of recourses alongside an existing level of support, proved a turning point for people with disabilities in upholding and accessing their right to services.

8.4 Identification and documentation of participation strategies and methods used to engage hard-to-reach groups

Participation strategies

A limited experience persists of carefully

and methods

planned, high-level engagement with hard-to-reach groups.

Access to well thought out and easy to read information is vital in ensuring high levels of participation.

Good investment at the start of consultation planning.

Active advocacy, support and accompaniment.

Avoidance of over-reliance on 'expertism' in consultation forums.

Neutral meeting spaces and places for groups to encounter others in a non-threatening environment.

Provision of listening periods.

8.5 Identification and documentation of barriers to participation for hard-to-reach groups

Service Barriers

Exclusionary measures are common for hard-to-reach groups, for example asylum accommodation centres and methadone clinics for drug users are difficult to reach. A non-acceptance of the legitimacy of claims as to the reality of conditions in which some hard-to-reach groups are living exists – the research found some evidence of 'denial' of

sub-standard conditions of service in a number of instances. The loss of frontline support as a means of communication for hard-to-reach groups proved detrimental.

Legislative Barriers

Absence of citizenship affects rights to services and a sense of belonging. Hard-to-reach populations tend to be 'overlooked and under-served' in policy terms.

Unwillingness to accept the stigmatising nature or shame associated with extreme poverty. Measures of poverty used in Ireland may not capture the true extent of those experiencing poverty, and social exclusion.

Social Barriers

The Digital Divide was an issue for overseas seafarers wanting to contact their families on arrival at a port, as well as for people with disabilities in rural areas. There is an assumption that most people have access to the Internet or broadband for consultations whereas there is substantial evidence that this is not the case. Access to transport was repeatedly referred to by former prisoners, asylum-seekers and people with disabilities in rural areas.

Personal Barriers

Some of the hard-to-reach population wish to remain anonymous, thereby making it extremely difficult to include their views in policy decisions. In these circumstances there is a need for investment in advocacy services. It is the case that some hard-to-

reach groups are dealing with more than one obstacle to being heard in decision-making.

Educational Barriers

It must be recognised that some of the hard to reach may not have formal educational qualifications or experience of large formal meetings. Care should be given to providing 'jargon' free information prior to and at consultation meetings. For a genuinely participative consultation, the language and structure of consultation meetings should reflect a non-hierarchical approach.

8.6 Identification and documentation of case studies

Case studies of successful examples of supporting and engaging hard-to-reach groups to participate in public decision making or policy influencing forums:

National Anti Poverty Strategy The social partnership approach has assisted in giving legitimacy to the strategy across a range of stakeholders. However, it may not be the ideal approach for including the voice of the hard to reach. The Social Inclusion Forum and Peer Reviews offer an opportunity both for greater participation and the international sharing of good practice.

National Drugs Strategy The high level of community involvement and commitment forced the government into acting on the drugs issue. The high level of

commitment and support of organizations such as Citywide helped to give the consultation and the agreed strategy a level of legitimacy within the community. The organized facilitation and support to articulate views appears to show success.

National Action Plan for Women

This was a well thought out consultation planning process, which provided an international basis. The funding for organizations to make a submission and contribution to the consultation helped to increase the range of opinion. There was also accessible and wide-ranging information on opportunities to take part in the consultation process, which was frontloaded prior investment. Substantial funding at the start of the consultation process rather than at the analysis stage provided for greater levels of inclusion and involvement from target groups.

Voices for Change

The inclusion of those working with and experiencing poverty in participatory actions proved successful. By placing a value on the experiences of those in poverty, it created a sense of genuine empowerment. Using alternative means of communication along with support from community organizations proved useful in reaching out to disadvantaged groups.

Case Studies

The importance of faith based organizations should be recognised in providing services

to hard-to-reach groups. Community activism and frontline workers provide an invaluable contribution while the use of a slow community development model to provide support in gaining access to services has been beneficial to date. Research has demonstrated that access to transport increases the level of participation. Empowerment building through the use of smaller consultation forums assists in developing the skills and competencies to participate in larger public policy forums.

