UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO POVERTY IN IRELAND

Combat Poverty Agency
working for a poverty-free Ireland

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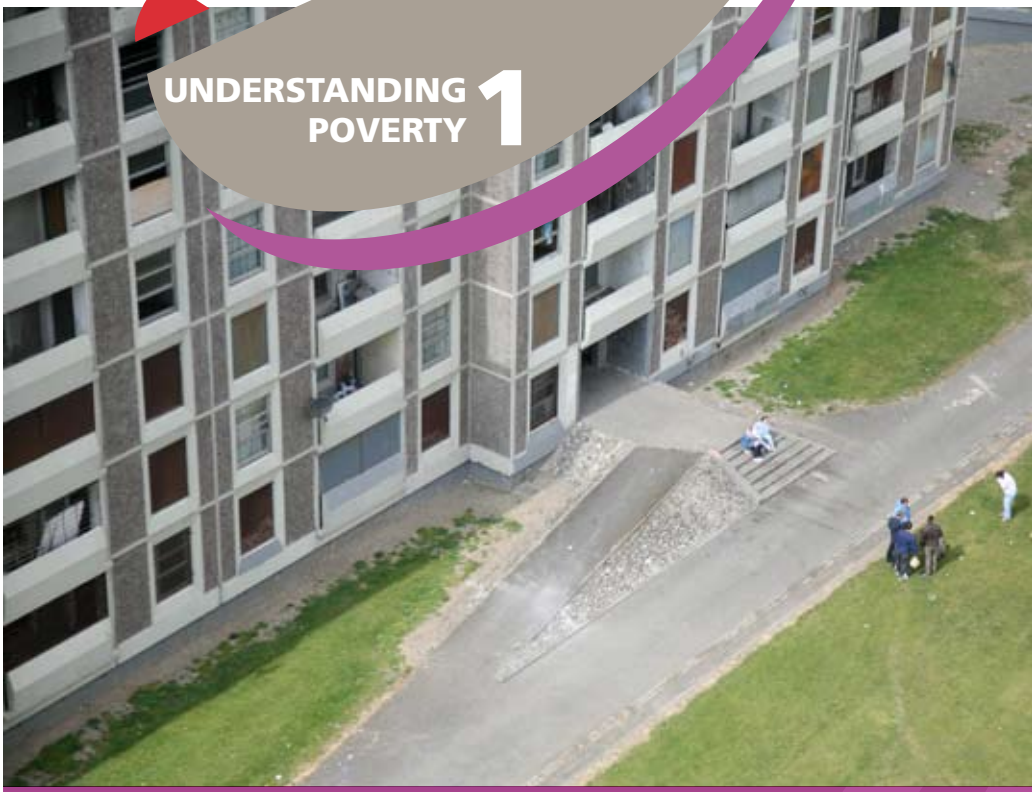
UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 1



UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

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What is Poverty?

Poverty is more than having no money. It means social isolation, shame, powerlessness. It means getting sick and not being able to buy medicine. Living in cold, damp conditions. Going to school hungry. Not having a job. Being stressed. Dying young.

Poverty has to be understood not just as a disadvantaged and insecure economic condition, but also in terms of how people in poverty interact with wider society. Lack of money can stop people from being able to take part in the most routine social events, such as meeting friends for coffee or going on a school trip. It also affects the way that people are talked about and treated in everyday life - in the media, by officials and across society at large. It is not surprising that stress, isolation and shame are some of the commonest feelings experienced by people living in poverty. The term ‘being treated like the poor relation’ rings true.

You feel degraded going in. It's like confession… You feel like a beggar on the street. 'Sorry I can't help you'.

You feel you're begging for money. I don't like going down there. You're queuing up and you don't know what to say. I get embarrassed.

They put you down straight away… they have no respect for you. They know you have to go and ask them for things and the way they treat you, you would think they were taking it out of their own pockets.

The Impact of Poverty

Poverty has a range of outcomes for those who experience it. As well as the immediate visible effects of poverty, such as not having enough food, heating or clothing, it can also have serious longer term effects.

Spending a short period of time in poverty may not have any impact in the longer term. But for people who are forced to endure long stretches without adequate resources, the impacts on health, education and general welfare are significant. This is particularly the case for children. Poverty is passed from generation to generation. Today's poor child will likely be tomorrow's poor pensioner.

Children whose parents are unemployed are more likely to be unemployed themselves when they are of working age. They will leave school earlier and they will earn less throughout their life.

For many, the reality of poverty means not being able to access even the most basic services and facilities that the rest of society takes for granted (for example healthcare, education, financial services etc.)

Causes of Poverty – A Structural Understanding

Some societies focus on individual failures and deficiencies to explain the occurrence and patterns of poverty. Personal characteristics such as laziness or lack of ability are seen as the primary causes of poverty. The poor are blamed for being poor and solutions to poverty are assumed to lie within their individual control.

But this approach fails to acknowledge that poverty is not random. The likelihood of poverty varies sharply depending on age, gender, family structure, health, education, economic conditions and where you live. In other words, it is not the poor choices and 'bad' behaviour of individuals that lead to poverty, but structural failings which stack the odds against certain people and make it difficult for them to escape deprivation or reach their full potential.

Structural causes of poverty vary widely. Some are linked to economic circumstances, such as the failure of an economy to provide enough jobs, sufficient wages or stable working conditions. Others relate to social and political conditions. Lack of adequate transport or affordable childcare can prevent people from being able to take up jobs. Discrimination on the basis of race, colour, gender or other prejudices is also a major factor, as is health status. People with disabilities and those who suffer from poor health are particularly vulnerable.

It is often possible to predict from a very young age that a child will end up in poverty as an adult. This is a stark reminder of the unequal playing field caused by structural issues. The challenge is to develop policies that give every citizen an equal chance of success in life, regardless of their circumstances.

Having an understanding of the causes of poverty is critical in the design of social policies and the welfare system in order to make a real impact on poverty.

Later chapters in this book examine in more detail the structural causes of poverty in Ireland today.

Defining Poverty

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy defines poverty as: *"People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources, people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society".*

This understanding of poverty recognises that people have social, cultural and emotional needs, as well as physical and economic needs. Living in poverty is not just about lack of money. It can also mean feeling excluded, isolated, powerless and discriminated against. The Irish government has accepted this multi-dimensional definition of poverty.

Measuring Poverty

To determine what helps to reduce poverty, what works and what does not and what changes over time, poverty has to be defined, measured, and studied - and even experienced. How poverty is defined and measured influences what we find about the nature, causes and extent of poverty. This, in turn, determines the way that policies and resources are directed to tackle poverty.

Most commentators agree that there is no single way to comprehensively measure poverty and that different types of measurement give insights into different aspects of poverty.

Some of the main measurements used to assess the nature and extent of poverty are:

Relative Income Poverty, also referred to as '*at risk of poverty*' or 'income poverty'

Relative poverty is useful for measuring the level of inequality in a society. The higher the figure, the bigger the gap in income levels between the rich and poor. People living below the income poverty threshold may not be deprived of basic items, such as food or clothing. However, they are likely to be prevented from participating fully in society because of a lack of money.

Income poverty is defined as having an income that is below a certain financial threshold. In Ireland this is typically set at 60 per cent of the median national income or €219.96 per person per week[1]. Relative poverty is the official EU Indicator of financial poverty. 17 per cent of Irish people were into this category in 2006.

Consistent Poverty

Consistent poverty helps to identify the depth of poverty and deprivation in a society. It refers to people who are both *at risk of poverty* and are also deprived of certain items that the rest of society sees as basic necessities. The items that are used to measure deprivation (deprivation indicators) change over time to reflect prevailing income standards. A set of deprivation indicators for Ireland were developed by the ESRI[2] in 1987. They included a list of eight items and were

1 2008 value as assessed by CSO

2 Economic and Social Research Institute (www.esri.ie)

based on the standard of living at that time. It was recognised that these indicators needed to be revised to take account of current living standards and also to focus to a greater degree on items reflecting social inclusion and participation in society.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016 took on board the ESRI recommendation to amend the original list. There are now 11 items in the deprivation index:

Persons at risk of poverty **and** lacking **two or more** items from this index are regarded as being in consistent poverty.

1. Two pairs of strong shoes
2. A warm waterproof coat
3. Buy new not second-hand clothes
4. Eat meals with meat, chicken, fish (or vegetarian equivalent) every second day
5. Have a roast joint or its equivalent once a week
6. Had to go without heating during the last year through lack of money
7. Keep the home adequately warm
8. Buy presents for family or friends at least once a year
9. Replace any worn out furniture
10. Have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month
11. Have a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight, for entertainment

Persistent Poverty

Persistent poverty measures the extent to which people remain in poverty for long periods of time and are unable to escape, or improve their circumstances. It is measured as the percentage of people living below the income poverty threshold, who have also been poor (using the same measure) in two of the previous three years.

Absolute Poverty

Absolute poverty is defined according to an absolute minimum standard needed to live. It refers to severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to social services.

Trends in Poverty over Time

Since the mid-1990s, economic growth in Ireland has lifted many people out of poverty. Unemployment, the main structural cause of poverty in the 1980s fell dramatically, and those who were in a position to take up a job were able to increase their incomes. It was generally assumed that if there was full employment, there would be no poverty. But as unemployment fell and wages grew, it became clear that employment was not the solution for all people. As employment grew, the incomes of people who were not in a position to enter the workforce fell further behind the rest of society. This growing inequality was reflected in an upward trend in income poverty levels which persisted for almost a decade until 2004.

By 2006, Ireland had one of the highest rates of income poverty across all EU member states, with approximately one in six people *at risk of poverty*. Typically the groups most at risk share certain characteristics such as where they live, their age, the composition of their households and whether or not they have a job.

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

In 1997, the Irish Government launched a ten-year National Anti-Poverty Strategy which set out the extent, causes and effects of poverty in Ireland, and identified key areas for attention and also the strategic direction for policy in relation to these. This followed the United Nations (UN) World Summit for Social Development which took place in Copenhagen in 1995, at which the Irish Government endorsed a Programme of Action, aimed at reducing overall poverty and inequality throughout the world.

The launch of the Strategy in 1997 represented one of the most significant developments to have taken place in Ireland over the past 20 years. One of the most important features of the NAPS was that it set out, for the first time in Ireland, specific targets for poverty reduction. The core objective under the NAPS is to reduce substantially and, ideally, eliminate poverty in Ireland and to build a socially inclusive society.

The NAPS is designed to provide, and to further develop in an integrated way, the range of policies and programmes such as employment services, income support, health, education or housing, required to reduce and, in time, eliminate poverty.

The most recent NAPS: *The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016* was launched in 2007.

It set an overall target on consistent poverty:

To reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition.

This Plan was prepared in a different context to the original 1997 NAPS. There is a greater emphasis on services and activation as a means of tackling social exclusion. The Plan also supports the development of a more joined-up and multi-disciplinary approach to policy making, with co-ordinated inputs from a wide range of actors.

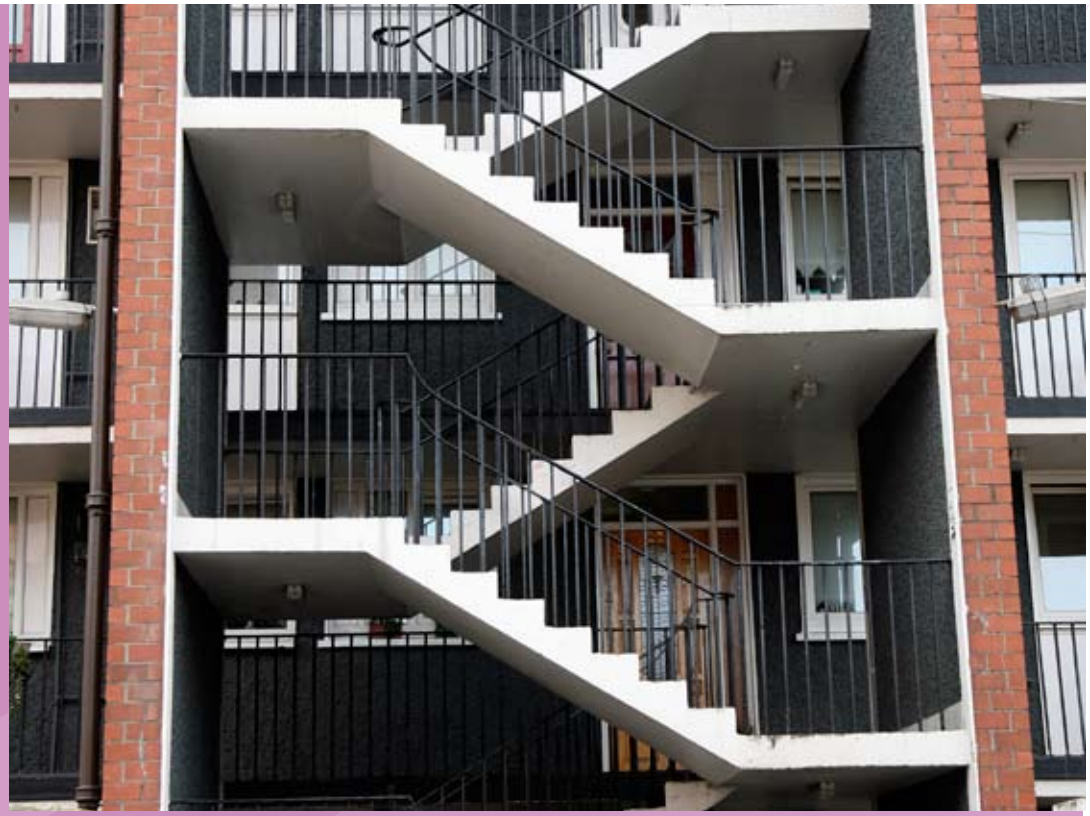

Table 1: Income Poverty in Ireland

	2004	2005	2006
Income Poverty Threshold in €	€185	€193	202.49
% of population in Income Poverty	19.4	18.5	17

