Shared Island: Projects, Progress & Policy
Sharing Knowledge and Lessons in Combatting Poverty

NESC

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Eacnamaíoch agus Shóisialta
National Economic & Social Council

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SECRETARIAT PAPER

Contents

Abbreviations

BHC
Before Housing Costs

CAP
Common Agricultural Policy

CSO
Central Statistics Office

CSP
Community Support Programme

DCDEI
Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration

DEIS
Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

EAPN
European Anti-Poverty Network

ECEC
Early Childhood Education and Care

EIB
Enhanced Illness Benefit

EPSR
EU Pillar of Social Rights

ESF
European Social Fund

EWSS   Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme

LCDCs   Local Community Development Committees

LDCs
Local Development Companies

MAEDF
Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund

MESL
Minimum Essential Standard of Living

NALAB
Network for Adult Learning Across Borders

NICVA
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

NIMDM2017
Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017

NISRA
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

OMC
Open Method of Coordination

PPFS
Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme

PTSD
Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

PUP
Pandemic Unemployment Payment

RED
Reducing Educational Disadvantage

SCoTENS
Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South

SIB
Strategic Investment Board

SICAP
Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme

SIF
Social Inclusion Forum

SOAs
Super Output Areas

UKCRF
UK Community Renewal Fund

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

What is the paper about?

As part of its work in 2021 for the Department of the Taoiseach in producing a comprehensive report on the Shared Island, NESC has prepared a secretariat paper on sharing lessons in combatting poverty on the island of Ireland. The paper:

- presents the most recent information on poverty levels and trends on the island of Ireland;

- sets out the relevant policy frameworks for combatting poverty in Ireland and Northern Ireland;

- documents policies, programmes and practices in tackling poverty through social welfare, social service supports, and local and community development approaches;

- explores some existing areas of cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland; and

- concludes by summarising the key lessons from the work, and identifying issues with the potential for further cooperation in combatting poverty.

The Extent and Nature of Poverty on the Island of Ireland

Similar poverty trends have been identified in Ireland and Northern Ireland, with people who are unemployed, lone parents, and people with disabilities at greatest risk of poverty. Children and young people in both jurisdictions have a high risk of poverty, and have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. Digital exclusion has also been highlighted by the pandemic. Other trends identified are the invisibility of some rural poverty, the increasing risk of poverty faced by people in low-paid work, and the links between poverty and mental health. Some groups in the population are particularly marginalised and at risk of poverty, including people who are homeless, Travellers and migrants. In addition, there are concentrations of poverty in the north-west of both Northern Ireland and Ireland. While statistics can be compiled across the jurisdictions, it would be useful to have some common measurements for comparison and to assist in developing appropriate interventions.

Anti-Poverty Strategies

Both jurisdictions have anti-poverty strategies in place or in development. In Ireland, the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 has the overarching ambition to reduce the national consistent poverty rate to 2 per cent or less of the population (from 5.5 per cent in 2019), and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive states in the EU by 2025. To achieve this, the Roadmap sets out 7 high-level goals, including 66 commitments. A feature of the Roadmap is explicit recognition of a cross-government approach, with the integration of relevant departmental strategies within the Roadmap. The Roadmap was discussed at the annual Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) in April 2021, with issues raised including: the unprecedented levels of need which have become apparent as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with some groups being disproportionally affected; the need for a specific focus to address child poverty; and the importance of community development and community support.

In Northern Ireland, a co-design process, where members of civic society work with government officials, has been put in place to prepare an anti-poverty strategy. An expert panel has prepared recommendations for this strategy, with the intention to have the strategy finalised by December 2021, following consultation. The main recommendations of the expert panel include: that the NI Assembly should pass an Anti-Poverty Act, and that the Act should contain provisions for an Anti-Poverty Commission; that income should be adequate for those reliant on benefits and that a 'living wage' would ensure that those in work are not at risk of poverty; that there should be a new non-taxable weekly Child

Payment[1] for all 0-4 year olds and for 5-15 year olds who are in receipt of free school meals; and that greater attention should be paid to eradicating destitution.

There is a limited focus on community supports, educational disadvantage, and the legacy of the NI conflict, as the expert panel was mainly concerned with 'putting money in people's pockets' through benefits, work, and by reducing living costs. Some commentators have highlighted the following aspects of the strategy: the priority of addressing child poverty; apparent increases in the levels of destitution – as evidenced by the use of food banks and increasing levels of debt, which may be related to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to benefit cuts, and welfare reforms, especially in relation to Universal Credit; the invisibility of some rural poverty; the need to create good jobs; and a poverty of hope in some communities.

There is limited cooperation between the two jurisdictions in the development and implementation of the anti-poverty strategies. Two areas where cooperation has occurred, however, are the all-island food poverty network, which provides a co-ordinated and strategic approach to tackling this issue on the island of Ireland; and an EU-funded mainstreaming social inclusion project, from which a number of lessons were learned.

Policies, Programmes and Practices in Combatting Poverty

In Ireland, the social welfare system does well in reducing the risk of poverty. In addition, during the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, the introduction of measures such as the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the Enhanced Illness Benefit (EIB), and the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) have helped to support people. In Northern Ireland, concerns have been raised about the adequacy of benefits, especially Child Benefit, and about the attrition in the value of housing benefit. The five-week wait for payment of Universal Credit has been shown to increase food poverty and debt.

Both jurisdictions are concerned about tackling educational disadvantage. In Ireland the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme provides additional support to schools in disadvantaged areas. In addition, lifelong learning in disadvantaged areas is provided through adult and community education, with the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF)[2] and the 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy as notable supports. In Northern Ireland, a recently published plan to address educational disadvantage sets out 47 actions, which involve a number of government departments and public agencies. The Fair Start Action Plan prioritises investment in early years development, and gives prominence to emotional health and wellbeing. The Plan proposes a new programme – Reducing Educational Disadvantage (RED) – a targeted intervention that would encourage partnerships with the community and voluntary sector, as well as with other schools. The RED proposal reflects elements of the Irish DEIS initiative, as well as similar programmes in Scotland and Wales. There are also specific proposals in relation to supporting boys in education, based on evidence that boys are underachieving.

Local and community development plays an important role in tackling poverty. In Ireland, a number of strategies have been put in place in recent years to help address disadvantage and to promote social inclusion, supported by specific funding programmes. These programmes include the EU's initiative to support rural development projects (LEADER), the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), and the recently announced Community Development Pilot Programme. An initiative worthy of note in response to the Covid-19 crisis is Community Call. This initiative has been an experiment in partnership between national and local government, and the community and voluntary sector, to deliver co-ordinated support to vulnerable people remaining at home during Covid-19 lockdowns. In Northern Ireland, support for local and community development, and for community programmes, is delivered through the Department for Communities, whose overall aim is tackling disadvantage and building sustainable communities. Programmes are available to target social need through social, economic and physical regeneration; neighbourhood renewal; supporting disadvantaged and rural women; and funding support for the community and voluntary sector. Both jurisdictions also have initiatives to tackle concentrations of urban disadvantage.

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[1]   In addition to Child Benefit.

[2]   The Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) provides funding to support educationally disadvantaged learners to access and participate in community education. The fund has a focus on building the digital infrastructure of community education providers, including providing devices and software, and increasing their capacity to deliver online learning.