8.7 Identification and documentation of competencies and resources

The professional competencies and other resources required to support and facilitate community-based, anti-poverty and social inclusion groups and public bodies to implement strategies and methods for hard-to-reach groups to have a meaningful say in public policy decisions that affect them:

Professional competencies and resources

An essential requirement is the adoption of a community development model, which allows for greater level of empowerment among hard-to-reach groups.

The importance of field experience involving regular face-to-face contact with hard-to-reach groups cannot be understated.

The approach adopted by faith-based organizations in engaging with seafarers at Dublin Port based on a non-judgemental

approach should inform future engagements with hard-to-reach groups.

Knowledge of the complexities of working with the hard to reach, for example many hard-to-reach groups may be facing more than one barrier to effective participation. In areas such as drug use, a technical knowledge of the complexities of the drug problem is necessary. Those working in community based, anti-poverty and social inclusion projects and public bodies must be well informed of the services in place as well as barriers to accessing these services.

Knowledge and experience of effective participation strategies such as Voices for Change are beneficial. It is important that the consultation process is well thought out and planned from the outset, such as the National Action Plan for Women. The preplanning for the National Action Plan for Women could be used as a baseline for future consultation processes.

Appendix 1

Members of the Advisory Group to the Study

Pat Bennett – CEO, Family Support Agency

Paula Clancy – Director, Think tank for Action on Social Change TASC

Mary Davis – Chair of Implementation Group for Taskforce on Citizenship

Mary English – Donegal Vocational Education Committee

Eleanor McClory – CEO, Young Ballymun

Prof. John Monaghan – Vice President, Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Trish Murphy – Manager, Roscommon Partnership

Siobhan O’Dowd – Community Development Programme, Cork

Stuart Williams – ATD Fourth World

Appendix 2

Information Note on Study

Supporting Hard-to-reach Groups to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

As part of its Having Your Say Programme, the Combat Poverty Agency has commissioned Ralaheen Ltd to carry out research to find out what resources and supports are needed for hard-to-reach groups to have their voices heard in the policy making process.

To carry out this research we are joined by Dr. Marie Mahon of the Department of Geography of National University of Ireland, Galway.

Hard-to-Reach groups are those population groups who are geographically, culturally or socially remote from formal and informal institutions and who are both underserved in terms of services and under represented in terms of policy voice. Hard-to-Reach groups are those for whom extra steps have to be taken to lift the barriers or the side doors to their engagement with any dialogue and who, in some instances, rely on peer advocates to represent their views.

Groups known to be hard to reach include former prisoners, people with mental health issues; people who are homeless or living in remote rural areas and people from ethnic minority backgrounds. The research is being conducted using a case study method and will explore participation strategies and methods used to engage with hard-to-reach groups.

Combat Poverty has established a research advisory committee to support the study, which includes individuals from a varied range of organizations concerned with poverty, citizenship and social service development.

Further information about the research can be obtained by contacting:

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Appendix 3

List of individuals and organizations who participated in the research

Meetings and discussions

John Monaghan, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul
Paula Clancy, TASC
Stuart Williams and members of ATD Fourth World Ireland
Dublin City Councillor
Office for Social Inclusion
One Parent Exchange Network representative
Rev. Tom Haskins
Discussions with EXPAC
EXPAC discussion with Cavan Partnership
EXPAC and Cavan Partnership discussion with ex prisoners
Irish Refugee Council
The Refugee Information Service
Reception and Integration Agency
Three meetings with Traveller support group
Traveller activist
Member of Dublin North East Drug Taskforce
Exchange of views with Kenneth Fox, CEO, The Disabled Drivers Association of Ireland
People with Disabilities Ireland Dublin
Irish Penal Reform Trust
Dermot Hayes, People with Disabilities Ireland, County Clare- several interactions

Telephone discussions

Family Support Agency
Society of St Vincent de Paul, Cork

Julie Smith, Combat Poverty Agency

Site visits

Visit to a Direct Provision Centre of the Reception and Integration Agency

Visit to Dublin Methadone Clinic

Visit to Traveller Support Centre