Table 2: Consistent Poverty in Ireland

	2004	2005	2006
% of population in Consistent Poverty	6.6	7.00	6.5

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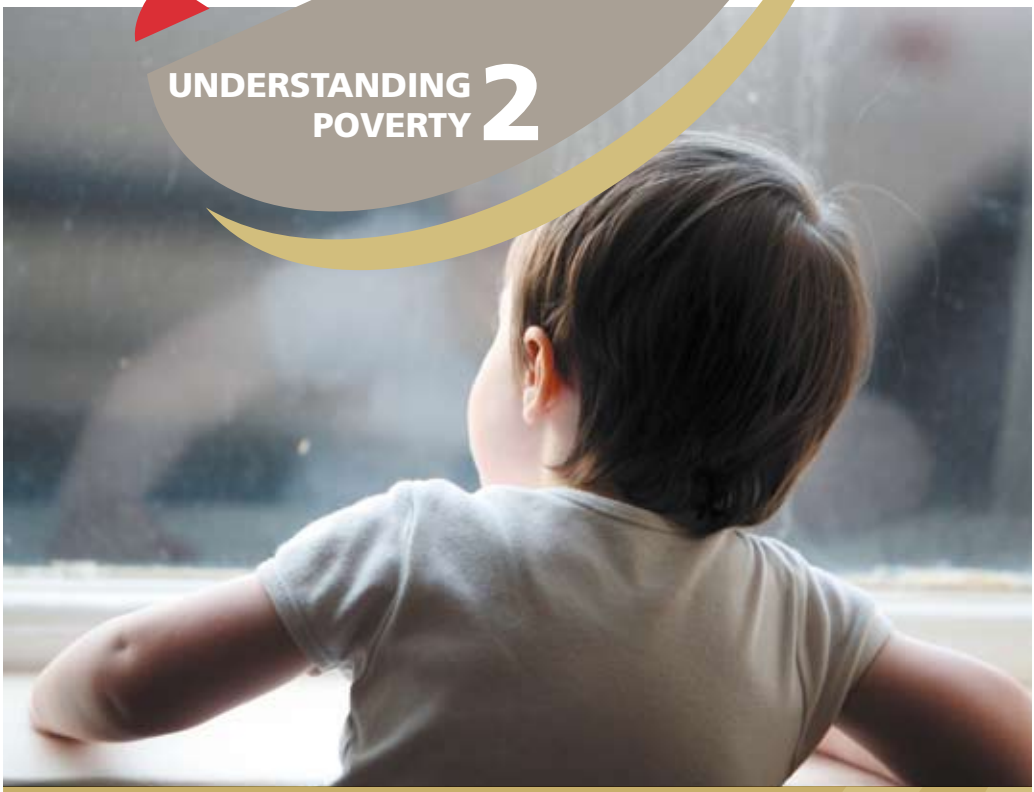

CHILDREN AND POVERTY

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…The longer a child stays in poverty, the more likely he or she is to be poor as an adult…

Child Poverty

Child poverty is widespread in Irish society. Almost a quarter of the population – over one million people – is under the age of 18, making the Irish population one of the youngest in Europe.[i] A large percentage of the population faces poverty during childhood.

Child poverty causes not only immediate hardship. It also has the potential to seriously damage a child's opportunities for the future. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to leave school early, lose out on the chance of well paid work, and have poor health. They may be vulnerable to homelessness and delinquent behaviour. The longer a child stays in poverty, the more likely he or she is to be poor as an adult.

"All children have the right to grow up with equal opportunities for a successful future."

There is also a very high risk that child poverty in one generation affects the children of the next generation. For example, a person whose parents have no educational qualifications beyond primary level has a far higher risk of having no formal qualification – and thus fewer well-paid job prospects – compared to

someone whose parents have third level education.[ii] Halting this cycle of poverty is imperative if we want to give every child the chance to grow into a happy, successful, educated and healthy adult.

Understanding Child Poverty

Household income is the fundamental explanation of child poverty. Household income is, in turn, affected by a number of factors, including parental employment, family size and composition and the health of parents. The accumulation of various disadvantages increases the risk of poverty among children. The combination of these factors makes each child's experience of poverty unique and determines the depth of poverty a child will experience.

Parental Employment

The number of working adults in a household has an impact on the level of child poverty. Children in households where neither parent is employed are very likely to experience poverty, while children whose parents are both employed are much less likely to experience poverty. Families in which only the mother works have an extremely high probability (75%) of experiencing poverty.

The frequency and duration of parental unemployment also impacts on child poverty – the more often a parent is unemployed, and the longer these unemployment spells last, the more likely a child is to experience poverty.[iii]

Family Income

The source of the family's income is a key indicator of child poverty. The more dependent a family is on welfare as a source of income, the more likely the household is to experience poverty. A recent Combat Poverty study found that 62% of children in homes where most of the income (more than 75%) came from welfare were poor for more than 3 years.[iv] The value of child income support (in the form of welfare payment) for families in poverty is likewise a major factor underlying child poverty.

The rate of poverty is also growing among families whose income comes from low paid employment. These 'working poor' maintain regular employment but still experience levels of poverty due to low wages and expenses, such as those required to raise children. The working poor are often described as living from 'paycheck to paycheck,' and can experience huge economic strain from an unexpected expense, such as a household repair or a medical emergency. Children whose parents are working poor not only face the immediate hardship of poverty, but may be expected to earn an extra income to help keep the family solvent. This can affect their chances of a good education.

Family Size and Age of Children

People living in households with children are almost twice as likely as those without children to be consistently poor. Families with three of more children have a higher risk of staying in poverty than smaller families.

The age of the child(ren) also impacts on household poverty levels. Although food, clothes, schoolbooks and other items usually cost more for older children, childcare for small children can be extremely expensive. A parent of a small child may end up financially better off by remaining unemployed.

Lone Parenthood

Poverty is particularly high in lone parent families. 32.5% of lone parent households are consistently poor. This is four times the rate of other households.

Because there is only one adult in the household, it can be difficult for lone parents to go to work because of the lack of affordable childcare. For many parents, it is more financially sensible to remain unemployed and look after the children themselves than to pay expensive childcare fees so that they can work in a low-wage job. Unemployed lone parents may also fear losing their medical card if their wages rise above a certain level. Lone parents are also particularly susceptible to debt and to poverty traps.

The children of lone parents also spend longer in poverty than other children because of the difficulty single parents can have in climbing above the poverty threshold.

Health of Parents

20% of people with illnesses or disabilities are in consistent poverty. They are among the most vulnerable groups in Irish society. Their chances of getting a well paid job are reduced and they have the added stress of ongoing medical expenditure.

The likelihood of persistent income poverty is higher for children whose parents have poor health. The cost of healthcare can stretch budgets to the limit, which means that children's basic needs are not met, parents already experiencing the pressures associated with poor health suffer additional stress, and children are relied on heavily as carers. This can have a negative impact on their schooling.

Parental Education

Living in a household where parents have low levels of educational achievement increases the risk of child

poverty. A child whose parents have no educational qualifications beyond primary level has 23 times the risk of having no formal qualification compared to someone whose parents have third level education.[v] Parents with little or no educational experience can find it difficult to provide adequate supports for their school-age children. This results in earlier school-leaving and a continuation of the cycle of poverty.

Other Risk Factors

Children in temporary accommodation and children of the Traveller community, homeless children, as well as children whose parents are seeking asylum are at a high risk of poverty. Children who have lived or are currently living in institutions also have an above average risk.

Living in Poverty

Poverty affects a child's educational achievement, health, physical and mental development, and lifespan.

There are many costs associated with keeping a child in school. Though primary and secondary education are free in Ireland, the costs of the school uniform, meals, books, and supplies can be prohibitive for families in poverty, particularly when these need to be supplied for more than one child. For some children, poverty means attending school hungry, poorly dressed and without the necessary books and equipment.

Family poverty also causes many children to leave school early due to the 'pull' factor of poorly paid, low-skilled employment. *Against All Odds* cites the case of a 15 year old boy who had opted out of school to work for five hours a day, six days a week for €63.50 a week.[vi]

A child's health is also negatively affected by the experience of poverty. Poverty affects children's health both directly and indirectly – directly through poor nutrition, low-quality housing, and lack of access to quality medical services and indirectly through the effect of poverty on the way children see themselves, their future, and their place in the world. A negative outlook is often directly linked to a child's perception of the neighbourhood in which s/he lives, and the level of exposure s/he has had to drugs, violence and anti-social behaviour. Some neighbourhoods are seen as places of fear and children are acutely aware of the stigma attached to them:

"I'm getting as far away from here as possible. I want to go somewhere where it is quiet and you are not frightened."

Though perhaps the least visible and hardest to quantify, the emotional effects of poverty on children leave permanent scars that can affect the course of a child's future. These emotional effects should not be underestimated. Children in poverty know from an early age that they do not fit in with their peers. They cannot take part in many of the activities that other children take for granted, like birthday parties and school trips.

Poor children are also victims of aggressive marketing and advertising. Wearing particular brand names of

clothing, runners and school bags becomes a passport to acceptance by others. Not having the 'right' clothes can mean that a child is shunned by his or her peers. This creates a vicious circle of stress, with children feeling ashamed when their parents cannot afford brand names.

"Well there's about four you would be alright with: Adidas, Nike, Ellesse and Reebok. Sometimes when my ma can't afford any of these, I try and get ones with no name. Having ones with no name is better than having a crap name. You can pretend with ones with no name. Sometimes I make them all dirty so that it looks as if they're designer."

In extreme cases the parents' inability to afford the 'right' brand label for their children results in them being bullied:

"You have to wear designer stuff. All the kids have designer stuff and we haven't. We stick out and we're picked on…"

Way Forward

In recent years, the Government has set admirable goals to tackle the problem of child poverty. The National Children's Strategy (NCS), developed in 2000, and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (NAPSincl) are the primary policy frameworks for reducing poverty and social inequality among children.

These strategies focus on including children's participation in the decision-making process, as well as looking at ways to reduce deprivation among children, particularly by increasing educational and family income supports. The government will track the impact of government policies and its progress toward these goals by the major study *Growing up in Ireland*, (to be carried out from 2006 through 2012). However, much specific policy work remains to be done in the fight against child poverty.

Good quality, well paid work is a key route out of poverty. Improving employment rates for households with children is therefore one of the best ways to reduce child poverty.

In order for parents – particularly mothers – to go to work, they need to be sure that their children will receive high quality child care. Improving the number and quality of childcare providers, particularly in disadvantaged areas and for lone parents, is critical to solving child poverty.

Parents also need to know that the family will be better off if they go to work and that they will not lose out

on important benefits, such as the medical card and rent allowance. Benefits should be reduced gradually as income increases rather than cutting benefits all at once, which might discourage parents from getting jobs.

Ireland has made great strides in achieving its targets on child benefit, which is paid to all children regardless of income. Much more needs to be done, however, through targeted allowances such as the Child Dependant Allowance (CDA), which is paid to families on welfare and the Family Income Supplement (FIS), which is paid to working families on a low income.

Income increases alone, however, will not solve the problem of child poverty. The State provides generous income support for families with children but doesn't adequately assist families to meet the costs of childcare, education, healthcare and housing.

Services to children – particularly health and education services – must be improved. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds need extra help to succeed in school. Pre-school childcare and education can give a child the extra advantage he or she needs to make a successful start.

Extra supports are also needed to encourage children to stay in school in order to secure their future. Parents need help particularly with school-related expenses such as books and uniforms.

Facts and Statistics

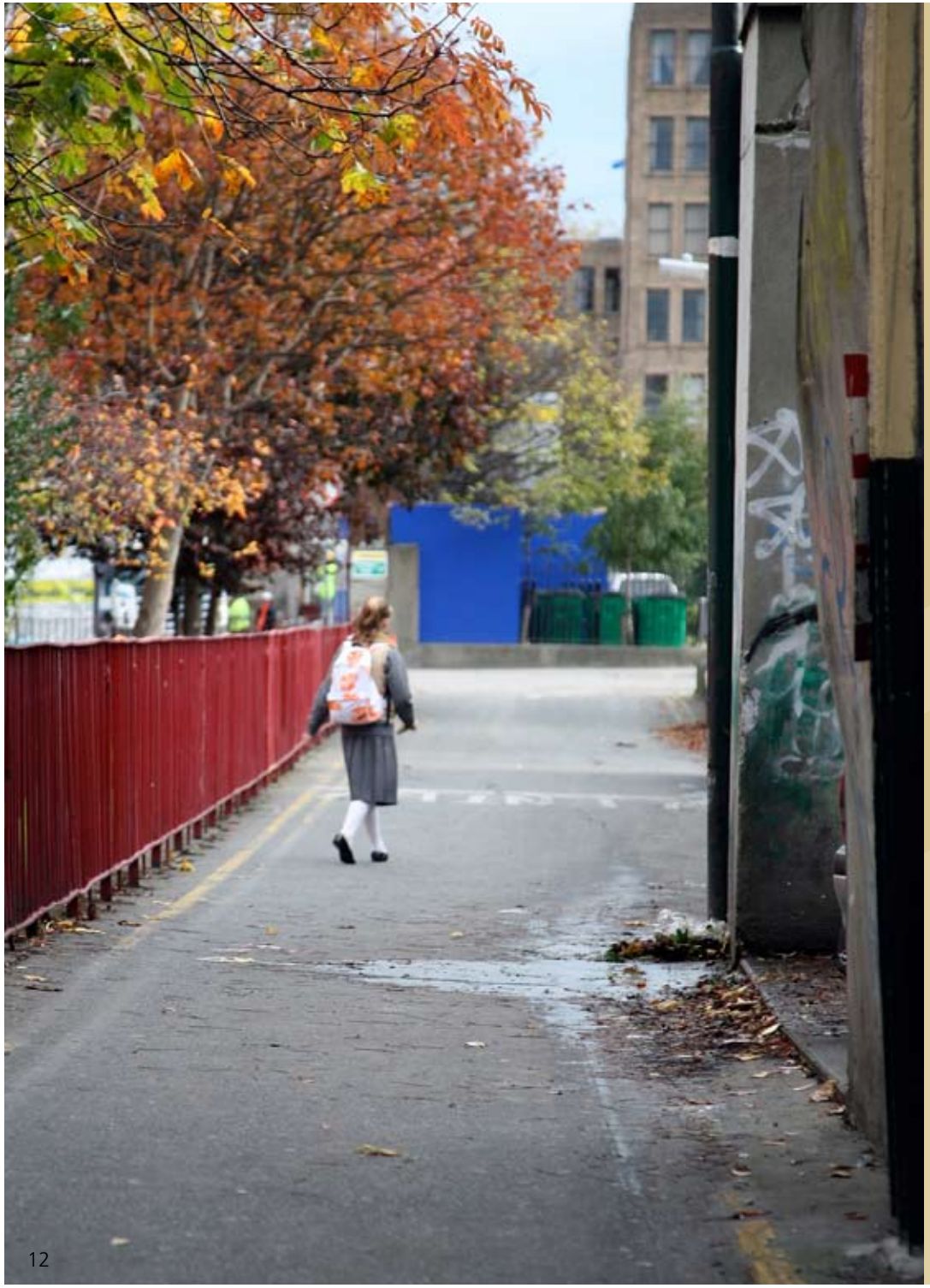
Child Poverty Rates in Ireland		
	% at risk of poverty	% in consistent poverty
Ages 0-14	20.2	11.1
Total Population	17.0	6.9