A key learning from these programmes and initiatives is the importance of state, community, and voluntary bodies working together to address disadvantage, whilst listening to and drawing on the knowledge and experience of people living in these local areas. This is very much a bottom-up approach, which is supported by resources at a regional or national level, drawing on learning from similar initiatives, and exhibiting elements of co-design.

Areas of Cooperation

Many organisations collaborate on an all-island or north-south basis, especially through network approaches. The North South Ministerial Council provides a forum for more structured and formal north-south deliberations. In addition, there are a number of other initiatives with formal north-south collaboration related to poverty alleviation and social inclusion. These include the Peace Programmes I-IV. Of particular relevance are the new Peace Plus Programme; social welfare summer schools; post-Brexit reciprocal social welfare arrangements; the network for adult learning across borders; the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South; community grant funding; and cross-border strategic partnerships.

Next steps

A number of areas warrant further consideration, including:

- child poverty; the inter-generational transmission of poverty; and educational underachievement;

- socio-economic rights;

- the role of the community and voluntary sector, including its relationship with local and national government;

- the role of social security;

- the better alignment of poverty measurement;

- the links between poverty and mental health;

- the impact of the green and digital transitions on people experiencing poverty; and

- the role of special initiatives in tackling concentrations of poverty.

These issues will be considered further in the context of the overall NESC Shared Island research programme.

1.1 Introduction

The Department of the Taoiseach has asked the National Economic and Social Council to produce a comprehensive report on the Shared Island in 2021, to inform the development of the Shared Island initiative as a whole-of-government priority. The NESC research will contribute to building a shared knowledge base and understanding about possible ways in which greater co-operation can emerge across a number of economic, social and environmental areas in Ireland, North and South, and also between these islands East and West.

The research will seek to engage with all communities and traditions on this island to build consensus around a shared future, with a focus on actionable areas of cooperation. The work will be underpinned by the Good Friday Agreement and absolute respect for the principle of consent. The research will not address the constitutional question, but will focus on sustainable economic, social and environmental development issues in line with NESC's strategic remit.

NESC's work in 2021 will focus on a select number of areas. The areas selected for more detailed description and analysis are being documented in state-of-play reviews, which seek to build on NESC's existing areas of competence and expertise. The work on these areas is informed by consultation and discussion with key interests across the island. This state-of-play review is on sharing lessons in combatting poverty.

It is becoming clear that the pandemic and its aftermath are having a severe impact on many people, families, and communities across the island, with an associated increase in poverty levels and inequality. Even before the pandemic, both jurisdictions were concerned about reducing poverty. In Northern Ireland, the most recent statistics for 2019-20 show that 17 per cent of people lived in relative income poverty (before housing costs), including 22 per cent of children.[3] In Ireland, 13 per cent of the population was living in relative income poverty in 2019, including 15 per cent of children.[4] The 13 per cent figure for Ireland compares to an EU-27 average poverty rate of 16.5 per cent in 2019. Ireland is ranked 7th of the EU-27 member states on this poverty indicator. The UK is no longer included in the EU poverty statistics following its withdrawal from the European Union.[5]

Both jurisdictions have anti-poverty strategies. In Ireland, the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 aims to reduce consistent poverty to 2 per cent or less (from 5.5 per cent in 2019), and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU.[6] It is supported by a range of plans and initiatives that aim to reduce poverty and to make Ireland more socially inclusive (Government of Ireland, 2020a). In Northern Ireland, as provided for in the 'New Decade New Approach' agreement, an Anti-Poverty Strategy is being developed by the Department for Communities using a co-design, co-production approach.

NESC's work looks at both of these policies in order to identify common concerns and approaches, and to share learning. This paper also discusses community approaches to addressing poverty – especially in the light of the current Covid-19 pandemic – and what can be learnt from the range of initiatives that support communities experiencing poverty and deprivation. In addition to addressing basic needs, the work will seek to identify approaches that provide opportunities for children and young people to break the cycle of deprivation.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the most recent information on poverty levels and trends on the island of Ireland. Section 3 sets out the relevant policy frameworks for combatting poverty in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Section 4 documents policies, programmes, and practices in tackling poverty through social welfare and social service supports, and local and community development approaches. Section 5 explores some existing areas of cooperation between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The concluding Section 6 summarises the key lessons from the work, and identifies areas with potential for further cooperation in combatting poverty.

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[3]   People are considered to be living in relative income poverty in NI if the income of their household is less than 60 per cent of the UK median household income. See https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/system/files/publications/communities/ni-poverty-bulletin-201920.pdf accessed 12.11.21.

[4]   People are considered to be living in relative income poverty in Ireland if their disposable income is less than 60 per cent of medium disposable income. See https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/ accessed 05.11.21.

[5]   See https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/156b21-social-inclusion-monitor/#2018-2019 accessed 13/11/21.

[6]   People who are both at risk of poverty and experience enforced deprivation are in consistent poverty, the official Irish measure of poverty.

1.2   Poverty Levels on the Island of Ireland

Official poverty statistics are produced by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in Ireland and by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in Northern Ireland. There are no poverty statistics produced for the island of Ireland by these bodies, though regular collaboration does take place on various statistical issues. The Irish National Statistics Board Strategic Plan 2021 – 2026, *Quality Information for All – Numbers Matter,* recommends that 'data collection should include collaboration with agencies such as NISRA to support a shared-island approach to official statistics, where appropriate' (NSB, 2021: 34).

1.2.1   Poverty Levels in Ireland

The CSO publishes poverty trends for Ireland based on the EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions. The most recent data is for 2019, pre-Covid, which shows that 12.8 per cent of the population was 'at risk of poverty', that is, their disposable income was less than 60 per cent of medium disposable income. Some 17.8 per cent of the population experienced enforced material deprivation, that is, lacking two or more of eleven types of deprivation because they cannot afford them.[7] People who are both at risk of poverty, and who experience enforced deprivation, are in consistent poverty, the official Irish measure of poverty. In 2019, 5.5 per cent of the population was in consistent poverty (CSO, 2020).

The following subgroups of the population tend to have the highest poverty rates:

- Women have slightly higher poverty rates than men.

- Children and young people have higher poverty rates than working-age and older people.

- People who are not at work because of illness or disability, and people who are unemployed, have a high risk of poverty.

- Households where no-one is working have a high poverty risk.

- Lone parents and single adults under 65 have a high poverty risk.

- People with low levels of qualifications have a high poverty risk.

- Renters have a much higher poverty risk than owner occupiers.

- People living in urban areas tend to have a higher poverty rate than those in rural areas, though rural poverty can be hidden.

- At a regional level, the Northern and Western region has higher poverty rates than the Southern or Eastern and Midland regions.

See Table A1 in Appendix A for further details.

