

## Combat Poverty Agency Seminar

*An assessment of the Irish institutional and policy framework for tackling and preventing poverty and social exclusion among children*



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## Format of Seminar

Introduction & outline of purpose of research (Seamus O'Connell)

Presentation of Research Findings

- 1 Lessons from the EU Social Inclusion Process (Hugh Frazer)
- 2 Findings from 4 Local Case Studies (Maurice Devlin)
- 3 Conclusions from Assessment of Irish Institutional and Policy Framework (Maurice Devlin)
- 4 Recommendations (Hugh Frazer)

Discussion

## 1 - LESSONS FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION'S SOCIAL INCLUSION PROCESS

## Lessons from the EU - 1

### Analysis of lessons from EU Social Inclusion Process 2001-2008

The research draws on:

- National Action Plans on poverty and social inclusion
- Social Protection Committee reports
- European Commission reports
- Transnational exchange projects
- Reports from European networks
  - e.g. Eurochild, Euronet, EAPN, Feantsa, European Social Network, Street Children, Caritas
- EU Network of independent social inclusion experts
- EU Research reports
- EU Seminars and conferences (peer reviews and Round Table Conferences)
- 2007 thematic year on child poverty and well-being
- Interviews with key actors at EU level

## Lessons from the EU - 2

### Lessons about the nature of child poverty and social exclusion

- Multi-dimensional
- Relative
- Long-term effect and intergenerational inheritance
- Poverty and social exclusion are linked
- Main groups at high risk
  - Children in lone parent families, large families and jobless households
- Some groups of children at risk of severe poverty
  - e.g. children with disabilities, ethnic minorities (Roma), asylum seekers and immigrants, children in or leaving care, homeless, children suffering violence/abuse/neglect, living in dangerous environments
- A structural and changing problem

## Lessons from the EU - 3

### Lessons for policy and practice

- Balanced approach
- High profile political priority
- Link to children's rights and anti-discrimination
- A comprehensive strategy with clear objectives & quantified targets
- Children mainstreaming
- Mobilisation & involvement of all relevant actors
- High quality and timely data and analysis

## Lessons from the EU – 4

### Lessons for policy and practice (cont.)

- A comprehensive/multidimensional policy framework is essential
  - increasing income
    - Income from work & making work pay
    - Child income support
  - increasing access to services
    - Housing and safe environment
    - Education and training (early childhood, school drop out, integrating minorities & reducing costs and barriers)
    - Health services
    - Transport
  - ensuring effective child care and protection and social services
  - increasing participation
    - Sport, recreation & culture

## Lessons from the EU – 5

### Lessons for policy and practice (cont.)

- Ensure effective delivery
  - effective linking of central and local
  - promote coordinated & integrated approaches at local level
  - flexible and tailored responses with pathways for progression
  - community development approach
    - empowerment, participation, respect and dignity
- Put in place effective monitoring and reporting system
  - ensure accountability
  - monitor impact of policies

## Lessons from the EU – 6

### A framework for assessing national approaches

- Effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements
- Quality of overall strategic approach
- Effectiveness of key policy areas
- Effectiveness of delivery arrangements
- Effectiveness of monitoring and reporting arrangements

(see handout)

## Lessons from the EU – 7

### Ireland in comparative perspective

- How does Ireland's performance compare to other EU countries?
  - overall = **mediocre**
  - compared to best performing = **poor**

NB

- high level of relative income poverty
- Ireland ranks only 11<sup>th</sup> on consistent poverty

(see next slide and handout for some comparative data)

Issue	Ireland %	3-4 best performing MS %	EU average %
At risk of poverty	23	9-12	19
Intensity of poverty	23	11-15	23
Consistent poverty	12	3-6	
Risk of poverty for children in lone parent families	50	20-23	34
Risk of poverty for children in large families	27	9-15	25
Risk of poverty for children of young mothers (under 30)	33	15-16	28
children at risk of poverty living in low skilled households	60	7-13	33
% gross income of poor households with children coming from work	33		55
Children living in jobless households	11	4	10
Lone parents with children in jobless households	50		24
Large families who are jobless	12		5
Risk of poverty for children living in households at work	11	6-7	13
At risk of poverty rates for children of lone parents working part-time	36		30
% by which social transfers (other than pensions) reduce poverty for children	43	60+	44
Proportion of 15-24 year olds who left school early	12	5	15