Source: EU-SILC 2006

Rates of Household Poverty in Ireland		
	% at risk of poverty	% in consistent poverty
Households with children	54.3	65.5
Households without children	45.8	34.5

Source: EU-SILC 2006

- Ireland has one of the highest rates of child poverty in Europe.
- 21.2% of children under age 15 are at risk of poverty.[vii]
- 11.1% of children live in consistent poverty.[vii] This is the highest level of consistent poverty across all age groups.[ix]
- During the period 1994 – 2001 almost one in five Irish children lived in income poverty for five years or more.[x]
- Members of households with children are almost twice as likely to suffer consistent poverty as those without children.[xi]



- Children in lone parent households spend substantially more time in poverty than children in two parent households.
- The chance that a lone parent, with a child under 5, will get out of poverty was 66% lower than a lone parent with a child aged 12 to 17.[xii]
- In 2006, 12.3% of the 18-24 year old population were early school leavers.[xiii]
- One in ten children leaves primary school with serious literacy problems.[xiv]

Glossary

Child Dependent Allowance (CDA):
Child Dependant Allowance (CDA) is an increase in payment to the adult recipient of a social welfare allowance for the costs of maintaining a child or children. It is payable for children under 18 years of age and for children under 22 who are in full-time education.

Early School Leaving:
Non-participation in school before reaching the age of 16 years or before completion of three years post-primary education, whichever is later.

Family Income Supplement (FIS):
A weekly, tax-free payment for families living on a low-income from paid employment.

National Children's Strategy (NCS):
A ten-year plan published in 2000 by the Government, with the intention to improve life for all people under age 18 in Ireland by improving health, education, leisure facilities, and other supports.

Working Poor:
Individuals and groups who maintain regular, full-time employment, but remain in poverty due to low wages or high expenses.

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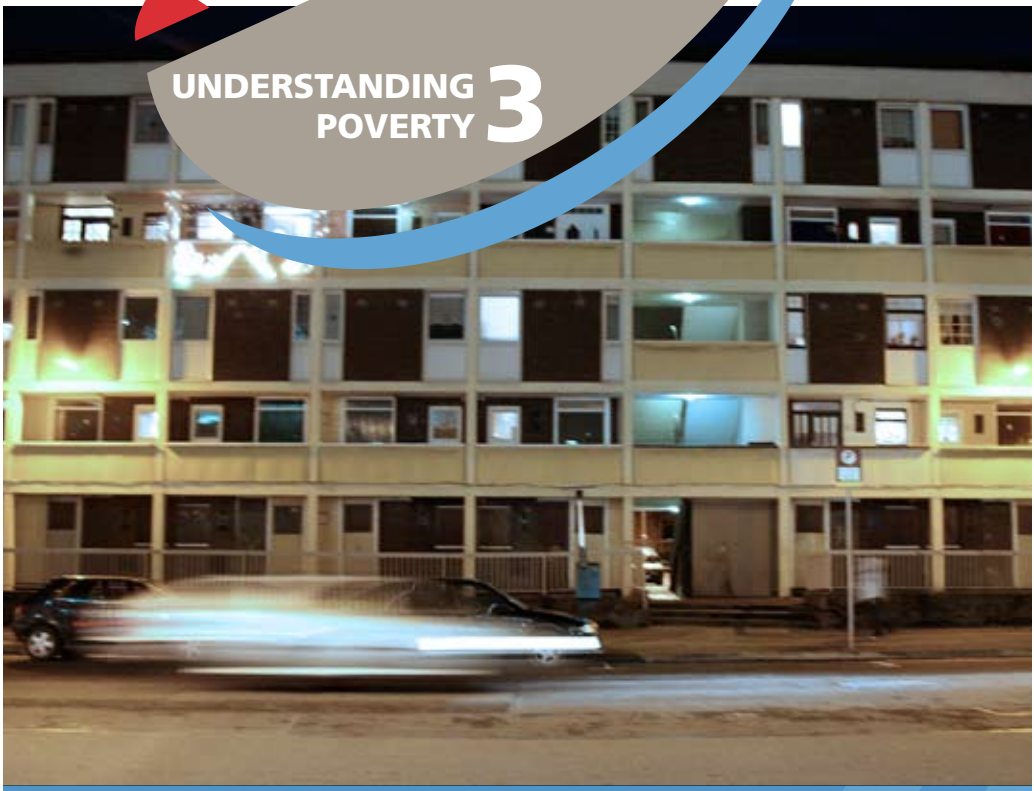

EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY

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…The provision of well paid and secure jobs for people who are most distant from employment is a key anti-poverty strategy. …

Links between employment, unemployment and poverty

Employment provides income for over two million people in Ireland. For many this is their primary or only source of income. Employment not only helps to ward off poverty by providing a regular source of income. It also provides social networks and social status.

People who are unemployed may experience low income, poverty and social exclusion. The provision of well paid and secure jobs for people who are most distant from employment is a key anti-poverty strategy.

While employment is an important route out of poverty, it is not necessarily an option for everybody in poverty. For example, paid full time employment may not be appropriate or suit the needs of particular groups such as children, older people, people with illness, and carers.

The extent to which the income from social welfare can replace the income from paid employment is a key factor in avoiding poverty. Similarly, the extent to which social welfare can boost income for a family whose main source of income is low-paid employment impacts on whether they will experience poverty.

The duration of unemployment also affects the likelihood of falling into poverty. People who are out of work long-term (over 12 months) have a higher risk of poverty than those who have episodes of employment and unemployment or are unemployed for a short period. The more unemployment experienced in a 12 month period, the higher the risk of poverty as savings and resources are exhausted.

Unemployment affects both individuals and households. When the head of a household is unemployed, and/or there are children in the household, there is a particularly high risk of poverty. This is also the case when households are 'jobless', i.e. households where no one is employed. Other earners in the household or alternative sources of income usually reduce the risk of household poverty.

Unemployment and poverty seriously impact on health, including psychological health. The stress of a household coping with inadequate money and the loss of social status, social networks and self esteem contributes to the deterioration of the health of unemployed people and their families (see chapter on health).

Employment

In 2006, for the first time, more than 2 million people in Ireland were in paid employment. Ireland's employment rate for women rose by almost 15 percentage points between 1996 and 2005 while it rose by 9 percentage points for men in the same period.[i] However, towards the end of 2008 economic growth and employment levels started to drop in response to domestic and international economic developments.

The National Competitiveness Council considers that the growth in employment in Ireland over the last ten years was facilitated by several factors. These include:[ii]

- Increase in the number of people of working age in the population – enhanced by numbers of returning Irish emigrants and new immigrants
- Increase in the number of women aged 18-35 in the labour force

From 2000 to 2005 there were shifts in the numbers employed from manufacturing, agriculture, fishing and forestry to service-based employment such as:[iii]

- hotels and restaurants
- health
- financial services
- wholesale and retail services
- transport and communications services.

In 2005, construction accounted for over a tenth (12.6%) of people employed.[iv] Though the number of people employed in construction rose steadily between 2002 and 2007, by the third quarter of 2008 it had dropped by 9.5% and further decreases were predicted for 2009.[v]

The service sector employs the majority of immigrants with work permits, though the health sector, agriculture, construction and the hotel and restaurant industry employ substantial numbers of immigrants as well. Many of these jobs are low paid and insecure. Asylum seekers are not permitted to work in Ireland.

Sharing employment

Over the last decade there have been significant changes in the sharing of employment within households. The number of households with two or more income earners has increased, largely due to the rising levels of female employment.[vi] The distribution of hours worked across earners also indicates the sharing of employment. Lone parents work relatively few hours per week, often because of the way childcare commitements, tax and social welfare polices impact on their take home pay (see chapter on lone parents).

Unemployment

The rate of unemployment increased slightly since the all-time low of 3.9% unemployment in 2001 and it was 5.5% in 2007[vii]. However, it has risen sharply since and in November 2008 it was 7.8%. This was higher than expected and further rises were predicted in 2009.[viii]

People who have been long-term unemployed may find it very difficult to get back into paid work. Employers often prefer to recruit people with current work records because there is sometimes a skills mismatch between people who are long-term unemployed and current vacancies. Low levels of self-esteem and confidence among people out of work for a long time may also be a barrier.

Unemployment is a significant cause of poverty. However, being out of work is not necessarily the same thing as being poor. Savings, redundancy payments or family support can provide financial resources during a short period out of work and this can protect from poverty. Unemployment over an extended period of time uses up these resources and this can result in poverty. This is particularly the case when the head of a household is unemployed. When members of a household other than the household head are unemployed, there may be a reduced poverty risk.

On the other hand, employment does not necessarily prevent poverty. The most recent poverty data from the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)

highlights that, in 2006, about 1.7% of people in consistent poverty were in work.[ix]

There has been a rise in the numbers of people claiming employment-related welfare payments such as the One Parent Family Payment (OFP) and the Disability Allowance and they make up an increasing proportion of people on the Community Employment scheme. The numbers of people receiving Jobseekers Benefit (126,058) has more than doubled since 2006 and the number claiming Jobseekers Allowance (131,373) has also risen sharply. [x]

Reduction in income tax rates, allowing people to retain certain social welfare benefits (such as medical cards) for a period after starting work, and higher wage levels for entrance-level employment are among a range of policy measures that have helped people move from welfare to employment.

Groups experiencing unemployment

People whose skill and educational difficulties are accompanied by health and disability problems, low self-esteem, and in some instances particularly acute problems such as addiction, prison records, and homelessness are the most marginalised from paid work.[xi]

There is a link between educational achievement and employment and between educational achievement and earnings. Low educational attainment makes it harder to compete for decently paid and secure jobs. Unemployment rates among those considered low-skilled are double that of people considered high-skilled (see chapter on education). This cycle repeats itself from generation to generation. Children living in poverty are more likely to be among those who leave school earliest or who underachieve in the education system, and therefore experience poverty as adults.

People who are 'displaced' from the labour market, including those with low-skills and/or poor educational levels (such as early school leavers, some lone parents, or some women returners); those with out-of-date skills (including those being made redundant, some women returners and the older unemployed) and immigrants whose qualifications may be unrecognised here are also vulnerable to unemployment. The number of foreign nationals signing on the Live Register rose by 63% in 2008 and, at September 2008, they comprised 17% of those on the Live Register.[xii]

Discrimination can also affect the job prospects of specific social groups, including people with disabilities and minority ethnic groups, such as Travellers.

Policy, employment, unemployment and poverty

The Irish National Employment Action Plan and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007 – 2016 are two primary policy frameworks for addressing employment, unemployment and poverty. The Employment Action Plan was adopted by the Government as its response to the European Employment Guidelines. It includes a commitment to a more systematic engagement of the Employment Services with the unemployed. Foras Áiseanna Saothair (FÁS), Ireland's training and employment authority, provides a series of services for those seeking

employment. The main employment schemes are Community Employment, Job Initiative and Social Economy. These provide opportunities for work and/or training within local communities. In 2005 there were 25,000 places overall on these schemes. FÁS recently extended its pilot social inclusion scheme, *Expanding the Workforce*, which provides supports and services for women seeking to enter or return to work.[xiii]

The National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008 incorporates a series of objectives and policy measures to tackle poverty. It states that priority is now being given to increasing employment participation among marginalised groups and improving access to quality education for those in low-skilled employment.[xiv]

The extent to which social welfare protects people who are unemployed from poverty and the extent to which people on welfare are facilitated to move back to work are key policy considerations for poverty. Social welfare payments, including child and family payments, and the availability to unemployed people of secondary benefits, such as medical cards, are crucial influences on the risk of poverty and on an individual's ability to return to paid employment.

Social welfare payments are announced in the Government's Budget, usually in December each year. As an anti-poverty strategy social welfare payments need to keep pace with the general standard of living. Ensuring that social welfare payments and secondary benefits do not act as an 'unemployment trap' for individuals or households on welfare is a general policy concern. This means that if people return to work they may be worse off as their social welfare money or other provision for unemployed people would be withdrawn and they would be subject to income tax on their earnings. In other words, people continue to be trapped in unemployment as the monetary and other benefits they receive when unemployed are of greater value to them than their take-home pay from work.