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[7]   Material deprivation refers to the inability to afford basic identified goods or services because you cannot afford them. It is reported at the household and not the individual level, but it is assumed that each person in a household where a form of deprivation was reported experienced that form of deprivation. There are 11 items on the list. If a person experienced two or more of the eleven basic deprivation items due to inability to afford them, they are said to be deprived. The eleven items are: (i) without heating at some stage during the year; (ii) unable to afford a morning, afternoon or evening out in the last fortnight; (iii) unable to afford two pairs of strong shoes; (iv) unable to afford a roast or its equivalent once a week; (v) unable to afford a meal with meat, chicken, fish or its equivalent every second day; (vi) unable to afford new (not second-hand) clothes; (vii) unable to afford a warm waterproof coat; (viii) unable to afford to keep the house adequately warm; (ix) unable to replace any worn-out furniture; (x) unable to afford to have family or friends for a drink or meal once a month; (xi) unable to afford to buy presents for family and friends at least once a year.

In terms of the spatial dimension of deprivation, the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index for Small Areas maps deprivation based on indicators from the 2016 Census of Population (Haase & Pratschke, 2017). The indicators try to capture both urban and rural deprivation, including opportunity deprivation. There are three dimensions to the Pobal HP Deprivation Index:

- demographic decline (predominantly rural): population loss and the social and demographic effects of emigration captured through age dependency and low educational achievement of the adult population;

- social class deprivation (applying equally in urban and rural areas): social class composition, education, and housing quality; and

- labour market deprivation (predominantly urban): unemployment, lone parents and low skills base.

Figure 1.1 shows the application of the 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index to Ireland. The blue areas show the most affluent areas, with the red/orange areas showing the most deprived. The most affluent areas are in Dublin—Rathgar, Rathmines, Blackrock, Sandyford and Pembroke. The most deprived areas are Cork City North-West, Waterford City South, Longford, and Glenties and Stranorlar in County Donegal.

Figure 1.1: Spatial Deprivation in Ireland, 2016
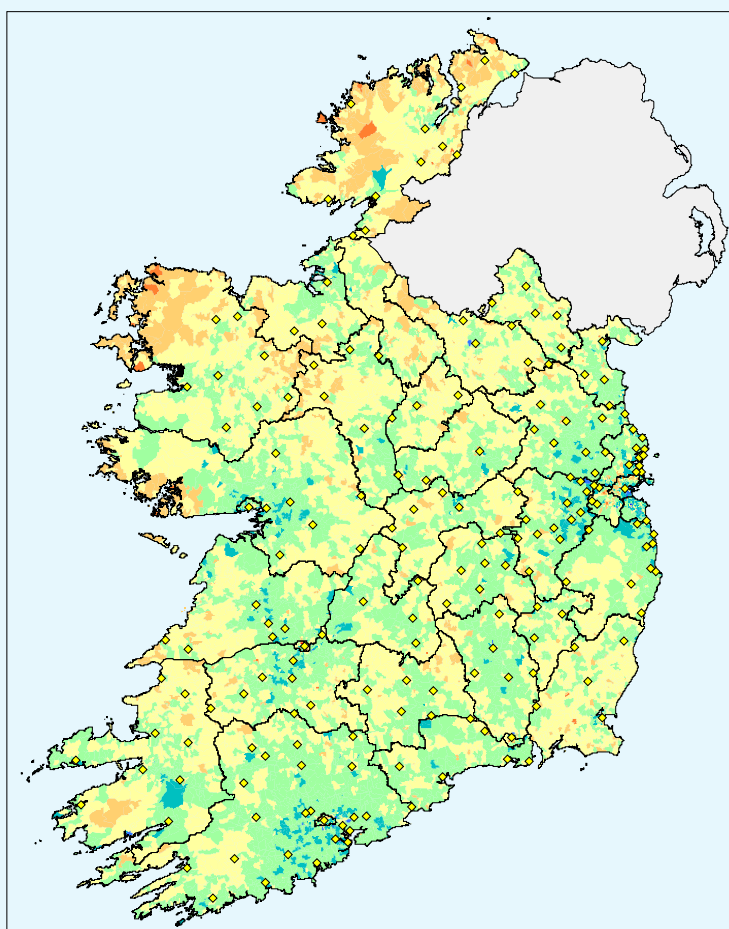
Source: 2016 Pobal HP Deprivation Index.

1.2.2 Poverty Levels in Northern Ireland

NISRA publishes poverty trends for Northern Ireland based on the Family Resource Survey. The most recent data is for 2019-20, also pre-Covid, which shows that 17 per cent of individuals were living in relative poverty, before housing costs (BHC).[8] For subgroups of the population the relative poverty rates are (BHC):[9]

- 22 per cent of children;

- 14 per cent of the working-age population; and

- 18 per cent of pensioners.

Although the figures are not directly comparable, the relative income poverty rate is higher in Northern Ireland than Ireland: 17 per cent compared to 13 per cent. In both jurisdictions, children have higher poverty rates than adults, with a noticeably higher rate in Northern Ireland: 22 per cent compared to 15 per cent in Ireland. What is also notable is the higher poverty rate among pensioners in Northern Ireland at 18 per cent, compared to 11 per cent in Ireland. Poverty rates are similar for the working-age population: 12 per cent in Ireland compared to 14 per cent in Northern Ireland.

A recent Save the Children Europe publication reported that 100,000 children are growing up at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland. In particular, they note that children from black ethnic communities are far more vulnerable to poverty in Northern Ireland, with 66 per cent growing up in poverty, almost three times the national figure and higher than any other community (Save the Children Europe, 2021).

NISRA measures spatial deprivation in Northern Ireland, with the most recent deprivation measure available for 2017 (Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 or NIMDM2017).[10] Following extensive consultation, and building on previous work, the NIMDM2017 comprises seven distinct types of deprivation: income; employment; health and disability; education, skills and training; access to services; living environment; and crime and disorder. These seven domains are weighted and combined to provide a ranking of multiple deprivation for 890 areas (referred to as Super Output Areas (SOAs)) across Northern Ireland. These are ranked from the most to the least deprived area.

The most deprived area is in Derry City and Strabane District Council. Of the 10 most deprived areas, 5 are in Derry City and Strabane and 5 are in Belfast. Of the 100 most deprived areas, half are in Belfast, one fifth are in Derry City and Strabane. There are none in Lisburn and Castlereagh. Figure 1.2 provides an illustration of deprivation across Northern Ireland. The most deprived areas are in dark blue with the least deprived areas in light blue.

A notable feature of the NIMDM2017 from earlier versions is the attempt to capture rural deprivation better, by extending the indicators in the 'access to services' domain to take account of travel times to a wider variety of services by private and public transport, and by including access to broadband. In addition, the income domain is now based on household income rather than benefit receipt, in order to capture low pay.

While the Irish and Northern Irish deprivation measures were devised and are applied separately, there has been information exchange and ongoing collaboration between NISRA and the CSO.

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[8]   An individual is considered to be in relative poverty if they are living in a household with an equivalised income below 60 per cent of UK median income in the year in question. This measure includes housing costs (another measure is also presented for relative poverty after housing costs, where housing costs are deducted).

[9]   The absolute poverty rates are also available for NI. An individual is considered to be in absolute poverty if they are living in a household with an equivalised income below 60 per cent of the (inflation adjusted) UK median income in 2010-11. Using this measure, the absolute poverty rate for NI in 2019-20 was 13 per cent; 17 per cent for children; 11 per cent for people of working age; and 14 per cent for pensioners.

[10]   See https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation/northern-ireland-multiple-deprivation-measure-2017-nimdm2017 accessed 05.11.21.