## Lessons from the EU – 7

### Ireland in comparative perspective (cont)

- Focus on lone parent households and large families
- Tackle joblessness and increase access to quality employment (esp. for women)
  - raise skills; reduce costs of child care; enhance flexible/family friendly working; reduce early school drop outs; tackle part-time work poverty problem; develop enabling services
- Further increase income support to families with children
- Prioritise children of parents born outside Ireland

## 2 - FINDINGS FROM 4 LOCAL CASE STUDIES

### Local case studies

- 4 areas
  - Ronanstown, County Dublin
  - Dublin city - “canal communities”
  - Bagenalstown, County Carlow
  - County Mayo (various)
- Used existing NUIM contacts – advantages and disadvantages in research terms
  - Certain provision/services in place which may not be elsewhere
  - Opinions/experiences not unduly negative

### Local case studies

- Focus groups
- Local adults, young people and children
- Professionals and activists
- Interviews with key informants

### Local case studies

- Things that help/work well/make a difference
  - Information generally good(?)
  - Increases in recent years in allowances/benefits (CB/CDA & FIS)
  - CE schemes – frequently a ‘stepping stone’
  - Back to Work Allowance
  - Other training (e.g. primary health care)
  - Improvements in housing

### Local case studies

- Things that help/work well/make a difference (cont...)
  - Need for early intervention acknowledged(?)
  - Range of services for children and families (breakfast clubs, lunchtime & homework clubs, family support, home school liaison, youth projects...)
  - Good examples of coordination/cooperation between agencies ‘on the ground’
  - Effective leadership roles being played locally
  - Participation and ‘voice’ for children and young people

### Local case studies

- Difficulties/problems/gaps
  - Consistent pattern regarding groups worst affected (lone parents, jobless, Travellers, asylum seekers, people with disabilities, larger families)
  - Significance of class & gender
  - Particular difficulties for rural dwellers

### Local case studies

- Difficulties/problems/gaps
  - Child care: availability, costs, recent changes
  - Low pay – getting lower?
  - Inadequate income
  - Obstacles to integration of asylum seekers
    - Incompatibility & inflexibility of schemes/supports (individual & organisational aspects)
  - Attitudes of 'officials'

### Local case studies

- Difficulties/problems/gaps
  - Health & health related services poor
  - Child protection concerns
  - Lack of facilities for children and young people
  - Short term view of policy and provision ('pilot, pilot, pilot...!')
  - Lack of integration/coordination at policy level

### 3 – CONCLUSIONS FROM ASSESSMENT OF IRISH INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

### 10 Conclusions

1. Levels of child poverty in Ireland, however measured, unacceptably high.
2. Despite some positive initiatives, eradication and prevention not a sufficiently visible or high level political goal.
3. Overall approach is piecemeal, disjointed and reactive – fails to acknowledge fundamental causes.

### 10 Conclusions

4. National institutional arrangements lack sufficient coordination.
5. More coherence is required between national and local developments.
6. Further integration is needed between policy measures (active employment measures, income support, access to services).

### 10 Conclusions

7. The lack of a comprehensive system of early childhood education is a serious barrier to breaking the cycle of childhood poverty.
8. The focus on children's rights remains weak and the attention to children's and young people's participation needs to be strengthened.

## 10 Conclusions

9. Statutory responsibility of the HSE for care (other than medical care) of children should be reviewed urgently
10. Not much seems to have been learned about child poverty from the EU experience.