Conclusion

Ireland's economic growth has delivered significant job growth which has helped reduce unemployment rates. However, unemployment continues to be a significant cause of poverty, with specific groups at risk. National policy frameworks seek to prevent unemployment and to proactively support people as they make the transition from social welfare to employment.

Facts and Statistics

- By mid-2008, there were over 2.10 million people in employment.[xv]
- The overall unemployment rate at November 2008 was 7.8%.[xvi]

- The long-term unemployment rate in September 2008 was 1.6%.[xvii]
- In November 2008 almost 58,000 people under 25 were on the Live Register[xviii]
- At 7.8% the Irish unemployment rate is no longer the lowest in the EU. The rate in Denmark is 2.3% and it is 2.8% in the Netherlands.[xix]
- The average unemployment rate for the EU27 was 6.9% in August 2008%.[xx]
- Over a fifth of people (22.8%) experiencing poverty in 2006 were unemployed. This was a slight increase on the figures for 2005 when 21.6% of those in poverty were unemployed.[xxi]
- 1.3% of people in employment in 2007 experienced consistent poverty.[xxii]
- Over 6% of those engaged in home duties (unpaid) experienced consistent poverty in 2007.[xxiii]

There are variations in the labour force participation rates in different geographical areas:

- Census data from 2006 illustrates that labour force participation rates are highest in and around Dublin. However, Dublin suffered the highest proportion of redundancies in 2008 (41%). The border region had the highest increase in job losses, with a rise in redundancies of 83%, compared to the national average increase of 43%[xxiv]
- The lowest rates of labour force participation are in Cork City (54.6%), Limerick City (56.7%), Donegal (57.2%), and Mayo (58.4%).[xxv]

- The state-wide labour force participation rate was 64.7% in November 2008[xxvi]

Men continue to earn more from employment than women. Female average earnings were 70% of male earnings (€30,109 as against €43,270) in 2006.[xxvii]

Glossary

Consistent poverty: Relative income poverty combined with the lack of basic items such as a warm coat, sufficient food or adequate heating.

Employment rate: Percentage of working age people in the labour force, compared to the total population.

Household head: Primary source of income for the household, who are considered his/her dependents.

Long-term unemployment: Lack of work for over 12 months.

Poverty risk: The proportion of people living in households where their disposable income is below the threshold of 60% of the national median. The EU measure of poverty risk is set at 60% of national median income.

Unemployment rate: Percentage of working age people without jobs, compared to the total population.

Work permit: Required for non-EU nationals to obtain work in Ireland.

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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 3

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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 4

LONE PARENTS

Combat Poverty Agency

working for a poverty-free Ireland

…Taking on the full parenting role for a child or children can restrict a parent's options…

Lone Parents

The family in Irish society is changing. With the increase in both marital separations and non-marital births, one notable change is the rise in the number of lone parent families.

Lone parent families have a higher than average risk of poverty, as they face the challenge of parenting alone on a single income. This risk increases over time, particularly if the lone parent has a low income and lacks childcare support. Despite the availability of state supports, many lone parents find themselves trapped in long-term poverty and dependent on social welfare.

Lone parents and poverty

In 2006, there were 189,240 lone parents in Ireland, comprising 162,551 lone mothers (86%) and 26,689 lone fathers (14%). This is one in six of all families. 121,283 children under the age of 15 live in one parent families.[i]

Lone parents have the highest risk of both consistent and income poverty of all household types. 39.6% of lone parents were at risk of poverty in 2006. 32.5% of lone parent households were classified as consistently poor that same year.[ii]

Why are lone parents poor?

There are a number of reasons why lone parents have the highest risk of consistent poverty and deprivation.

Low income

Many lone parents, particularly those dependent on social welfare, live on an income just above the poverty line. While it may be possible to manage on a day to day basis, any sudden or unexpected expenditure may be difficult. This can include things like a child or parent getting sick, holidays and birthdays, a death in the family, school costs or the breakdown of a basic item such as a washing machine.

Lone parents are particularly vulnerable to debt; 40% experience debt from ordinary living expenses.[iii] Though research has found that lone parent households report low levels of debt relative to the amount of money they have available, many are refused basic banking facilities from mainstream financial services providers. This forces lone parent households to use unsanctioned and more expensive credit.

Lack of employment and education

Employment is one of the main routes out of poverty. Half of lone parents with children under 15 are employed.[iv] The rest are not working for a variety of reasons, mostly related to the care of their child(ren). Many lone parents are working in low quality and/or temporary positions, making them susceptible to job insecurity and low income levels.

The absence of affordable childcare can make it difficult for lone parents to work. They may need employment which allows flexibility to care for their children when required, such as when a child is sick or on school holidays. This can be difficult to arrange, especially for those parents who lack family or community support structures.

Levels of education among lone parents are low. Almost one quarter of lone parents (under 65 years of age) have either no formal education or primary level only, and nearly half have only basic education to the minimum school leaving age.[v] This can make it difficult for lone parents to get jobs which pay well enough to provide for a family.

Employment traps

The move from welfare into work can be a complex one, involving sudden withdrawal of some benefits and gradual withdrawal of others. This can create uncertainties, delays in payments, and in some cases the lone parent being financially worse off in a job than in receipt of social welfare.

The main social welfare payment for lone parents is the One Parent Family Payment (OFP). There are 80,366 lone parents (42% of all lone parents) on this payment.[vi] Its current value is €185.80 per week. See Welfare.ie for updates. In addition, all lone parents receive Child Benefit of €160 per month per child and lone parents in receipt of OFP receive Child Dependent Allowance of €22 per week per child.[vii] See Welfare.ie for updates.

Lone parents with an income below a certain level are entitled to the OFP payment. These parents can earn up to €146.50 and still get the payment (earnings disregarded). Those who earn between €146.50 and €400 per week are entitled to half the payment.[viii] See Welfare.ie for updates. Unmarried and separated lone parents are required to try to get maintenance from the other parent. Maintenance can affect the level of the OFP.

When a person on OFP is working but on a low income they may be entitled to Family Income Supplement (FIS). FIS is payable at 60% of the difference between the person's weekly income and the income limit set by the Department of Social and Family Affairs – this is €480 for a family with one child.[ix] See Welfare.ie for updates. The person must work at least 19 hours per week and have at least one child. All these parameters can make it difficult to predict levels of income when making choices about taking up work or not.

The complexities of welfare payments can trap a lone parent in part-time low paid employment. Their income may actually fall once they move above the earnings disregards levels and stop receiving welfare payments. This is why the Community Employment Scheme has been popular with lone parents: it is part-time, flexible, locally available and often includes childcare. However, only a minority of lone parents progress from Community Employment into other jobs. It is estimated that some 60% (48,000) of OFP recipients are working. Just over one tenth (13%) of these are engaged in Community Employment, Jobs Initiative and Social Economy programmes.[x]

Many lone parents are living in private rented accommodation. If they are on a low income/social welfare benefit they are entitled to rent supplement under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance Scheme. This can be a major factor affecting a lone parent's decision to take a job as they may no longer be eligible for the rent supplement payment and have to pay their rent, possibly making them financially worse off overall. Many lone parents are on waiting lists for a local authority house and under the new rental accommodation scheme local authorities will have to provide social housing to those with accommodation needs.

All lone parents on social welfare/low income are entitled to a medical card. The potential loss of this card when income goes above a certain level may also deter a lone parent from taking a job or progressing in employment, particularly if they have a child prone to illness.

Parenting Alone

A particular issue for lone parents is the sheer fact that they are parenting alone. Taking on the full parenting role for a child or children can restrict a parent's options. This becomes especially evident in relation to the "co-habitation rule" for those in receipt of social welfare.

The co-habitation rule means that lone parents who "cohabit" lose their entitlement to the One Parent Family Payment, even if the person with whom they are co-habiting is not a parent of the child(ren) or contributing financially to their upbringing.[xi] This restriction on cohabitation can deter the formation of relationships, with a subsequent instability in the lives of lone parents and their children, increasing the risk of poverty.

Lived Experience

For many lone parents living on a low income their overriding concern is the needs of their children. When the bills are paid there is often no money left for socialising or providing a treat for the children:

"Being on the money lone parents get you can't go out. I can't afford to go to the beach or anything like that."

Trying to buy clothes for children and providing for Christmas and confirmations or communions puts a particular strain on the family finances, often making families vulnerable to debt:

"I borrowed from Provident to get clothes for the children for last Christmas and I'm still paying this back."

Getting a job does not necessarily improve family finances:

"I was on the social welfare and tried to do a Community Employment Scheme. It was only an extra €26 a week but it would have cost €65 or €78 for a crèche to have the baby minded."

Way Forward

A number of things should be done to ensure that lone parents are not in poverty.

These include:

- Social welfare incomes which are adequate and lift people above the poverty line
- Provision of early childhood care and education which is available, accessible and affordable
- Education and training supports
- Available and suitable jobs
- Fewer poverty traps

We should strive to provide:

- An adequate level of payment for the lone parent and child(ren)
- The facility to move between/combine work and caring
- The facility to form relationships without penalty
- Support from both parents, if possible

Many reviews of lone parents, their payments and risk of poverty have been carried out and many proposals made for reform. The most recent are contained in a Government Discussion Paper: *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents* (2006)

The proposals include:[xii]

- Strengthening supports for lone parents to return to employment, education or training
- Actively engaging with lone parents in receipt of benefit
- Improving the supply and affordability of childcare

- Reforming the social welfare payment
- Ensuring agencies providing supports work together.

In relation to the reform of the social welfare payment it is proposed that the One Parent Family Payment be replaced with a new means-tested Parental Allowance.

This Parental Allowance would:

- Be available to all parents in receipt of social welfare
- Be paid to the main carer of the child regardless of whether there was joint or lone parenting
- Allow the recipient to receive the payment until the youngest child is aged 5. For the following 2 years the recipient would engage with social welfare staff to assess future options
- End when the youngest child reached age 7.

Combat Poverty supports the broad thrust of these proposals but believes that:

- Child income support and educational and training supports should be improved in tandem with the implementation of the proposals to maximise their effectiveness in tackling poverty among lone parents and children.
- Resources should be provided up front in the areas of jobs' facilitators, childcare supports and increased targeted investment in early education.
- There should be some flexibility in the implementation of the proposals.

Facts and Statistics

Numbers of Lone Parents

	All Lone Parents with resident child/ren of any age			Lone Parent Families with dependent children (<15)			All Families
	Lone	Lone Fathers	All Lone	Lone	Lone Fathers	All Lone	
1991	94,241	19,167	113,408	38,235	5,836	44,071	757,925
1996	108,282	20,834	129,116	49,819	6,293	56,112	806,835
2002	130,364	23,499	153,863	62,264	6,361	68,625	924,464
2006	162,551	26,689	189,240				

Source: Census of Population

Lone Parent Status, 2006

	Single	Married	Separated/ Divorced	Widowed	Total
Female	64,332	6,680	47,544	43,995	162,551
Male	3,313	2,932	8,742	11,702	26,689
Total	67,645	9,612	56,286	55,697	189,240

Source: Census of Population, 2006

Poverty among Lone Parents, 2006

	Lone Parents %	Population %
Consistent Poverty	32.5	6.9
Risk of Poverty	39.6	17.0

Source: EU-SILC, CSO, 2006

Elements of Poverty 2005		
	Lone Parents %	Population %
No substantial meal	19.3	5
Without a meal with meat or chicken	11.8	2.9
Without a roast	20.1	4.2
Without shoes	11.9	3.3
Without a warm waterproof coat	13.4	2.8
Without new clothes	23.5	6.8
Without heating	30.6	6.5
Debt from living expenses	39.7	10

Source: EU-SILC, CSO, 2005

Lone Parents in Receipt of One Parent Family Payment (OFP)				
Year	Unmarried	Separated / Divorced	Prisoners Spouse	TOTAL
2000	56,046	16,630	98	72,774
2001	58,755	17,031	105	75,891
2002	60,662	17,301	107	78,030
2003	61,132	16,989	103	79,296
2004	61,884	17,135	106	80,103

Source: Department of Social and Family Affairs

Age Profile of One Parent Family Recipients (excluding widows), 2005							
	Under 20	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	Over 50	TOTAL
Numbers	1,038	15,552	18,353	27,881	13,453	3,173	79,450
%	1.3%	19.5%	23.1%	35.1%	16.9%	4.0%	100%

Source: Department of Social and Family Affairs

OFP Recipients by Number of Children, 2005								
	1 child	2 children	3 children	4 children	5 children	6 or more	Total	Total Children
No.	47,147	20,954	7,975	2,809	834	428	80,147	131,165
%	58.8%	26.1%	10.0%	3.5%	1.0%	0.5%	100%	

Source: Department of Social and Family Affairs

Glossary

Basic Banking Facilities:

Simple, low cost current accounts.

Co-Habitation Rule:

To receive OFP, lone parents must not be co-habiting. This is defined as "A qualified parent shall not, if and so long as that parent and any person are cohabiting as husband and wife, be entitled to and shall be disqualified from receiving payment of one-parent family payment". Persons are determined to be co-habiting if they share a residence, finances, household duties, sex and go out socially.

Community Employment (CE):

A scheme designed to help people who are long-term unemployed or otherwise disadvantaged to get back to work. 26% of the 22,000 participants are lone parents.

Family Income Supplement (FIS):

This is a tax free payment to married and unmarried employees with children, working a minimum of 19 hours per week. 9,000 lone parents are in receipt of FIS.

Job Facilitator:

Job facilitators help inform and assist people to move from welfare to work. They are employed by the Employment Support Unit of the Department of Social and Family Affairs, and are based at local Social Welfare Offices around the country.

Jobs Initiative (JI):

An initiative where full-time employment is provided in the social economy to those over 35 years of age who fulfil certain criteria. 23% of the 2,000 participants are lone parents.

Lone Parent:

Someone who has one or more children and is parenting alone. Two classifications are commonly used: (i) lone parents with resident child/ren of any age, never married; (ii) lone parents with resident dependent child/ren under 15.

