



POLICY SUBMISSION

Submission to NAPS Urban Disadvantage Working Group

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1. Introduction

The Agency welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the NAPS working group on urban disadvantage. Our submission begins with a discussion of the concept of urban disadvantage, which is a pre-requisite for mapping out an agenda for this group. We then identify a number of wider policy issues which impact on the living conditions of disadvantaged urban areas. The submission then identifies four policy priorities, with appropriate indicators and targets for policy intervention.

2. Understanding urban disadvantage

The spatial aspect of poverty was clearly identified in the original NAPS as requiring a distinct policy response. This is in keeping with the emphasis placed in policy on targeted spatial responses, eg breaking the cycle, local development, PEACE and URBAN programmes, and urban renewal/regeneration initiatives. However, there remains considerable confusion as to what constitutes 'urban disadvantage' which, in turn, shapes the objectives of policy. Urban disadvantage can have at least three distinct dimensions (see Pringle et al 1999 for an indepth examination):

1. The first refers to poor households who live in urban areas. Recent research suggests that the level of urban poverty is in line with other geographical areas and that there is no concentration of poverty in towns and cities (Nolan et al, 1998). By contrast, an important indicator of poverty risk division is housing tenure, with households in public housing having up to ten times the risk of poverty for those in private housing. This division is especially acute in urban areas, especially Dublin. However, the overall level of concentration is still limited, with on 50% of poor households living in public housing. In addition, the characteristics of local authority tenant households reflect social class, education and employment factors, not a distinct 'housing' influence. Other high-risk poverty groups that reside in urban areas include lone parents, private rented tenants, homeless, Travellers and refugees. Again, these are small groupings.
2. A second interpretation refers to urban (local authority) communities with high concentrations of poverty which face additional communal problems or where poverty reproduces itself. Additional problems can include inadequate public services, social disorder and crime, limited involvement in decision-making and the negative effects of public stigma. Intergenerational factors (also referred to as an underclass effect) relate to issues such high levels of early school-leaving, a pattern of young lone motherhood and widespread deviant behaviour. However, recent ESRI research finds no evidence of such a distinct underclass effect. There leaves problems of service provision and community involvement, which has been the focus of much policy intervention in recent years.
3. A third dimension of urban disadvantage is areas experiencing economic and environmental decline, due to the collapse of traditional industry or the poor quality of the physical infrastructure (eg docklands, inner city areas and failed suburbs such as Ballymun). Here, the problem is not the people but the environment in which they live. This analysis has encouraged various urban renewal initiatives. However, they too may fail because of the weak linkage between economic and infrastructural improvements and the quality of life experienced by local residents. Another element is the quality of housing management, as reflected in the recent Agency study of social housing (Fahey et al, 1999)

Each of these dimensions of urban disadvantage requires a different policy response. The analysis of urban disadvantage proposed in the background paper issued by the

Department is somewhat flawed in not taking into account of these different dimensions (essentially it only emphasises urban disadvantage as a population group, with only a single reference to the problems of disadvantaged urban communities or decline in the built environment of urban areas).

In addition, it is important to clarify the definition of urban (and by extension rural) areas. A standard census definition of urban would be towns above 1,500. This gives an urban population 2.1 million or 58% of the total in 1996 (see below). Dublin dominates our urban system, with almost half of all urban dwellers.

Table 1: Distribution of population by location

Dublin	26.3%
Other cities	10.0%
Towns > 10,000	10.5%
Towns between 1,500 and 10,000	11.4%
Other (rural)	41.9%

Another issue is the lack of micro-level data on poverty, which would help to map poverty patterns at a local level. The reliance on census indicators is a flawed methodology, which can lead to erroneous policy conclusions. Among the problems identified in a recent review by Pringle et al (2000) are:

- use of diverse deprivation surrogates in the absence of income data;
- composite deprivation indices can confuse different causes of poverty and are poor measures of trends overtime;
- the use of variable spatial units can give misleading results;
- area-focused studies can encourage spatial fetishism and hide structural issues.

Future analyses of the spatial aspects of poverty would benefit from a) the collection of income data, b) the avoidance of multiple indices which eschew a theoretical basis and c) the use of equalised and more localised spatial units for analysis.

3. Key cross-cutting policy issues in tackling urban disadvantage

Drawing from the above analysis, it is clear that urban disadvantage does not exist in a policy vacuum. There are five key policy areas which directly impact on urban disadvantage and which are important in preventing this problem:

- *regional development*
The ad hoc and unbalanced nature of economic and social development is reflected in the uneven distribution of economic activity and population. The proposed national spatial strategy should therefore have as a key theme a commitment to balanced regional and urban development.
- *urban planning*
Large parts of urban Ireland suffer from economic and environmental decline. Recent policy initiatives include the urban renewal scheme and special projects (eg Temple Bar, Docklands and Ballymun). These should have an explicit commitment to develop the economic and physical infrastructure.
- *housing policy*
The segregated provision and poor management of social housing is a major contributor to the problems of disadvantaged urban communities.

- *co-ordination and delivery of public services*
The provision of public, private and voluntary services has a crucial bearing on the quality of life in urban areas. The centralised and compartmentalised nature of public services gives rise to local problems such as access and integration.
- *development of sustainable neighbourhoods/communities*
Government policy does not give adequate attention to the development of sustainable neighbourhoods. A key element of this is the lack of local decision-making. Another is the absence of a neighbourhood planning framework in public policy. What such a framework might look like was explored in Urban 1, notably in Tallaght/Clondalkin, where various neighbourhood planning methodologies were applied to enhance the quality of the physical and social environment.

A new urban policy framework is needed therefore to prevent the generation of urban poverty.

4. Policy priorities for tackling urban disadvantage

Short-term measures to address urban disadvantage are also needed as follows:

- *targeted investment in run-down urban areas*
policy instruments: urban renewal scheme, community reinvestment initiative, social housing, Urban, city development strategies, social economy programme, advanced factories initiative, city enterprise boards, public sector initiative (new)
- *enhanced delivery of services (public and private)*
policy instruments: Rapid, local development programme, equal opportunities childcare programme, educational schemes (eg 'breaking the cycle'), youth diversion programme, family resource centres, labour market programmes, Springboard, sports partnerships, early childhood education
- *strengthened neighbourhood structures*
policy instruments: community development support programme, tenant participation, community health initiatives, home-school-community liaison scheme, community information points, crime prevention initiatives

There have been a number of urban poverty policy initiatives in other EU countries, notably the UK, France and Denmark. There could be scope to learn from these initiatives. In particular, it is therefore proposed that there should be an input about these policies at the consultative seminar planned for late June.

5. Indicators and targets for urban disadvantage indicators

- general poverty rate in urban areas and public housing
- concentration of poverty in specific localities
- 'quality of life' in disadvantaged urban areas
- access to services
- level of community involvement

targets

- global poverty reduction target for urban areas
- greater investment in rundown urban areas

- improved delivery of public services
- improved quality of life in poor neighbourhoods

References

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