## 4 - RECOMMENDATIONS

## 12 Recommendations

### Political and institutional

1. Make child poverty specific government priority
  - set ambitious outcome target for reduction in child poverty
2. Develop a more comprehensive strategy
  - set quantified objectives for each key policy area
  - enhance consultation with key stakeholders, especially children (viz OMCYA, Children's Ombudsman & Children's Rights Alliance)
3. Enhance mainstreaming and coordination of child poverty issues
  - need for higher status, more dynamic, better resourced, more proactive, more rigorous & more critical coordination (CPA + OSI = ?)
  - establish joint OSI-CPA/OMCYA committee
4. Strengthen link with children's rights agenda
  - better links with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child process
  - more focus on child poverty by Children's Ombudsman

## 12 Recommendations

5. Review role of HSE in relation to delivery of children and family services (except medical)

### 3 Key Policy priorities

6. Increase parents' access to work and make work pay
  - especially lone parents and parents of large families
7. Increase income support to families with children
  - ensure all are lifted to at least 60% median income line
8. Invest seriously in early childhood education and care
  - comprehensive, universal, high quality, inclusive and affordable

## 12 Recommendations

### Delivery

9. Improve coordination of local services
  - accelerate establishment of children's services committees
  - consider statutory basis for coordinating delivery
10. Strengthen requirements to ensure accountable delivery
  - build on work of OMCYA and Barnardos
11. Improve sharing of administrative data

### Overall

12. Make eradication of child poverty a key theme of Ireland's participation in 2010 EU Year on poverty and social exclusion

**Extract from EU section of draft research report**

**1.8 A Framework for Assessing National Policies to Prevent and Tackle Child Poverty and Social Exclusion**

This chapter has examined the main lessons that have emerged from the EU Social Inclusion Process on effective ways of preventing and tackling the poverty and social exclusion of children. This concluding section draws on these lessons to develop a five part framework which is intended to assist policy makers and other interested parties in their ongoing assessment and further development of the Irish national policy framework for preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion.

The framework has informed the fieldwork undertaken as part of this research project which is reported in part two of this report. It has also provided a framework for the assessment made in part four of this report. It could also be used to examine the policy approach in other countries.

Drawing on the earlier part of this report the framework takes the form of a series of questions in each of five main areas: governance, strategic approach, policy effectiveness, effective delivery and monitoring and reporting.

**1.8.1 Effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements**

A key issue is how effective and comprehensive are the political, institutional and governance arrangements for preventing and tackling the poverty and social exclusion of children. In particular:

- Is there strong political leadership on the issue of child poverty and the social exclusion of children? Is this reflected in the programme for government and in key national development documents and in the allocation of political responsibility?
- Are there effective arrangements for mainstreaming a concern with the social inclusion of children into all areas of national (and sub-national) policy making and into budgetary decision making?
- Are there effective arrangements for coordinating policies and action on the inclusion of children horizontally (i.e. across departments and agencies - both at national and sub-national levels) and vertically (i.e. between levels of governance)?
- Are there effective arrangements for mobilising and involving all actors concerned with the well-being of children in the design, implementation and assessment and monitoring of policies (e.g. social services, NGOs, parents, academics)?
- Are children sufficiently consulted about the issues that concern them and are the results of such consultations fed into the design and assessment of policies?
- How extensive and satisfactory are the data and analyses on the situation of children and is there a strategic approach to filling any gaps?
- Are *ex ante* impact assessments, including the use of micro-simulation models, sufficiently used to support policy development?

### 1.8.2 Quality of overall strategic approach

Another important consideration is the comprehensiveness and quality of the overall strategic approach to preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion. In particular:

- Does Ireland adopt a sufficiently comprehensive and multidimensional strategic approach to preventing and reducing child poverty and social exclusion?
- Is this based on an in-depth analysis of the key factors affecting children's well being (material deprivation, housing, health, exposure to risk and risk behavior, social participation and family environment, education, and local environment)?
- Is this underpinned by a clear focus on the rights of the child?
- To what extent is there an effective and thought out balance between universal and targeted policies (i.e. predominantly targeted with additional targeting when necessary)?
- Is there sufficient focus on both prevention and alleviation?
- Are clear and appropriate objectives established for preventing and reducing child poverty?

Are there specific objectives:

- for the overall reduction of poverty?
- for improvements in specific policy domains?
- for improving the position of the most vulnerable groups?
- for improving processes and governance?
- Are appropriate overall quantified outcome targets set for the reduction of child poverty which are derived from an in-depth analysis of the causes of poverty and social exclusion and which are benchmarked against the best performing EU Member States?
- Are appropriate and quantified outcome and input targets established in policy domains that are critical to the achievement of the overall target(s) and that have been established on the basis of an in-depth analysis of the causes of poverty and social exclusion?