Medical Card:

Medical cards are issued by the Health Service Executive to enable recipients and their dependents to receive certain health care services free of charge: GP services, prescribed drugs and medicines, in-patient public hospital services, dental and aural services, medical appliances. All lone parents with no other income other than OFP receive a medical card. Since 2005 a GP Visit Card is also available which provides entitlement to GP services only, for those on a slightly higher income.

One Parent Family Payment (OFP):

A means-tested payment which is made to men and women who are caring for a child/ren without the support of a partner. The claimant must be widowed, separated or divorced, unmarried or a prisoner's spouse.

Parental Allowance (PA):

A means tested payment proposed for low income families (both two and one parent) with young children. It would replace the OFP and Qualified Adult Allowance. The PA would be paid to the main carer of the child/ren and would be time limited in respect of the age of the youngest child.

Poverty Trap:

Where someone would be financially worse off in a job than they would be on social welfare.

Qualified Adult Allowance (QAA):
Paid to the spouse or partner of a social welfare recipient. Payment is currently about 70% of the personal rate of welfare payment.

Rental Accommodation Scheme:
A scheme administered by the local authorities which is intended to provide an additional source of rented accommodation for eligible persons, to meet long-term housing need. People on Rent Supplement for 18 months or more are expected to be accommodated by the local authorities under this scheme.

Rent Supplement:
A payment for those in receipt of a social welfare or health service executive payment to cover the costs of their rent. It provides short-term income support to eligible people living in private rented accommodation whose means are insufficient to meet their accommodation costs and who do not have accommodation available to them from any other source. 13,000 lone parents are in receipt of Rent Supplement.

Social Economy Programme:
This programme supports the development of social economy enterprises and provides sustainable jobs for the long-term unemployed. Lone parents make up 22% of the 2,000 participants.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA):
A weekly allowance paid to people who do not have enough means to meet their needs and those of their children. It is run by the Health Service Executive through Community Welfare Officers at local health centres. It is sometimes referred to as the "Scheme of Last Resort".

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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 5

OLDER PEOPLE AND POVERTY

Combat Poverty Agency

working for a poverty-free Ireland

…many pensioners find themselves stretched to maintain even a basic standard of living in their old age…

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 5

Older People and Poverty

While many people move into their old age looking forward to the chance for more leisure, new experiences and quality time with friends, others face a future of poverty, isolation and exclusion.

13.6% of people aged 65 and older* live below the income poverty threshold, compared with a national average of 17.0%. This means that one in every five older people survives on an income of less than €202 per week.[i]

As they get older, people encounter a number of problems that they may not have experienced in youth. In a recent survey of older people, half identified 'making ends meet' as a major issue. Other problems mentioned were transport, loneliness, and keeping warm in the winter.[ii]

Despite this, people aged 65 and over have the lowest level of consistent poverty of all age groups, with only a small proportion of those living below the income poverty threshold unable to afford basic items such as

* For the purpose of this chapter, 'older people' are defined as people aged 65 and over.

adequate food, heating and clothing.[iii] This apparent contradiction is mainly due to the fact that older people tend to have fewer financial commitments than younger people. They have fewer dependents, typically don't pay mortgages, and usually have acquired other assets and resources over time.

Social Exclusion

Although useful as a measure of extreme deprivation, consistent poverty gives a limited insight into the experiences of older people living on low incomes. It does not measure the extent to which older people are excluded from society because they can't afford the cost of going out, or their (in)ability to pay for other critical expenses such as medication costs, funerals, or the upkeep of their homes.

Causes of Poverty Among Older People

Income

Low income levels are a key cause of poverty among older people. Pensions supply 84% of income in households with older people.[iv] Pensioners whose incomes are particularly low are those on a Widow's (Contributory and Non-Contributory) Pension and those on the State (Non-Contributory) Pension.

During the last decade of the 20th century, there was a notable increase in the risk of poverty for older people as pension increases rose at a slower rate than typical income levels. With limited opportunities to supplement their incomes through employment, many pensioners find themselves stretched to maintain even a basic standard of living in their old age.

Gender

Older women are particularly vulnerable to poverty. Typically, they are less likely to have worked in paid employment or in sectors where they had been making regular insurance contributions. Many have no pension rights, and face particular risks of poverty and social exclusion as a result. In addition, women are significantly more likely to live alone than men, which also increases their risk of poverty.

Discrimination

Age discrimination contributes to poverty, with stereotypical assumptions about the capability of older people apparent in many aspects of society, including:

- employment and income levels
- access to health, education, and other services
- barriers to participation caused by physical inaccessibility and insurance stipulations

Age related costs

Older people often face extra costs in later life as a result of illness, or when, because of the death of a partner or companion, they are forced to live alone on a single income.

Aspects of Poverty Among Older People

As well as the risks of monetary poverty, issues around living alone, reduced social and family contact, mobility and health, accessibility, fear and even abuse can lead to greater risks of social exclusion for many older people. Additional needs can turn an adequate income into an inadequate one and tragic events involving older people only serve to highlight the particular risks faced by many older people, often unseen by the public eye.

Isolation

Isolation is a major problem within the older population in Ireland. Older people are more likely to have minimal social contacts, particularly if they are over 80, experience poor health, or have lower levels of educational attainment and socio-economic status. 29% of older people in Ireland live alone.[v]

Isolation can lead to depression, loneliness and, in extreme cases, death. Isolation can take different forms, to different degrees and be both an objective and a subjective phenomenon. No one indicator can give an accurate account of the extent of isolation. Even temporary isolation, where a contact or support structure that normally exists is withdrawn for a period of, for example, holidays, can carry great risks should support be needed. These risks are not revealed when it seems that support is in place.

The fact that women live longer than men and suffer greater risks of low pension income means that older women in particular often face greater risks of isolation. Over 65% of older people living alone in Ireland are women.[vi]

Health

While acknowledging that many older Irish people are healthy and self-sufficient, it must also be recognised that substantial numbers of older people experience chronic physical or mental health problems. More than 46% of older people with chronic illness have mobility problems. Difficulty of movement due to chronic illness is particularly marked among older women.[vii]

For many, lack of access to adequate health and transport services can exacerbate the issue, and force older people into a life of isolation and ill health.

Older people tend to experience poorer health than younger people, which can seriously impact on their ability to participate and contribute to society, and lead to poverty and social exclusion. Accessible prevention and treatment services is a key concern among this age group, as early detection and treatment of illness increases cure rate, saves money, and allows sufferers the greatest chance of continuing to lead a full and active life within society.

Household Deprivation

While older people are less likely to experience consistent poverty and basic deprivation than the rest of the population, they have the highest rate of housing deprivation. Older people are less likely to have amenities such as central heating, a bath or shower, hot water,

and running water. They are also less likely to engage in home improvements, because of the additional expenses involved in improving older dwellings.

Fuel Poverty

25% of older people who live alone do not have central heating.[viii] Known as 'fuel poverty,' the inability to afford adequate heating for a household can result in persistent illness and even premature mortality, particularly among older people. Ireland has the highest rates of fuel poverty in northern Europe among older people living alone.

Way Forward

Policies targeting older people significantly reduce the risk of poverty, with social transfers such as old-age pensions and survivors' benefits cutting the risk of poverty among older people by over 60%.

There are a number of policies that can further reduce the risk of poverty for the older population.

- Increase the value of pensions to reflect the rising levels of wages and cost of living.
- Set up a compulsory pension scheme so that all retired people will have access to some form of income.
- Increase the living alone allowance for older people.
- Provide older people with adequate housing support.
- Provide adequate transportation services for older people, particularly isolated rural dwellers.

Facts and Statistics

Population

- In 2006, 11% of Ireland's population was aged 65 years and over. 44% of older people were aged 75 and over.[ix]
- The National Council on Ageing and Older People predicts that, by 2021, the percentage of Irish people aged 65 and over will rise to around 15%, the numbers of those aged 75 and over will rise as high as 285,000, and the number of Irish people aged 80 and over will increase by 37%.
- 56% of the older people in Ireland are women; 44% are men.[x]
- Women in Ireland live longer than men. At the age of 60, a woman can expect to live another 22.9 years, while a man can expect to live another 19.2 years.[xi]
- Rural regions tend to have the oldest populations. In 2002, Dublin Fingal had the youngest population, with an average age of 32, closely followed by Dublin South, with an average age of 32.1. County Leitrim had the oldest population, with an average age of 38.5 years, followed by County Roscommon, with an average age of 38 years.[xii] The National Council on Ageing and Older People projects that the rural regions will continue to have the oldest age profiles in the coming decades, as they are likely to experience static or steadily falling numbers of people under age 65.

Poverty and Lifestyle of Older People

In 2006 13.6% of people over 65 were at risk of poverty, and 13.6% were living below the threshold.[xiii]

Category	Number	% of total population
Men aged 65+	297,095	4.9
Women aged 65+	260,831	6.2
Total aged 65+	467,926	11.0

Central Statistics Office, Population Census, 2006

'At Risk' of Poverty Rate (60%) After Social Transfers			
Age Group	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
0-14	19.4	21.1	20.2
15-64	16.2	17.0	16.6
65+	13.6	13.7	13.6

Source: EU SILC 2006, Central Statistics Office

Consistent Poverty Rate (60%) level Using Basic Life-Style Deprivation Indicators			
Age Group	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
0-14	11.2	11.1	11.1
15-64	6.2	6.7	6.5
65+	2.4	1.9	2.1

Source: EU SILC 2006, Central Statistics Office

In 2003, 26% of older people were in receipt of the Old Age Contributory Pension, 19.8% were in receipt of the Retirement Pension and 19.9% were in receipt of the Old Age Non-Contributory Pension.[xiv]

135,696 older people have a disability. This comprises 32.2% of the total older population. The average older person affected by disability has 2.8 disabilities, compared with 1.9 for the rest of the population.[xv]

4% act as unpaid carers for a family member or friend who has a long-term illness or disability. Over 60% of older carers are women.[xvi]

There are 422,245 people aged over 65 living in private households in Ireland and of these 29%, or 121,157 people, live alone. Over 65% of these are women.[xvii]

31% of older people in Ireland are widowed.[xviii]

European Context

Older people are in a vulnerable position not just in Ireland, but across Europe. In 2003 the income poverty rate for people aged 65 and over in the EU was 19%, compared with 15% for the total population.[xix]

Glossary

Contributory Pensions:
Social insurance based payment made to people at age 66. This payment comes in part from income a person has been paying to the pension in the years before s/he reaches age 65. This payment is unaffected by current income level, and older people can continue in paid employment and still receive this pension.

Fuel Poverty:
Being unable to afford adequate levels of heating

Household Deprivation:
Living in poor quality housing lacking basic amenities, such as central heating, running water, and adequate bathing facilities.

Non-Contributory Pensions:
Social insurance based on income-level for people aged 66 or over who do not qualify for a Contributory Pension, based on their social insurance record.

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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 5

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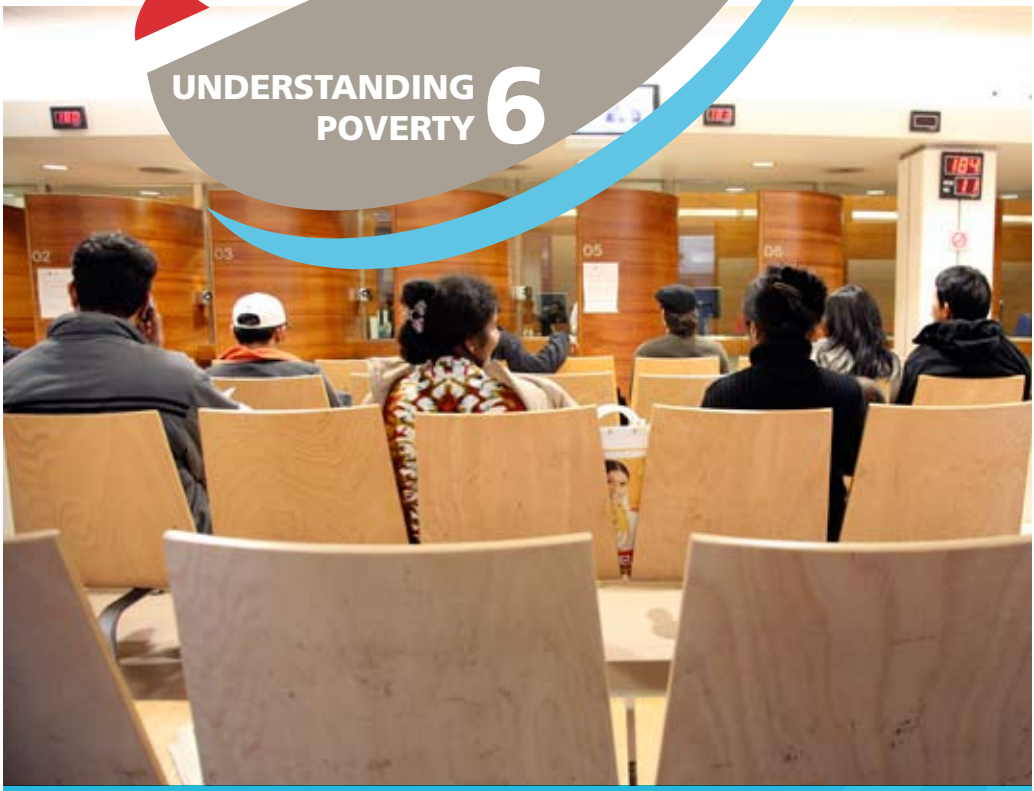
UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 6



ETHNIC MINORITIES AND POVERTY

Combat Poverty Agency

working for a poverty-free Ireland

Ethnic Minorities

Up to the early 1990s Ireland was a country of emigration, losing up to 40,000 of its population in a year. But during the 'Celtic Tiger' years rising numbers of migrants came to Ireland in search of economic opportunities and to improve their lives. Up to then, despite the existence of the distinct Traveller way of life, there had always been a perception that Irish society was uniform, with a single shared culture.