Figure 1.2: Multiple Deprivation in Northern Ireland, 2017, showing the 10 most deprived areas
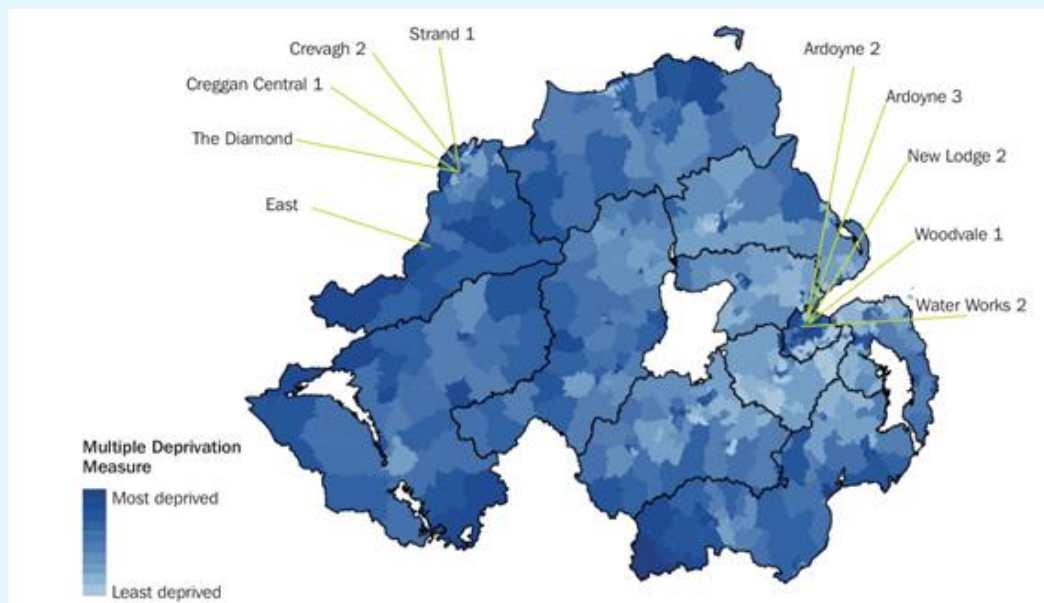
Source: NISRA.

1.2.3 Overview of Poverty Levels on the Island of Ireland

The previous sections have portrayed the poverty and deprivation levels in Ireland and Northern Ireland using the official statistical sources (CSO, NISRA, Pobal HP Deprivation Index). These sources show that:

- Poverty levels are slightly higher in Northern Ireland than in Ireland.

- Child poverty is an issue in both jurisdictions.

- Pensioner poverty is comparatively higher in Northern Ireland.

- There are concentrations of poverty, shown by the mapping of deprivation.

- It is more difficult to capture rural deprivation.

- Outside of the main cities, there are high levels of deprivation in the north-west of both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

As the official poverty statistics are based on population surveys, they can fail to capture poverty rates among some subgroups of the population. While the official Irish figures show high poverty levels among people who are unemployed, lone parents and people with disabilities, other subgroups which are numerically small but are known to have high poverty levels are people who are homeless; Travellers; and migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers.

The official statistics are not yet available to assess the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on poverty levels. However, a survey by the St Vincent de Paul in January 2021 found that people struggling prior to the Covid-19 crisis were more likely to have lost income, report an increase in household expenditure on basics, and experience more adverse financial

impacts than those who were living comfortably prior to the pandemic (St. Vincent de Paul, 2021).[11] The results show that the impacts of Covid-19 and its associated restrictions have been felt unevenly across the country, and in some cases have exacerbated existing inequalities. Many of the groups that were more vulnerable to poverty prior to the pandemic are experiencing the most adverse financial impacts. These include low-income families with children; lone parents; renters; and people with disabilities. These groups are more likely to be experiencing food and energy poverty, while falling behind on their utility bills and accumulating rent arrears. While the survey was undertaken in Ireland, people concerned with poverty issues in Northern Ireland have reported a similar situation there, with a growing reliance on food banks and charitable supports.

The St Vincent de Paul has reported a 20 per cent increase in calls for help in 2021 compared to the same period in 2020.[12] The society has received 45,000 calls for help in the first three months of 2021, the highest number during any first quarter in the past decade. Households are struggling to meet costs for children's and babies' clothes, laptops, tablets and wifi for children to participate in remote-learning, and for basic homeware such as bed linen, towels and tableware.[13]

Digital exclusion has been highlighted by the pandemic. Pre-pandemic, Northern Ireland had twice the rate of internet non-users (14.2 per cent) as London (7 per cent), and across NI only 78 per cent of those in the most deprived areas had home broadband access compared to 94 per cent in households in the least deprived areas.[14] While 91 per cent of households in Ireland had access to the internet at home in 2019, only 71 per cent in the Border region had a fixed broadband connection compared to 92 per cent in Dublin (CSO, 2019). In both jurisdictions, those most likely not to be using the internet are older people, people in rural areas, and people living in poverty. As well as lack of access to the internet, digital exclusion relates to lack of access to devices, lack of skills to use the internet and devices, and a lack of confidence to engage with ICT (NESC, 2021).

There is a concern about the impact of climate change and other environmental harms on people who are poor, e.g. energy poverty, and health concerns related to poor air quality and poor housing conditions. Issues related to just transitions are considered more fully in other NESC Shared Island work on climate change.[15]

In relation to poverty and inequality more generally, the ESRI and the Community Foundation for Ireland have recently published a report which tracks poverty and inequality trends from 1987 to 2019 (Roantree *et al.* 2021). They found that the incidence of income poverty and material deprivation remains closely linked to the absence of anyone in paid work, which is different to countries like the UK where poverty has increasingly become an in-work phenomenon. The high risk of poverty in families where no-one is in paid work, and in lone parent families, has been an enduring feature in Ireland since the late 1990s.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, however, along with the hangover from the economic recession in 2008, have raised concerns about the transmission of inter-generational poverty. Young people have disproportionately lost jobs as a result of the pandemic and, along with high housing and childcare costs, are at risk of enduring poverty without appropriate interventions and supports such as high-quality active labour market programmes, affordable childcare and an increase in the supply of housing.

A report by the Irish Youth Foundation focusing on marginalised children and young people found that the pandemic had impacted young people's mental health, that many of them lacked social skills and resilience, and that their education and employment prospects had stalled (Irish Youth Foundation, 2021).[16]

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[11] The St Vincent de Paul survey was carried out between the 22nd and 28th January 2021 by Red C in an on-line omnibus survey with a nationally representative random sample of 1,026 adults aged 18 and over.

[12] The St Vincent de Paul operates throughout the island of Ireland and currently has eight regional offices located around the country.

[13] See https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/st-vincent-de-paul-calls-for-charity-shops-to-be-classed-as-essential-service-1.4531384, accessed 16.06.21.

[14] Continuous Household Survey, NI, cited in (Department for Communities, 2020: 56).

[15] See https://www.nesc.ie/publications/collaboration-on-climate-and-biodiversity-shared-island-as-a-catalyst-for-renewed-ambition-action/.

[16] The national online survey was undertaken on 15th to 20th April 2021 by Amárach Research among 300 youth workers, working with marginalised young people and children.