### 1.8.3 Effectiveness of key policy areas

Within an overall comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach there is then an issue of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the measures in key policy domains: income, access to key services (i.e. housing, education, health care, child care, child protection), as well as participation in sport, recreation and cultural life, etc. In particular:

#### Income

- Is enough being done to focus employment policies towards parents of families with children with a particular focus on jobless households, lone parents, parents with 3+ children and groups at high risk (e.g. Roma, immigrant families, etc.)?  
For example through policies to:
  - reconcile work and family life
  - encourage flexible working
  - target active inclusion measures to these parents
- Is sufficient attention given to addressing the issue of a high level of low skills amongst parents, especially lone parents?
- Are there effective policies to ensure that income from work is sufficient to lift families with children out of poverty?  
For example through policies on:
  - minimum wages
  - retaining benefits
  - reducing employment traps

- pro family/child tax arrangements
- reducing costs (transport, child care)
- reducing insecure employment
- Are there adequate levels of income support?  
For example:
  - are overall expenditure levels sufficient?
  - are payments levels adequate
  - is spending effective/efficient in reducing poverty?
- Is the existing combination of employment and income support measures likely to be sufficient to significantly reduce Ireland's high levels of relative income poverty and to reduce consistent poverty?

### Access to Services

- Are families with children assured decent housing and environment conditions?  
For example through:
  - access to social housing
  - assistance with housing costs
  - security of tenure
  - policies to tackle/prevent homelessness
- Are there effective policies to prevent and tackle educational disadvantage?  
For example through policies to:
  - promote early education
  - tackle school drop out
  - ensure inclusive schools
  - reduce costs and financial barriers
- Are children assured access to health care?
- Is enough being done to ensure sufficient, affordable and high quality child care for all children?
- Is enough being done to ensure sufficient access to affordable public transport which facilitates access to employment, education, services, sport and recreation?

### Child Protection

- Are there adequate services to ensure the protection of children in vulnerable situations?
- Is there sufficient emphasis on care in the community/families rather than institutions?
- Are there effective local social services to support children and their families?
- Are there sufficient community-based initiatives to support families and children at high risk?
- Is there sufficient protection for the rights of children in line with the UNCRC?

### Participation in sport, recreation, social and cultural life

- Is sufficient attention given to ensuring that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to sporting and recreational activities?
- Is sufficient attention to ensure opportunities for all children to participate in cultural and creative activities?

#### **1.8.4 Ensuring effective delivery**

The EU experience has shown that a critical issue is not only the quality of the overall framework and the individual policies but also how those policies and programmes are actually delivered to ensure adequacy, accessibility and coverage. In particular:

- Is there sufficient linking of national and sub-national levels?
- Is there a sufficiently coordinated and integrated approach at local level?
- Is there enough focus on early intervention?
- Are interventions developed in a flexible way with tailored responses and pathways for progression?
- Are all relevant actors mobilised and working together in partnership?
- Is there a community development approach emphasising empowerment and independence?

#### **1.8.5 Effective monitoring and reporting**

The EU experience has shown that ensuring continuous improvement in policies and delivery requires effective and rigorous monitoring and evaluation arrangements at all levels and involving all relevant stakeholders. It has also highlighted the advantages in developing an EU wide social inclusion monitoring framework for children which makes full use of the agreed EU indicators on social inclusion. In particular:

- Are appropriate arrangements in place for regularly monitoring and reporting on the implementation of policies?
- Is there provision for independent expert assessments and for involving all relevant stakeholders?
- Is progress on reducing child poverty and social exclusion monitored against agreed overall quantified targets and sub-targets in different policy domains and is there an agreed set of indicators in place to monitor progress?
- Is there provision for undertaking *ex-post* impact assessments to support the assessment of the impact of specific policy measures on the situation of children and their families at the appropriate policy level?
- Is national progress benchmarked against other EU countries, making full use of EU agreed indicators?

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**Figures comparing Ireland's performance with other EU Member States**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Ireland</b>	<b>3-4 best performing MS</b>	<b>EU average</b>
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