The number of foreign-born people living in Ireland rose from 6% of the total population in 1991 to over 10% in 2006. In the year ended April 2006, 86,000 people arrived in Ireland[1], with almost 40,000 of them being from the new member states of the EU. Ireland has also become a popular destination for asylum seekers and refugees.

The Central Statistics Office estimates that Ireland's population will continue to rise and that immigration, in the next 10 years, will contribute to this by a figure between 150,000 and 300,000[2]. Some of these migrants will form distinct ethnic groups within the overall population.

Members of ethnic groups are diverse - in their backgrounds, their reasons and modes of coming to Ireland, their qualifications and skills, and their capacity to engage with society in Ireland. They may include migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers. People may come as dependent spouses of resident permit holders, on student visas, on work permits, by right of EU membership, or by undocumented routes.

1 Barrett and Duffy, 2007

2 Barrett and Duffy, 2007

Refugees and Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers and refugees often take great risks to travel to Ireland but many arrive with little knowledge of Irish society and culture. Some asylum seekers and refugees arrive without even their immediate family members.

Their separation from the culture and society they were born into, the trauma some have experienced in their native country, along with their lack of a support network of friends and relatives puts asylum seekers and refugees at a high risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Only a small proportion of asylum seekers arriving in Ireland are granted refugee status. Of these 6% are granted at first hearing and a further 11% on appeal[3].

Refugees, once their status is officially recognised, are granted the same rights and are entitled to the same social welfare supports as Irish citizens. People who have not been granted official refugee status but have received 'leave to remain', based on strong evidence that they cannot return to their own country, do not have the same rights to citizenship or family reunification as refugees.

3 Statistics from the Irish Refugee Council website accessed on www.ria.gov.ie/statistics (March 4th 2005)

Ethnic minorities and social exclusion

Ethnic minority groups face a high risk of poverty. Because of direct and indirect discrimination, it can be difficult for them to access both quality employment and public services, such as education and health. A lack of understanding of the culture and languages of ethnic minorities by service providers and Irish society, in general, can increase their isolation and their risk of social exclusion.

Asylum seekers living in the State's direct provision

system receive €19.10 per week per adult plus €9.50 per week for each child. They live in designated hostels and have little choice about what food they eat and how they live. These allowances were set in April 2000 and have not been increased since that time.

"The food we are eating.....the management has decided we have to eat at 7 o'clock. If you don't eat between 7 and 9.30 you can't get breakfast. If you don't eat between 12.30 and 2 o clock, you can't get it. If you don't eat from 5.30 to 7 you can't get food. Food is finished. And the food you are given is not your choice. They keep warming the leftovers. They keep it coming back, whether you want to eat it or not".[4]

4 Combat Poverty Agency, *Voices of Poverty*, Dublin, 2008

Since May 2004, when the new accession countries joined the European Union, legal changes around 'habitual residence' led to the withdrawal of Child Benefit for asylum seekers. All asylum seekers are eligible for discretionary Exceptional Needs Payments for costs of travel related to medical treatment and childbirth. They cannot access employment, education or training.

Some asylum seekers borrow, pool or share with others, usually from their own countries, as ways of coping with poverty:

You know, OK, I give you one story. So I ran out of cash. I have €2 and I don't have milk for my baby. I say, 'my god, what is all this?' So I have to call my friend [same nationality]. My friend say, 'come, come, I still have money left, come, don't worry'[5].

Children's needs, especially for school, very often come before food or other bills:

She [the mother] said, three weeks ago they say 'the teacher says I need to buy school book'. She had just photocopy you know. So today she stop one dinner and buy the book[6].

The risk of poverty among non-Irish nationals in 2006 was 23.5% compared with 16.6% of the total population. The consistent poverty rate was 8.5% among non-Irish nationals, compared with 6.8% of the total population[7].

5 Manandhar et all, 2006

6 idem

7 2006. EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) 2005.

Welfare payments to refugees and people with the right to live in the State have increased in line with inflation and other social welfare payments. But many migrants, in particular those who become undocumented or who have difficulties under the work permit system, are at high risk of poverty and exclusion from social and welfare supports.

Some migrants who legally enter the State with employment or study rights later become undocumented because they lose their work permit, which is held by the employer, or because they experience difficulties with education, employment or residency restrictions. Undocumented migrants are the most marginalised group and it is very difficult for them to protect themselves against unfair treatment.

Health

Ireland is bound by its international human rights commitments to provide for the health needs of people within its jurisdiction.

The arrival of new ethnic minorities has made it necessary for the healthcare system to understand and adapt to the health and cultural needs of these new communities.

All new ethnic communities have to use the health services at some stage and some are better equipped than others to deal with this. Many feel powerless, isolated or unable to express their health concerns.

Dublin: Central Statistics Office

Asylum seekers and refugees may come from areas of war, upheaval or poverty, with consequent affects on their health. Many suffer from poor nutrition before they arrive in Ireland. For some, migration may be beneficial because diagnosis and treatment may be available here, but others find the disruption of family and social networks and adjustments to a new culture and society difficult to manage, leading to stress, loss of self-esteem, poor diet and bad health.

"The way we live is stressful; four people - five people in the same room. Living four people in one room is very hard because of your privacy. We are grown up people. Some of them are smoking. You are not smoking. You want to listen to a channel on your TV but you're not allowed. Someone is putting on the radio. He is smoking. He is making noise. And you want maybe to sleep early but you can't sleep. You want to read. You can't read. You want to listen to your own music. You can't. So many things that are affecting four grown up people living together".[8]

Language barriers can cause misunderstandings in treatment and emergency situations that are potentially dangerous, and they can exclude ethnic minorities from enjoying full access to health services.

8 Combat Poverty Agency, *Voices of Poverty*, Dublin, 2008

Food poverty and health

Food poverty is one aspect of wider poverty and deprivation. Healthy food such as fresh fruit and vegetables can cost more than unhealthy products and sourcing food necessary for their traditional diets can be difficult for many ethnic minorities.

Within the direct provision system asylum seekers are at particular risk because low income can prevent them from buying food of their choice and they have to accept a diet provided by their centre that may be culturally unsuited and bad for health.

A study of diet, nutrition and poverty among a sample of asylum seekers in the northwest of Ireland found that asylum seekers consumed more than the recommended levels of proteins and saturated fats and nearly half of the group surveyed had put on weight since arriving in Ireland[9].

Poor diet and stress can contribute to heart disease, hypertension, cancer and diabetes and can affect the health of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and their children. Cases of malnutrition among pregnant and breastfeeding women, ill-health in babies, weight loss among children and both hunger and weight gain due to eating fat-rich foods have all been found among asylum seekers[10].

9 Manandhar et al 2006

10 Idem

Employment

Migrants make up 13% of the Irish labour force[11]. Minority ethnic groups account for 8% of the total Irish labour force, one of the highest percentages in the EU[12].

Since 2004, citizens of the EU and European Economic Area (EEA) countries, except for Bulgaria and Romania, have been free to work in Ireland without restriction. For non-EU citizens there is a work permit system, whereby an employer who can show that no EU citizen is available to fill a vacancy can apply for a work permit to employ a non-EU national, as long as certain other restrictions are met as well, including salary level, and as long as the occupation does not fall into an ineligible work permit category

The majority of new migrants are highly educated, but they tend not to secure jobs that reflect their level of education and earn less than Irish-born workers. More recent migrants tend to have lower education qualifications than the first arrivals but the proportion with third-level qualifications is the same as the Irish-born population.

There is little evidence that highly qualified migrants find work on a par with their qualifications over time. This may be due to non-recognition of qualifications and lack of language skills[13]. There is evidence that some lower-skilled workers, working in service or

11 Census 2006

12 FAS 2005

13 Barrett and Duffy, 2007

construction sectors, may be paid less or treated differently compared to their Irish colleagues.

Refugees are entitled to work, but asylum seekers whose applications for asylum were made after July 1999 may not take up paid employment. This restriction on employment is a major cause of poverty and social exclusion among asylum seekers.

The inability to work precludes asylum seekers from developing social networks and obtaining skills and experience in the workforce, furthering their social exclusion and increasing their risk of poverty.

Accommodation

Since April 2000, asylum seekers have been housed in hostel-type direct provision centres where board and food is provided while their applications for refugee status are processed. These hostels are dispersed throughout the country. In very many of these centres, residents have little control over their diet or other aspects of their daily schedule. Accommodation is shared with many other people and there is little privacy.

By the end of 2004, nearly 15% of asylum seekers in the State had been living in direct provision for more than two years[14].

Refugees have the right to live in the community but the transition from direct provision to independent living can be difficult, with people struggling to budget, shop and pay bills.

Education

All registered refugees and people who have been granted 'leave to remain' have the right to work and the right to free primary and secondary education. Refugees are entitled to free third-level education only if they have been living in Ireland for at least three years.

Asylum seekers are entitled to free primary and secondary education but are not entitled to free third-level education.

Schools in many areas are struggling to cope with the

14 Statistics from the Irish Refugee Council website accessed on www.ria.gov.ie/statistics (March 4th 2005)

increased enrolment figures from new residents and to meet the need for education supports, particularly in English language skills.

In addition to the growing number of migrant workers in Ireland, increasing numbers of foreign-born students are being educated at all levels of the Irish education system.

The lack of cultural awareness in schools can result in early school leaving, poor attendance and lack of achievement. The strong Catholic and Christian influence on education in Ireland can further exclude members of minority faiths.

Lived Experience

Migrants and members of ethnic minorities can face hostility from Irish people, often based on lack of knowledge about their entitlements and living conditions. These views may be expressed by people who are not themselves well off and perceive migrants to be getting better treatment than themselves.

Furthermore, it is very difficult for new arrivals and native Irish to meet and socialise:

Interviewer: Have you ever had an invitation to anybody's home?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: In two years, you have never been in an Irish person's home?

Respondent: No … you don't know anyone and some of the whites, the Irish, are very difficult to meet with. I don't have any friends. I am alone with my baby here all the time[15].

Discrimination

Asylum seekers face multiple discrimination: for their ethnicity; for their status as asylum seekers; and for their State-imposed dependence on social welfare. They live in very strictly controlled conditions, which can particularly restrict their access to social networks and the supports they give. Language difficulties and cultural differences can marginalise them further.

15 Manandhar et al 2006

Ethnic minorities also face significant direct discrimination, both from service providers and from Irish society in general. As of December 2006, Ireland has not ratified Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which contains a general prohibition on discrimination. Minority groups are often unaware of existing mechanisms and supports for obtaining reparation for acts of racism and discrimination.

Until 2005, Ireland was one of the few European countries that automatically granted citizenship to children born in the country, regardless of the citizenship of the child's parents. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) considered this provision a positive step towards integrating migrant populations into Irish society. In 2005, however, the Irish Government amended this law to apply only to children whose parents had lived in Ireland for a minimum of three years before the birth of the child.

Moreover, the foreign national parents of Irish-born children were automatically entitled to residency due to the citizenship of the child and to the right of the child to the support and care of his or her parents. But in 2003, the Supreme Court ruled that foreign national parents were not automatically entitled to remain in the State by virtue of having a child who was an Irish citizen. These amendments to residency and citizenship law have made it more difficult to integrate foreign nationals.

Way forward

- A long-term policy for integrating migrants based on respect for their identity and human rights is necessary.
- All mainstream public policy should include an intercultural and anti-racism dimension.
- Measures to protect and guarantee equal and fair treatment for migrant workers within the labour market should be supported.
- An interim or bridging work permit should be made available to allow migrants, who have difficulties with their work permit, time to resolve their difficulties.
- Specific measures are needed to ensure the social inclusion and participation of asylum seekers.
- Asylum seekers should only be required to stay a limited time in direct provision, after which time they should have the right to live in the community. They should be granted the right to work after six months in the State.
- Measures to protect asylum seekers from poverty and social exclusion should be built into State services. These services should include increased welfare allowances in the short term; a policy focus on ensuring a minimum income standard rather than direct provision; action to promote the health of people within the direct provision system; and support for access to healthy, affordable and ethnic

food of people's choice.

- Health providers should receive training in ethnic and cultural diversity and awareness of the health needs of ethnic minorities.

Facts and Statistics

Population Profile including Immigrants	
Total population of Ireland	4,234,925
The total number of immigrants (foreign citizens) resident in Ireland	419,733
Immigrants as a percentage of Ireland's total population	10%
Net immigration between 2002 and 2006	186,000
National Origin of Foreign Nationals in Population	
United Kingdom	112,548
Poland	63,267
Lithuania	24,628
Nigeria	16,300
Latvia	13,319
United States	12,475
China	11,161
Germany	10,289

Ethnic or Cultural Background of Irish Population	
White ethnic or cultural background	94.8% of population
'Black or Black Irish'	1.1% of population
'Asian or Asian Irish'	1.3% of population
Ethnic or cultural background not stated	1.7% of population

Source: Census 2006 Principal Demographic results

National and Ethnic Profile of Irish Labour Force	
Percentage of labour force made up of foreign nationals	13%[16]
Percentage of labour force made up of minority ethnic groups	8%[17]

- In 2006, 102,944 of the 278,097 foreign nationals working in Ireland came from the 10 new EU member states.

Foreign Nationals and Total Population Categorised by Social Class		
	Foreign Nationals	Total Population
Professional Workers	6.6%	6.5%
Managerial/Technical	18.6%	26.5%
Non-Manual	12.4%	17.2%
Skilled Manual	18.5%	17.2%
Semi-Skilled	15.9%	11.1%
Unskilled	6.4%	4.3%
All Other Gainfully Employed	21.5%	17.2%

Source: Census of Population 2006

16 Census 2006

17 FAS 2005

Access to Medical Care by Foreign Nationals Compared to the Total Population		
	Have Medical Card	Have Private Medical Insurance
Foreign Nationals	29.9%	32.7%
Total Population	31.9%	47.6%

Source: EU-SILC 2005

- In 2006, there were 31,963 foreign nationals studying in Ireland.
- Travel distance and border controls mean that only 5%–6% of all refugees come to Europe, and of these only 2.4% are in Ireland. Ireland receives less than 1.5% of all applications for asylum to the industrialised world in 2006.
- From 2000 to 2005, the largest number of asylum seekers living in Ireland was from Nigeria and Romania.