More generally, poverty increases the risk of mental health problems, and can be both a cause of mental ill-health as well as an outcome of poor mental health. Mental health is influenced by the social, economic and physical environments, including the inequalities, within which people live (Poole *et al.* 2013; Elliott, 2016).

In conclusion, similar poverty trends have been identified in Ireland and Northern Ireland, with people who are unemployed, lone parents, and people with disabilities at greatest risk of poverty. Children and young people in both jurisdictions have a high risk of poverty, and have been disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. Other trends identified are the presence but invisibility of some rural poverty, the increasing risk of people in low pay being at risk of poverty, and the impact of poverty on mental health.

While statistics can be compiled across the jurisdictions, it would be useful to have some common measurements for comparison and appropriate interventions. This may become more difficult with the UK's withdrawal from the EU and the possibility of its non-inclusion in Eurostat Statistics.

Having examined poverty levels and measurements in Ireland and Northern Ireland, the next section considers the policy frameworks in place to tackle poverty.

1.3 Anti-Poverty Policy Frameworks

Most countries are committed to tackling poverty, and many signal this through specific anti-poverty or social inclusion policy frameworks. This section describes the anti-poverty policy frameworks in place in Ireland and in Northern Ireland, which is a devolved administration of the UK.

1.3.1 Ireland

Ireland has had a whole-of-government anti-poverty strategy in place since 1997 (Government of Ireland, 1997). The Government at that time adopted the following definition of poverty, which is still in use today.

> *People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them 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 (ibid.).*

There have been a number of subsequent Irish National Anti-Poverty Strategies. Many of these have aligned with the European National Action Plans against poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/inclusion), through the Open Method of Co-ordination introduced in the Lisbon Strategy in 2000.[17] Here it was agreed that all governments must adopt a poverty perspective in their policymaking, thus placing mainstreaming social inclusion at the centre of the European Social Model. The Europe 2020 Strategy, which replaced the Lisbon Strategy in 2010, set a target to reduce poverty in the EU by at least 20 million people by 2020. This target was only half met, and the Europe 2020 Strategy has now ended.

The 2017 EU Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is the only remaining anti-poverty strategy at EU level. Conceived while the Europe 2020 strategy was still extant in practice the EPSR has replaced it, as the EPSR principles only began to impact the European Semester process in 2020. The European Commission's Action Plan to implement EPSR was adopted in early 2021, and introduced measures such as the European Child Guarantee. This requires member states to develop national action plans by March 2022, in order to meet a target of lifting at least 5 million children out of poverty by 2030. This measure also provided funds, and called on all member states to allocate appropriate resources to tackle child poverty.

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[17]   The Open Method of Co-ordination was a new form of governance with the following characteristics: the use of guidelines and recommendations; integration of actors from multiple policy areas and levels of government; benchmarking and the sharing of good practice; mutual agreement on policy goals and multilateral monitoring of implementation; and regular policy review and revision.

In general, at EU level there is increased recognition of the need to strengthen the concept of Social Europe, and to give effect to the EPSR. In this context it is worth noting that the EU has introduced a draft proposal for an Adequate Minimum Wage Directive.[18] This draft proposal aims to improve working conditions; to address wage inequality at the lower end of the income distribution; to reduce in-work poverty; and the gender pay gap; by establishing a framework for adequate minimum wages, and for access to minimum wage protection, either provided by collective agreements or set in legal provision (EU Commission, 2020).

In January 2020, the Department of Social Protection published the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 - 2025 Ambition, Goals and Commitments (Government of Ireland, 2020). This whole-of-government strategy builds on the work of its predecessors with the aim of reducing the number of people in consistent poverty in Ireland, and increasing social inclusion for those who are most disadvantaged. While accepting the original definition of poverty from the 1997 *Sharing in Progress* strategy, it also sets out a definition of social inclusion, reflecting the Active Inclusion approach adopted by the European Commission:

> *Social inclusion is achieved when people have access to sufficient income, resources and services to enable them to play an active part in their communities and participate in activities that are considered the norm for people in society generally (ibid.:11).*

The Roadmap was published following a period of consultation, which included input from a number of government departments, and took into account the views of people experiencing poverty, and of the community and voluntary sector groups working with them. This was done through an online public consultation process, and the annual social inclusion forum. A view has been expressed by some in the community and voluntary sector that the public consultation process was too limited, and that there could be a greater focus on income adequacy in the Roadmap.

The Roadmap takes into account current EU and international policy, such as the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Social Charter and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Roadmap has the overarching ambition to reduce the national consistent poverty rate to two per cent or less of the population (from 5.5% in 2019), and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive states in the EU by 2025. To achieve this, the Roadmap sets out 7 high-level goals, including 66 commitments, as shown in Table 1.1.

Progress on achieving the high-level goals will be tracked against 22 targets, which cover poverty (including child poverty), deprivation, income distribution, housing, health, early learning and care, social participation, and active citizenship.

A feature of the Roadmap is explicit recognition of the cross-government approach, with the integration of relevant departmental strategies within the Roadmap – e.g. the National Traveller and Roma Strategy; Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness; Comprehensive Strategy for People with Disabilities. A Social Inclusion Roadmap Steering Group has been established, chaired by the Minister of State for Social Inclusion, to oversee implementation of the commitments in the Roadmap. Membership comprises senior departmental officials of relevant departments, along with three representatives from the community and voluntary sector. It is envisaged that the Steering Group will meet twice per year, and will report to the Cabinet Committee on Social Affairs and Equality. A mid-term review will be undertaken.

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[18] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1968, accessed 28.10.20.

Table 1.1: High-Level Goals and Commitments in the Roadmap for Social Inclusion

High Level Goal	To be achieved by …
1. Extend employment opportunities to all who can work	Improving employment services for long-term unemployed people and marginalised groups
2. Ensure work pays – fair pay, fair conditions for workers	Tighten enforcement of employment conditions and continue development of the minimum wage
3. Provide income security for older people	Benchmark pension rates to salaries and inflation and establish a pension rates commission
4. Support families – reduce child poverty	Prioritise increases in family-related payments and introduce and extend new family supports
5. Reduce poverty among people with disabilities – help them maximise their ability	Reform the structure of disability-related welfare payments and enhance employment supports for people with disabilities
6. Build inclusive communities – encourage active citizenship	Protect all-Ireland schemes and services post-Brexit and implement the National Broadband Plan
7. Ensure that all people have access to quality services	Implement Sláintecare and reduce food and fuel poverty

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion was discussed at the annual Social Inclusion Forum (SIF) in April 2021.[19] Some of the key points emerging from the SIF were:

- Unprecedented levels of need have become apparent as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic – e.g. food and fuel poverty, digital exclusion, mental health issues.

- Some groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic – e.g. Travellers, Roma, people with disabilities, carers, people in direct provision, lone parents.

- There is a need for a specific focus to address child poverty, with the EU Child Guarantee being welcomed.[20]

- The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the poverty issues that were there before the pandemic and created/highlighted others – e.g. violence against women.

- Access to employment must involve access to decent jobs.

- There is a need to act on the potential for apprenticeships and social enterprise.

- Community development and community support is important, with a welcome for the new Community Development Pilot Programme.

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[19] The Annual Social Inclusion Forum is an event organised by the Department of Social Protection, which provides the opportunity for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and the community and voluntary sector groups that represent them, to engage directly with policy officials from a range of government departments to highlight and discuss their key concerns. Annual Social Inclusion Forums have been held most years since 2003, initially by the National Economic and Social Forum to 2008, and then by the Department of Social Protection.

[20] The EU Child Guarantee provides guidance and means for Member States to support children in need by guaranteeing effective access to healthy nutrition and adequate housing. Member States are to guarantee free and effective access to the following key services:
- early childhood education and care (ECEC);
- healthcare;
- education and school-based activities; and
- at least one healthy meal each school day.

- The importance of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) was acknowledged;

- The need for state support, rather than a reliance on charity, was recognised.

- Poverty in rural areas should be recognised and addressed.

- The provision of accommodation should be addressed.

A number of these issues cut across departmental strategies, some of which will be considered further in Section 1.4.

1.3.2 Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 obliges the Northern Ireland Executive (NIE) to develop a strategy 'to tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need' (Department for Communities, 2020: 6). In 2015, the Northern Ireland High Court ruled that no such strategy was in place. The current commitment by the Minister for Communities to produce an anti-poverty strategy seeks to address this deficit.

A co-design process has been put in place to prepare an anti-poverty strategy. An expert panel of four people was asked to prepare recommendations for an anti-poverty strategy, which was published in December 2020.[21] The recommendations are being considered by a Co-Design Group, comprising representatives of civic society groups concerned with poverty. At the same time, a cross-departmental group of officials is considering the report, with a particular focus on *vires*, affordability, feasibility, timescales and cross-referencing strategies which impact on poverty – e.g. childcare, health, education. Following this process, the revised strategy will go to the NIE for consideration. If agreed, the Anti-Poverty Strategy will then go out for full public consultation, along with equality screening, rural proofing, etc. On completion of these exercises, the Department for Communities will finalise the strategy. The intention is to have the strategy finalised by December 2021.

The main recommendations of the expert panel are summarised as follows:

Context: the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK's exit from the European Union, the climate emergency, and the aftermath of the economic crash of 2008 present economic and political pressures, with a call to 'build back fairer'.

Poverty definition: the expert panel suggests the following definition of poverty:

People are living in poverty if their income and other resources are so low that they are unable to meet their basic needs, including participation in society.

Anti-Poverty Act: the expert panel recommends that the NI Assembly should pass an Anti-Poverty Act with targets and timetables for 2030 and beyond. The Act should make discrimination in the provision of goods and services on the basis of socio-economic status unlawful.[22] The anti-poverty strategy should be based on socio-economic rights as set out in the relevant UN Conventions and Sustainable Development Goals. It should be informed by principles of inclusion and consultation, including a 'poverty truth' process through engagement with disadvantaged communities.[23]

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[21]   The four experts are: Mike Tomlinson, Goretti Horgan, Pauline Leeson and Bernadette McAliskey. Mike Tomlinson is an emeritus professor of social policy at Queen's University in Belfast, Goretti Horgan is a lecturer in social policy at the University of Ulster, Pauline Leeson is Chief Executive at Children in Northern Ireland, and Bernadette McAliskey is a civil rights activist and former politician.

[22]   The 2010 Equality Act in Britain contains a socio-economic duty but this does not extend to Northern Ireland. Equality is a devolved matter so this would need to be legislated for separately.

[23]   A 'poverty truth' process is where the lived experience of poverty is ethically recorded, published and routinely brought to the attention of stakeholders and policy makers.

Anti-Poverty Commission: The Act should contain provisions for an Anti-Poverty Commission with responsibilities to a) monitor progress on reducing poverty and income inequality; b) promote reduction of poverty and income inequality; and c) advise the NIE on poverty matters.[24]

Low pay: The expert panel's recommendations focus on enabling people to undertake paid work, and on improving social security for those who cannot work, or for whom work is unavailable. This includes addressing low pay through a 'real living wage', through 'living hours' employment, and through dealing with the constraints on hours worked. It includes ensuring that opportunities for work are available in areas of underdevelopment, many of which are in the west of Northern Ireland. A range of interventions is required to increase the employment of disabled people, young people and older workers. Furthermore, the childcare strategy must provide childcare that is affordable, accessible and high quality, to meet the diverse needs of families below the poverty line.

Child poverty: child poverty has been identified as a problem in Northern Ireland. The expert panel's strategy recommends a new non-taxable weekly Child Payment[25] for all 0-4 year olds and for 5-15 year olds who are in receipt of free school meals, with a proposal that the payment should be set between £12.50 and £15 per week initially.[26] In addition, it proposes that participation in school should be cost-free, by expanding Sure Start[27] provision and extending school food programmes. The childcare strategy also plays a role in addressing child poverty.

Social security benefits: the expert panel recommends improving social security benefits. Universal Credit is the main benefit in Northern Ireland, and the panel makes a number of proposals in relation to benefit cuts and welfare reform mitigations (the application of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland is discussed in section 1.4.2). There are also recommendations on the take-up of various credits, especially among older people.

Destitution: reference is made to the need to include policies aimed at eradicating destitution, hunger and severe poverty, including homelessness, with the need for a better understanding of the scale and nature of destitution in Northern Ireland. Many people at risk of destitution are not included in the official poverty figures.

Cross-cutting themes: there is reference to a number of cross-cutting themes, such as the need to address the link between housing and poverty, the need to audit the costs of poverty, and to improve poverty measurement – including making the list of deprivation items compatible with those used in Ireland.

A number of views have been garnered in relation to the recommendations of the expert panel. These include:

- the priority of addressing child poverty;

- apparent increases in the levels of destitution, as evidenced in the use of food banks and increasing levels of debt. This may be related to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, but also to benefit cuts and welfare reforms, especially in relation to Universal Credit;

- the presence, but invisibility, of some rural poverty, with many people in low pay and intermittent jobs who may not be eligible for benefits but are nevertheless living below the poverty line;

- the need to create good jobs, especially 'west of the Bann';

- a poverty of hope in some communities;

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[24] This proposed Poverty Commission is based on the Scottish Poverty and Equality Commission, see https://www.gov.scot/groups/poverty-and-inequality-commission/#:~:text=The%20Commission%20provides%20independent%20advice,poverty%20and%20inequality%20in%20Scotland and https://povertyinequality.scot/ accessed 05.11.21.

[25] In addition to the existing Child Benefit.

[26] This proposal is based on the Scottish Child Payment, https://www.gov.scot/news/new-scottish-child-payment-starts-today/#:~:text=The%20new%20benefit%2C%20which%20is,checks%20and%20start%20issuing%20decisions accessed 05.11.21. In Scotland, qualifying parents and carers receive £40 every 4 weeks for each child under 6 – this is called the Scottish Child Payment, introduced as an anti-poverty measure.

[27] Sure Start is a programme targeted at parents, and children under the age of four, living in the most disadvantaged areas. Sure Start projects deliver a wide variety of services, which are designed to support children's learning skills, health and well-being, and social and emotional development.

- the need for greater involvement of people experiencing poverty in the development of the strategy;

- the need to better understand the links between poverty and mental health;

- the need to think about prioritisation within the strategy;

- the feasibility and affordability of some of the recommendations made by the expert panel; and

- how the work of the Co-design Group and the Cross-departmental Group will dovetail to produce the draft anti-poverty strategy.