Glossary

Asylum Seeker:

A foreign national seeking the right to reside as a refugee in another country, and to be protected by that country, but who has not yet been formally recognised as a refugee

Celtic Tiger:

The period of rapid economic growth in Ireland during the 1990s and the early years of the twenty first century. The Celtic Tiger transformed Ireland's society into one where foreign nationals migrated inwards in search of work, rather than Irish people migrating outwards.

Ethnic minority:

A person or group of people who have a different culture, religion or language to the main one in the place or country where they live.

Leave to Remain:

A person who does not fully meet the requirements of the definition of 'refugee' under the terms of the *1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol*, and is granted leave to remain in the State for humanitarian or other compelling reasons.

Migrant:

Any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he/she was not born in order to better their material or social conditions and improve the prospect for themselves or their family, and does not include refugees, displaced or others forced or compelled to leave their homes.

Migrant worker:

A person who is to be engaged, is engaged, or has been engaged in paid work in a state of which he/she is not a national.

Refugee:

As defined under the *1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and *1967 Protocol*, any person

who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

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(National Consultative Committee on Interculturalism and Anti-Racism

European Commission against

Racism and Intolerance
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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 6

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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 7

TRAVELLERS AND POVERTY

Combat Poverty Agency
working for a poverty-free Ireland

…Travellers' rights to good quality accommodation, access to healthcare, employment opportunities, cultural rights and to education have to be recognised and acted upon….

Travellers and Poverty

Although Irish society has become very diverse in recent years, with the arrival of people from many ethnic backgrounds and countries, a distinct ethnic group has existed within Irish society for hundreds of years. The Traveller community is an indigenous minority group whose language and origins can be traced back to the twelfth century.

Traditionally, the Traveller community was a rural-based, nomadic group with its own language, traditions, history and cultural values. In the last 50 years economic, legal and social changes have reduced the viability of many of their traditional economic activities, putting them at a high risk of poverty and dependence on social welfare. Many Travellers no longer follow a rural or nomadic lifestyle but are settled in a number of cities and towns. They face many forms of direct and indirect discrimination from the settled community and a high degree of social exclusion.

In 2006, the census showed the Traveller population to be 22,435 or 0.5% of the population, although it is thought that the figure may be closer to 30,000[i].

Because of discrimination from outside the Traveller community and certain conditions within it, Travellers are very prone to unemployment, poverty and bad living conditions. Traditional occupations have become obsolete and unemployment levels are very high, caused in part by prejudice among settled employers, but also by low levels of education and relevant skills.

Many Travellers have become dependent on social welfare and their standard of living is made worse by other factors. Traveller families tend to be larger than the national average with a higher proportion of young people. Many live in poor quality, overcrowded or temporary accommodation, often without proper water, electricity or sanitation facilities.

Employment

In terms of employment and labour market participation, the 2006 Census highlighted the extent of Traveller unemployment: 74.9% of Travellers in the labour force are unemployed (comprising 63.8% who have become unemployed having lost or given up a previous job and 11% looking for their first job). The corresponding unemployment figure (as a proportion of the labour force) amongst the general population is 8.5% (comprising 7.1% who have become unemployed having lost or given up previous job and 1.34% looking for their first job).

Low education and literacy levels are huge barriers to finding work. In 2006,

two thirds of Travellers had left school by the age of 15. Discrimination by employers also makes it difficult for Travellers to find or to keep employment and some Travellers speak of having to conceal their identity in order to get a job (Kandola, 2003).

Traveller organisations have supported the development of Traveller men's and women's skills and the establishment of enterprises through which Travellers could progress from training courses into employment. However, lack of mainstreaming and refusal by government to address welfare to work issues, in particular retention of medical cards, given the health status of Travellers, has resulted in little progress. There have been some positive initiatives such as the civil service internship programme and the FAS Special Initiative on Travellers. Government cutbacks in work initiatives such as the Community Employment schemes, however, have had a negative impact on Traveller employment.

Accommodation

According to Census 2006, 55.8% of Traveller households comprise 4 or more persons, in comparison to 31.1% of all private households in the state. 17.1% of Traveller households comprise 7 or more persons, in comparison to 1.6% of total private households.

Although Travellers form only a small proportion of the overall population, they are more likely to live in unsuitable or substandard accommodation. Nearly 1,000 Traveller families still live by the roadside without

access to proper water, electricity or sanitation facilities. In 2004 several hundred were living in unauthorised sites without basic facilities, sharing accommodation in overcrowded conditions, or living in temporary accommodation.

Travellers living on unofficial sites may be evicted under Section 10 of the Housing Act. This directly affects Travellers who continue to live the nomadic lifestyle, essentially forcing them to give up their traditional way of life and settle in urban areas.

Travellers who settle in urban areas are often housed in poorly maintained, official accommodation, frequently located in dangerous parts of the city. Traveller families tend to be larger than the national average, and the extended family traditionally lives together, making a lot of urban accommodation too small for their needs.

This poor standard of housing badly affects Traveller health, education and quality of life, raising the risk of poverty and lowering life expectancy.

The link between poor housing and health and general quality of life is well documented, and has been emphasised in the National Traveller Health Strategy (2002):

> *There is little doubt that the living conditions of Travellers are probably the single greatest influence on health status. Stress, infectious disease including respiratory disease and accidents are all closely related to the Traveller living environment. It is clear that an immediate improvement to the living conditions of Travellers is a pre-requisite to the general improvement in health status.*

Because the provision of accommodation is often linked with attempts to assimilate Travellers into the settled community, the official housing provided for Travellers often fails to suit their culture. Travellers also face discrimination in cities as they interact with places of business, service providers and the settled community.

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 requires local authorities to provide for Travellers' accommodation needs. They must deliver Traveller-specific accommodation such as serviced halting sites and transient sites as well as standard local authority housing for those who prefer it. However, attempts to provide Traveller accommodation are often opposed

by settled communities although studies have shown that better serviced accommodation helps alleviate the hostility and discrimination that many Travellers meet.

At the present rates of progress, it is estimated that the amount of accommodation that will be provided will not keep pace with the projected annual increase in the Traveller population[ii].

Health

Studies on Traveller health have continuously shown that Traveller health is much poorer than that of the settled community. The life expectancy of Traveller men and women is 65 years, which is comparable to the life expectancy of the settled community in the 1940s. Travellers of all ages have very high mortality rates compared to the national average.

According to Census 2006, older Travellers (i.e. those aged 65 years and older) account for just 2.6% of the total Traveller population, compared to 11% of the entire country's population. The corresponding proportion of Travellers in this age group in Census 2002 was 3.3% of the Traveller population.

The only major survey of Travellers health to date reported that Travellers of all ages have much higher mortality rates than people in the general population, with Traveller men living on average 10 years less than men in the general population and Traveller women living on average 12 years less than their peers[iii]. Infant mortality rates are three times higher than in the

national population and the rate of still births is twice as high[iv].

As well as inadequate accommodation, restricted access to health services is a major cause of poor health among Travellers. The requirement of a settled address prevents many Travellers from obtaining social welfare and medical cards. Lack of education and of relevant information material has contributed to a low uptake of health services by Travellers. Low literacy levels hamper everyday actions such as reading instructions on medicine and health promotion material.

When Travellers do obtain health services, they often face direct discrimination. The lack of awareness among health service providers of the unique culture, language and identity of Travellers also contributes to poor health levels in Traveller communities.

The health status of Travellers and their lower age expectancy rate is similar to that of a developing country, and is a major concern. Improving the health status of Travellers, however, is not only an issue for the health services. It is also dependent on concomitant improvements in accommodation, environmental and economic conditions of Travellers.

Travellers and disability

11.4% of Travellers have a disability, compared to 9.3% of the national population. The effects of this are exacerbated by the very young age profile of Travellers. In fact, all age categories have a higher

rate of disability amongst the Traveller population when compared to the national population, with the exception of the 85+ age group, where a small proportion of Travellers in this age group are disabled, when compared to the national population.

Education

The proportion of children from Traveller communities attending primary school has risen significantly in recent years. The number of Travellers transferring to post-primary education has also increased, reflecting the increasing value Travellers put on education. However, while the attendance rate in some primary schools is 80%, this can fall to as low as 35% for some Travellers living on unofficial halting sites[v].

In relation to educational attainment, Census 2006 reports that 77% of all Travellers aged 15+ years who responded to the census questionnaire, obtained primary only/ no formal education as their highest educational attainment. This compares to 18.9% of the national population in the same category. It should be noted that in Census 2002, 63.3% of Travellers in this age group who responded, obtained this same level of education, demonstrating only a marginal reduction in educational disadvantage (with regard to attainment) in that four year period.

18% of Travellers aged 15+ years who responded to the question, obtained a lower secondary education, while the corresponding figure for the national population was 21.1%. Only 4.1% of the Traveller population over the

age of 15 years, who responded to the question, have attained upper secondary education. The corresponding figure for the national population is 29.5%.

Less than 1% (0.9%) of those Travellers, who responded to the question, and were over 15 years of age had attained a third level education (non-degree, degree or higher). The corresponding figure for the national population is 30.5%.

Travellers face a number of difficulties in accessing education. Accommodation without running water or electricity makes it difficult for children to get ready for school in the morning and to do homework in the evening. As most Traveller parents have not progressed far in education and as literacy levels are low among the Traveller community as a whole, children may not receive adequate support for their schoolwork within the home or community. Because many Travellers find it hard to get employment as adults, many do not see the point in continuing formal education.

Furthermore, Traveller children often don't receive adequate support or understanding of their culture in school. The education system has been developed on the understanding of Irish society having a uniform culture. There is little or no recognition of the Traveller or other minority cultures in the mainstream curriculum. Traveller children may also feel more isolated in post-primary school, as there are fewer members of their community at this level. This isolation can lead to early school-leaving, which, in turn, increases the risk of poverty.

In recent years policy has changed from a tendency to segregate Traveller children in separate classes to favouring full integration. In practice, some schools may cluster Traveller children in special learning support sessions which, while useful educationally, can dilute integration. Occasionally classroom integration has drawn protests from settled parents. Traveller children may feel their identity is a problem for them in school and there may be an inclination to hide their identity to avoid discrimination or bullying[vi].

Lived Experience

Finding and keeping work is difficult. In a report by Pearn Kandola (2003) a Traveller man 'spoke about keeping his Traveller identity secret for many years for fear of less favourable treatment by his colleagues and his manager. He also spoke about advising his children and local youngsters to do the same'. A Traveller woman cited said she had been made redundant 'because there wasn't enough work but the next week they gave my job to a settled person'.

> *Many employers want a Leaving Certificate. This is a way of discriminating against an awful lot of Travellers. Basic labouring jobs look for this[vii].*

Sub-standard accommodation and lack of basic facilities, particularly on unofficial or temporary halting sites, badly affects Travellers' health.

> *You have the infections from rats running around the place . . . their urine and everything else all around that area [where water is supplied].*

If you have cold water outside, every time you want water, you've to go out in the rain, hail, or snow to get … rats running around the place … and them [halting sites] that has showers, there's no hot water. So you're standing there in the middle of winter having a shower. Sure, you'd get pneumonia[viii]'.

In 2000, a study found that 36% of Irish people would avoid Travellers; 97% would not accept Travellers as members of their family and 80% would not accept a Traveller as a friend[ix].

If you have friends, they'll usually be Travellers. Not that you don't want settled kids [as friends], it's just they won't be friends with you[x].

SHOPS[xi]		
53.9% said they had been asked to leave a shop	66.1% had experienced others being served before them	60% had been 'made a show of' (embarrassed) in shops

Hairdressers		
32.5% said they had been asked to leave a hairdressers	31% had experienced others being served before them	28.3% had been 'made a show of' (embarrassed) in a hairdressers

LAUNDRETTE		
18.2% said they had been asked to leave a laundrette	25.5% had experienced others being served before them	24.7% had been 'made a show of' (embarrassed) in a laundrette

Way Forward

Travellers' rights to good quality accommodation, access to healthcare, employment opportunities, cultural rights and to education have to be recognised and acted upon.

Travellers' distinct culture and identity should be recognised and taken into account in planning and implementing strategies for specific issues such as employment, education and health[xii].

Good standard accommodation is an essential basis for other progress. There is a proven link between

improved accommodation for Travellers and better uptake of education, health and employment services.

Under the Employment and Human Resources Development Operational Programme (EHRDOP) of the National Development Plan a central body should be designated specifically to promote Traveller access and progression within the labour market.

A pro-active approach is necessary to give Travellers access to employment. This should include:

- Addressing the low education and literacy levels that create huge barriers to Travellers finding employment in pre-training and employment training
- Setting specific objectives for the inclusion of Travellers in job training programmes
- Creating links between training bodies and Traveller support groups to help identify those who would benefit most from training and their individual training needs
- Provision for additional support and follow-up when planning and delivering training programmes
- Adequate resources for training and CE schemes, and for Traveller community development projects, which often are the only chance of employment or training for many Travellers
- Including anti-discrimination and gender-proofing measures in policies to improve Traveller access to employment
- Taking into account the wider disadvantages that

affect Travellers' ability to find employment when planning for training and employment measures

- Addressing the concerns over loss of the medical card through taking up employment

In education, a co-ordinated national strategy for adult education for Travellers, including monitoring for effective outcomes, is needed.