There is a limited focus on community supports, educational disadvantage, and the legacy of the NI conflict in the expert panel's recommendations, as they were concerned mainly about 'putting money in people's pockets' through benefits, work, and by reducing the costs facing people. Nevertheless, fractured communities continue to exist in Northern Ireland along with high levels of poverty. There is an association between poverty, violence, stress, and mental illness. In 2005, the Combat Poverty Agency published a report on the links between poverty and conflict in Ireland, see Box 1.1 (Hillyard *et al.* 2005).

Box 1.1: Poverty and Conflict in Ireland: An International Perspective

This report sets out the relationships between poverty and conflict in an Irish context, drawing on international experience. While the relationship between conflict and poverty is complex, there is agreement that underdevelopment and high levels of inequality are high risk factors for armed conflict. Both poverty and inequality are contexts in which grievances may become politicised. Societies that are more equal are also more socially cohesive than others.

Poverty on its own is an insufficient predictor of conflict, and the wealthier a society the less likely that poverty is a trigger for conflict. But when poverty is combined with ethnic, religious or unresolved national divisions, armed conflicts are much more likely.

A number of different approaches have been taken to reconstruction in post-conflict societies. A consistent message is that a number of issues need to be addressed. These include:

- a mechanism for coming to terms with past human rights abuses;

- successful disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of former combatants;

- the specific position of women, children and young people must be addressed; and

- civil society must be empowered.

In relation to Northern Ireland, the impact of the conflict has been considerable and there is evidence to suggest that it has had an adverse effect on the weakest and most deprived sections of the community. The number of deaths and injuries has been greatest in the most disadvantaged areas, and those who have perpetrated a large proportion of the violence have originated from these areas. Yet, most anti-poverty policies fail to acknowledge the conflict. The primary challenge is to tackle poverty and social exclusion in the communities most affected by conflict.

More recent research on the legacy of violence and socio-economic factors shows how they contribute to high levels of mental illness in Northern Ireland, with deprivation being a major predictor of an area's level of mental wellbeing. Deprivation and high rates of mental and physical illness co-occur in the areas most impacted by violence (O'Neill *et al.* 2019). In addition, the legacy of poverty in the areas most affected by the Troubles has resulted in the most deprived areas having suicide rates that are up to three times those of the least deprived areas (Bunting, B. *et al.* 2018). The effects of trauma exposure can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with individuals who experience conflict more likely to have an anxiety, mood or impulse control disorder. In addition, research has shown that these effects can be transmitted between generations (Bunting, *et al.* 2011).

A cohort effect has been identified by Tomlinson (2012) with the rate of suicide almost doubling in Northern Ireland between 1998 and 2008. The cohort of children and young people who grew up in the worst years of violence, during the 1970s, have the highest and most rapidly increasing suicide rates, and account for an upward trend in suicide following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Tomlinson contends that the rise in suicide involves complex social and psychological factors. These include a growth in social isolation, poor mental health arising from the experience of conflict, and the greater political stability in the decade following the Good Friday Agreement. The transition to peace has meant that externalised aggression is no longer socially acceptable and that it becomes internalised instead.

1.3.3   Collaborative Policy Approaches

There are limited collaborative policy approaches between government officials and public sector organisations in Ireland and Northern Ireland on poverty issues. Meetings do take place between officials in both jurisdictions, but this tends to be on an irregular and informal basis.

A notable exception, however, is the work of the All-Island Food Poverty Network co-chaired by - *safe*food (a North South Implementation Body) and the Food Standards Agency of Northern Ireland. The Network was established in 2009 to provide a co-ordinated and strategic approach to tackling food poverty on the island of Ireland. Its membership includes government departments and agencies, local authorities, academia and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who all have a shared goal to reduce food poverty in Ireland. Through *safe*food it supports the development of consensus on related issues, collaboration and shared learning.[28] *safe*food has provided funding for programmes and guidelines addressing food poverty, and publishes reports on the costs of healthy food baskets in Ireland and Northern Ireland – see Box 1.2.[29]

Box 1.2: All-Island Food Poverty Network Research to Address Food Poverty

Food poverty is defined as 'the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of affordability and access to food, with related impacts on health, culture and social participation being felt'.30 Food poverty therefore not only affects what people eat, it also impacts on people's lifestyles, social interactions and health. It is a core experience of poverty.

Minimum Essential Standard of Living (MESL) research applies a 'Consensual Budget Standards Methodology' to calculate a budget for an acceptable standard of living. This method involves working with members of the public to reach agreement on the minimum needed to live and partake in the social and economic norms of everyday life. Through engaging with multiple deliberative focus groups, a negotiated consensus is reached on what people regard as essential for a socially acceptable minimum standard of living.

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28   See https://www.safefood.net/food-poverty-network, accessed 11.06.21.
29   See https://www.safefood.net/food-poverty/reports, accessed 11.06.21.
30   Definition used by *safe*food, see https://www.safefood.net/research-reports/healthy-food-basket-ni, accessed 25.11.21.

The research identifies what is needed to meet physical, psychological and social needs at a minimum but acceptable level. It is not a poverty standard, and represents a minimum level which people have agreed nobody should be expected to live below.

The costs of healthy food baskets for different family types have been calculated for Northern Ireland and Ireland. Low-income households need to spend up to one third of their income to buy a minimum essential food basket. Food costs are higher in households with older children. Overall, the findings from the research show that low-income households eat less well and have a higher level of diet-related disease. Low-income households face the challenge of trying to balance a healthy food basket with other household expenses and may sacrifice a healthy diet given other competing budgetary demands.

Thus, food poverty is multidimensional, encompassing both a lack of access to a nutritionally adequate diet with a consequential impact on health and social participation.

Historically, both Ireland and Northern Ireland were part of an EU-funded project on mainstreaming social inclusion, which ran from 2003 to 2007 and involved 17 partner organisations in final phase – see Box 1.3 (O'Kelly & Litewska, 2006; O'Kelly, 2007).

Box 1.3: Mainstreaming Social Inclusion

In 2003 the Irish Combat Poverty Agency drew down EU--funding to undertake a project to promote mainstreaming social inclusion. The project was undertaken in two phases, and the second phase involved partners from Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, the Czech Republic, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Norway, along with the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).

The initial phase of the project examined the meaning of mainstreaming social inclusion and the various elements needed for the process to be successful. Key findings were: the importance of understanding how public policy is developed across different political and administrative structures; how all the relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, NGOs working against poverty and social exclusion, and other relevant civil society organisations, are involved in the process of policy-making; and how the mainstreaming of social inclusion can be evaluated.

Phase 2 of the project evaluated the mainstreaming of social inclusion in seven EU member states (the UK and its devolved administrations, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, France, Portugal, Netherlands), an accession state (Bulgaria) and an EEA state (Norway). The evaluation findings indicated that governments were committed to tackling poverty and social exclusion regardless of the role of the EU in coordinating member state policies, and that central ministries and departments use the OMC process31 as a way of tapping into what other countries are doing. However, the evaluation also showed that there was a lack of understanding at lower levels of administration and among NGOs of what is happening at central level, and a failure of communications between the different levels of administration and interested organisations.