The *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* in relation to education and the Traveller Education Strategy should be implemented fully. Holistic approaches to supporting Traveller education should include:

- Access to official halting sites
- Homework supports for Traveller children and parents
- Stronger enforcement of schools enrolment policies
- Measures to combat bullying
- An intercultural approach that respects the background of all children.

Integrated and fully supported pre-school and early childhood care and education should be provided for all Traveller children.

The State must take responsibility for ensuring that all local authorities meet their current and future Traveller accommodation targets.

Facts and Statistics

Traveller Population	
Number of Travellers in Ireland:	24,000 – 30,000
Number of Traveller Families	6,991[xiii]
Median age within the Traveller Community	18 years
Percentage of Travellers under 25 years	60%
Percentage of Travellers over 65 years	2.6%

Health

- The rate of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is 3 times the national average.
- Travellers have a 2.5 times greater risk of dying in a given year than the national population.
- Travellers have a 4.5 times greater risk of dying from an accident than the national population[xiv].

Life Expectancy of Travellers Compared to National Population		
	Female	**Male**
Travelling Community	65 years	65 years
National Population	78 years	75 years

Source: *The Irish Times, 26 June 2007*

Education

- Forty per cent of all Traveller children of post-primary age attend mainstream post-primary school[xv].
- More than 60% of Traveller pupils are below

the 20th percentile in English reading and in mathematics while 2% are in the top quintile (80-100)[xvi].

- The national retention rate to Junior Cert is 94.3%. For Traveller pupils the rate was only 51%.
- 52.7% of all Travellers aged 15 and over have no formal education or only primary level compared to 15.4% of the national population.
- Only 3.4% of the Traveller population over the age of 15 years has attained an upper secondary education compared with 48.2% nationally.
- in 1998, only five Travellers were engaged in third-level education.
- Eighty per cent of adult Travellers are unable to read[xvii].

Accommodation

- Over 83% of Traveller households have no central heating, 24% have no piped water and 23% have no sewerage facility[xviii].

Glossary

CE (Community Employment) Scheme: A programme, operated by FÁS, to help people who are long-term unemployed and other disadvantaged people to get back to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in jobs based within local communities.

Medical Card: A card issued by the Health Service Executive (HSE) which entitles the holder to receive free

of charge family doctor services; prescribed drugs and medicines; public hospital services; dental, optical and aural services; medical appliances; maternity and infant care services; and a maternity cash grant on the birth of each child.

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www.ntwf.net

Pavee Point
www.paveepoint.ie

United Nations High Commission for Human Rights
www.unhchr.ch

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i Pavee Point, an organisation promoting the rights of Travellers, reports that local authorities also carry out a count of Traveller families each year, and that this count suggests that the number of Travellers in Ireland is closer to 30,000. Because many Travellers do not have permanent accommodation, an accurate count of their community is difficult to obtain.

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xii Report of the Task Force on the Traveller Community. 1995.

xiii Annual Count of Traveller Families 2004

xiv www.mwhb.ie/publications/traveller_health.pdf.

xv Estimate of the National Traveller Education Officer 2002-2003.

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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 7

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UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 8

TACKLING POVERTY

Combat Poverty Agency

working for a poverty-free Ireland

…A commitment to structural change in the economy is required to achieve greater equality…

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY 8

Tackling Poverty

This chapter explains the causes of poverty, including some discussion of the structural nature of poverty in Ireland today. It outlines some key policies that can be used to tackle poverty. These recommendations are based on recent research conducted for, and by, Combat Poverty, as well as other key Irish research studies on poverty.

The Causes of Poverty in Ireland Today

The underlying cause of poverty is a controversial and politicised issue. There is no simple way to get rid of poverty. It requires making fundamental policy choices about the distribution of resources and wealth in society.

However, in order to appreciate why poverty exists in a modern, wealthy society like Ireland, it is important to have an understanding of the structural factors which exclude the poor from sharing in the lifestyles of the rest of society. These structural factors are unrelated to personal choices or preferences. They relate to the way modern capitalist economies are ordered or

'structured'. A key example of a structural inequality is a lack of opportunity because of poor education (i.e. human capital). This excludes people from obtaining well-paid employment.

Many also argue that it is the lack of government intervention which results in more poverty, and that it is the responsibility of the wealthy to help those in need. Insufficient redistribution of wealth results in a concentration of resources in the higher socio-economic groups, higher rates of poverty, and a widening inequality gap.

Poverty is often described as a cycle, a 'vicious circle' or a 'catch 22'. This is because it is a social phenomenon in which poor individuals tend to remain poor throughout their lives and in many cases across generations.[i] It occurs because the resources necessary to get out of poverty, such as a good education, can only be obtained if the individual has financial resources in the first place. Poor individuals

find it difficult to get out of poverty because they do not possess enough resources to invest in their own economic development.

A commitment to structural change in the economy is required in order to achieve greater equality. This is arguable on the grounds of social justice primarily (i.e. everyone has a right to a life free of poverty) but also on economic grounds (i.e. poverty is an inefficient use of resources in terms of the lost human potential to the labour market).

Policies to Tackle Poverty

This section outlines some of the key anti-poverty policies advocated by researchers.

Some Existing National Models for Policy

- The National Economic and Social Council has developed a model of the welfare state based on the provision of an adequate income, access to quality public services and innovative or activist measures.[ii]
- *Towards 2016* (a social partnership agreement with a ten-year framework) recognises the usefulness of this model, and uses a three-stage lifecycle approach to develop policy measures.[iii]
- The *National Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2006-2008)*[iv] document was also written with knowledge of these models and focuses on three strategic areas: health, pensions and social inclusion.

The *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion* (NAPinclusion), complemented by the social inclusion elements of the National Development Plan sets out how the social inclusion strategy will be achieved over the period 2007-2016.

The new strategic framework should facilitate greater co-ordination and integration of structures and procedures across Government at national and local levels, as well as improved reporting and monitoring mechanisms.

The Plan has a strong focus on actions and targets, which are clearly defined and measurable. These are essential if the Plan's objectives are to be achieved and progress in achieving them effectively monitored.

Economic Growth and Wealth Distribution

The World Bank argues that growth is fundamental for poverty reduction and, in principle, growth, as such, does not seem to affect inequality. However growth accompanied by changing the distribution of wealth is better than growth alone.

The World Bank's research also indicates that poverty itself is also likely to be a barrier to poverty reduction, and wealth inequality seems to predict lower future growth rates.

Combat Poverty agrees with this research and is a long-established advocate of economic growth policies that are pro-poor and redistributive in nature.

Progressive Taxation

Inequality can be reduced by progressive taxation, wealth tax, and/or inheritance tax. This means that people who earn more income, or who have accumulated more personal wealth, should be compelled to pay more tax.

Combat Poverty's recent research study on taxation[v] argued for no further increases in indirect taxes (such as VAT and excise duties), and a continuation of the low direct taxes (such as income tax and inheritance tax) which have been a feature of Irish taxation policy

for the past decade. The study also points to the need to keep the tax base as broad as possible to maximise the fairness of taxation. One of the best ways to do this is by closing off any unnecessary or undesirable tax expenditures, such as tax reliefs, which do not yield social gains.[vi]

Regulation and Human Rights

In law, there has been a movement to establish the absence of poverty as a human right. In his book *The End of Poverty*, world-renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs laid out a clear plan to eradicate global poverty by the year 2025.[vii] Following his doctrine, international organisations such as the Global Solidarity Network are working with governments and partners to eradicate poverty worldwide with known, proven, reliable, and appropriate interventions in the areas of housing, food, education, basic health, agricultural inputs, safe drinking water, transportation and communications.

In 2006, Combat Poverty made a submission on the topic of rights and poverty to the Irish Human Rights Commission. This submission advocates the following key recommendations:[viii]

- The application of economic, social and cultural rights in the eradication of poverty
- The application of economic, social and cultural rights in law
- Informing and underpinning the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion by economic, social and cultural rights

- Strengthening accountability mechanisms for ensuring compliance with economic, social and cultural rights commitments.

Education

Education requires devoted time and energy. Children from poor families often have to work outside of school and cannot maximise their education, even if the education is free. Theorists believe that such children will not be able to break out of poverty because their reduced skills' set reduces their potential income. With no means to provide an educational environment suitable for children born into poverty, the poverty cycle begins again.

Therefore, it is critical that high-quality education is provided and funded by the State. Combat Poverty has advocated increased expenditure in education, particularly at primary and secondary levels, with a strategic focus on early childhood care, as well as education measures aimed at supporting low-income families and a continuation of generous levels of child income support.[ix]

Housing

Mixed-income or mixed tenure housing is being implemented in more and more cities in an attempt to bring families from different socio-economic backgrounds together in the same neighbourhoods. Research indicates that this interaction between low and middle-income families helps to avoid

'ghettoisation' of the poor, and improves the opportunities and aspirations of the less well-off.

Research commissioned by Combat Poverty also shows that there is a need to increase the level of social and affordable housing in Ireland to help low-income families afford a home of their own.[x] The research also confirms that the private rental sector has the highest risk of poverty in Ireland by some degree. Measures that increase the supply of stock in this sector are recommended, together with enforced regulations for minimum standards.

Healthcare

There is a strong link between poverty, socio-economic status and health. This link suggests that it is not only the poor who tend to be sick when everyone else is healthy, but that there is a continual gradient, from the top to the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, relating to health status. Lower socio-economic status has been linked to a variety of adverse health conditions such as chronic stress, heart disease, certain types of cancer, and premature ageing. The Black Report in the UK in 1980 found that those on low incomes had death rates two or three times higher than those more well-off.[xi] Similar relationships have been reported within Ireland in the 1990s.[xii]

Combat Poverty believes it is important that high-quality healthcare systems exist so that there is equal access to healthcare provision. Evidence suggests that people not in receipt of the medical card are considerably less likely to avail of General Practitioner (GP) services, indicating that many low-income working families not in receipt of medical cards are not able to afford access to GP and other primary care services for themselves and their children.[xiii]

Social Expenditure

Despite dramatic growth in real terms, Irish social expenditure remains low by comparison to most EU member states. Comparative data shows that there is a strong relationship between social expenditure and income inequality/relative poverty. Higher spending

countries tend to have lower levels of inequality and relative poverty. Comparative research has also shown that competitiveness and high employment levels are not irreconcilable with higher social expenditure and greater income equality/lower relative poverty. In fact, higher social expenditure can help to bring about not only lower levels of income inequality but can also contribute to positive economic outcomes.

Research published by the Combat Poverty Agency proposes a number of reforms, including increased public service expenditure, reduced tax expenditure, greater efforts to integrate excluded groups into the labour force and mechanisms for increasing low incomes from work and for linking benefit incomes to earned incomes.[xiv]

These reforms are justifiable on the grounds that they would make a significant contribution to the incomes and welfare of individuals and families that are currently on relatively low incomes, in particularly difficult labour market situations, or under extreme pressure due to work and family obligations.

This research has not argued that increased social expenditure will automatically, and in isolation from all other factors, result in more positive social outcomes. Rather, it calls for more careful policy planning that takes into account the redistributive outcomes of different policy instruments and gives greater priority to addressing both income inequality and the inequalities in access to services and employment that affect many people in Ireland.

Good Policymaking

Policymaking is difficult to do well because it is hard to foresee all of the potential effects of a given policy on the economy and on wider society. This extends to anti-poverty policy.

There are a number of features of good policymaking. Policies should be forward-looking and take a long-term view, one which is based on statistical trends,

rather than short-sighted stances or anecdotal evidence. They should also be outward-looking, taking on board experience from local, regional, national, EU and wider international best practice. They should be innovative and flexible. Above all, they must be based on evidence and fact.

Governments also require that a proposed policy needs to be accurately costed. Policies should examine all of the impacts on those affected by a given policy intervention, and those who will be affected by the policy should have a voice in the policymaking. Policies often require holistic, inter-Departmental approaches to maximise the potential of a given intervention. Policies should take on board past *exemplars* of good and bad policymaking. A 'lessons-learned' approach is often beneficial in this regard.[xv]

Combat Poverty believes that it is also important to perform poverty impact assessments on all potential Government policies and programmes to ensure that they do not have an adverse impact on poverty levels in a country. Combat Poverty also argues that social inclusion policy should be mainstreamed into the work of government departments, authorities and agencies in an effort to place people in poverty at the heart of the policymaking process in Ireland.[xvi]

Glossary

Poverty Impact Assessment:
A process usually undertaken before a policy is implemented that ensures that it does not result in an increase in hardship among those experiencing poverty.

Structural Inequality:
Inequality resulting from factors outside the individual's control, but related to the way in which capitalist economies operate.

Human Capital:
Human capital is a way of defining and categorising people's skills and abilities as used in employment and as they otherwise contribute to the economy. Many early economic theories refer to it simply as labour, one of three factors of production, and consider it to be a commodity.

Wealth Redistribution:
The process of sharing out financial prosperity from the rich to the poor until a level of equality is achieved.

Progressive Tax:
Taxes that are based on the ability to pay, i.e. the amount of tax collected from the individual is proportionate to their income / ability to pay.

Direct Tax:
Taxes (usually on income) paid directly to the Government.

Indirect Tax:
Taxes collected by an intermediary (such as a retail shop) from the person who bears the ultimate economic burden of the tax (i.e. customer). The intermediary later files a tax return and forwards the tax proceeds to government with the return. Examples include Value-Added Tax and excise duty.

Mixed-Tenure Estate:
A housing estate or development that contains units in the social and affordable sector and provided to those on social and affordable housing waiting lists, as well as units that are sold on the open market to private purchasers (owner-occupiers).

Social Expenditure:
All State expenditure on social services (such as public education, public transport, healthcare, childcare, etc.).

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XV. For more on this section, see Office for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland (2006). *A Practical Guide to Policy Making in Northern Ireland*, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Belfast.

XVI. For more, see Combat Poverty Agency (2006). *Better Policies, Better Outcomes: Promoting Mainstreaming Social Inclusion*, Combat Poverty Agency: Dublin.

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