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[31]   OMC is the Open Method of Coordination.

1.4 Practices in Combatting Poverty

As well as the overarching strategies which set out the priorities for tackling poverty, the implementation of policies, programmes and practices has a direct and indirect influence on the extent of poverty. This section presents some of the main policy and programme areas in Ireland and Northern Ireland in combatting poverty.

1.4.1 Ireland

Social welfare

In Ireland, the social welfare system does well in reducing the risk of poverty, with the latest data showing that in 2019 social transfers (excluding pensions) reduced the risk of poverty from 30.6 per cent to 12.8 per cent, representing a poverty reduction effect of 58.2 per cent.[32] During the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, the introduction of measures such as the Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP), the Enhanced Illness Benefit (EIB) and the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) helped to support people.

Service provision

Service provision, such as housing, health, education, childcare, employment services, and transport contribute to poverty reduction. NESC's report on the Developmental Welfare State (NESC, 2005) and the recent NESC report on the Future of the Irish Social Welfare System (NESC, 2020) highlight the importance of service provision to complement income supports. These reports emphasise: the need for education and training initiatives to support people with little education or few skills to gain qualifications and upskill; the importance of affordable and accessible childcare for child development, especially for people experiencing disadvantage and to support the transition from welfare to work; the importance of access to a medical card and access to timely healthcare for those with chronic illness or long-term disabilities; and the need for access to affordable, secure accommodation.

Educational disadvantage

In relation to tackling educational disadvantage, the DEIS programme (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) provides additional funding, literacy and numeracy programmes, as well as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme, the School Completion Programme, and assistance with school planning to schools in disadvantaged areas (Smyth *et al.* 2015). The original DEIS plan was launched in May 2005. The most recent DEIS Plan, published in 2017, focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (3 to 18 years). Some 887 schools were included in the programme in the 2020-21 school year. These comprised 689 primary schools (333 urban and 356 rural) and 198 post primary schools.[33]

Lifelong learning is also an important component in tackling educational disadvantage, particularly through the provision of adult and community education. Community education can engage with people who are socially excluded, in local centres committed to addressing the multiple forms of disadvantage that learners experience. A number of initiatives can support this learning approach, including the Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF)[34] and the 10-year Adult Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy.[35] A current feature of education, highlighted by the pandemic, is the need for further attention on digital inclusion (NESC, 2021).

Local and community development

Local and community development plays an important role in tackling poverty. A number of strategies published in recent years help to address disadvantage and promote social inclusion. These include:

- a five year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2019);

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[32] See https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-silc/surveyonincomeandlivingconditionssilc2019/povertyanddeprivation/, 13/06/21.

[33] See https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Services/DEIS-Delivering-Equality-of-Opportunity-in-Schools-/, accessed 13.06.21.

[34] The Mitigating Against Educational Disadvantage Fund (MAEDF) provides funding to support educationally disadvantaged learners to access and participate in community education. The fund has a focus on building the digital infrastructure of community education providers, including providing devices and software, and increasing their capacity to deliver online learning.
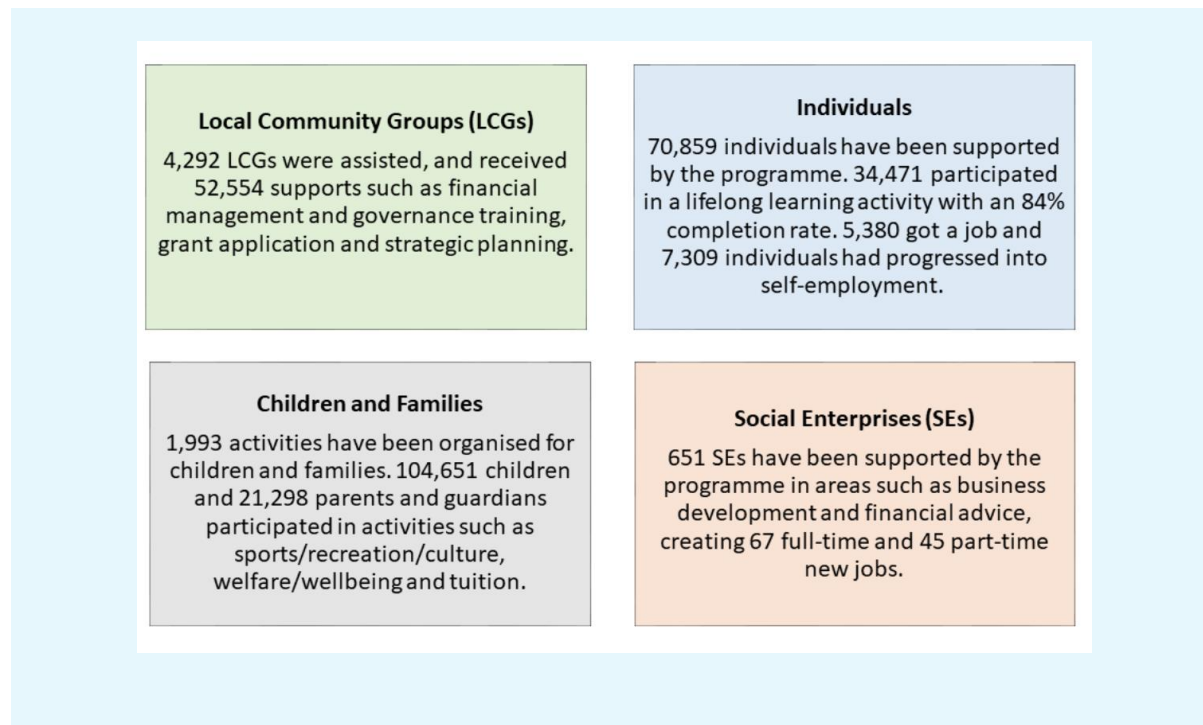
[35] See https://www.solas.ie/alnd-strategy/ accessed 05.11.21.

- a national volunteering strategy (Government of Ireland, 2020b); and

- a rural development policy (Government of Ireland, 2021).

Within these strategies, there are commitments to tackle poverty and develop initiatives to promote social inclusion. Programmes to do this include LEADER, the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and the recently announced Community Development Pilot Programme. The LEADER programme is a multi-annual programme for rural development co-funded by the EU through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The programme is based on a community-led approach to rural development and plays an important role in supporting communities and enterprises in progressing job creation, social inclusion and environmental projects at local level (Government of Ireland, 2021: 58).

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2023 is specifically targeted at reducing poverty, and promoting social inclusion and equality. SICAP provides funding to tackle poverty and social exclusion through local engagement and partnerships between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations, and public sector agencies.   SICAP addresses high and persistent levels of deprivation through targeted and innovative, locally led approaches. It supports disadvantaged communities and individuals, including unemployed people, people living in deprived areas, people with disabilities, single parent families, people on a low-income, members of the Traveller and Roma communities, and other disadvantaged groups. The programme is managed at a local level by 33 Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), with support from local authorities, and actions are delivered by Local Development Companies (LDCs) (Programme Implementers). LDCs work with marginalised communities and service providers, using a community development approach to improve people's lives by, for example, helping people to find work or to upskill, providing CV training or a personal development course, or helping them onto a work placement programme.[36]

Examples of those who have benefited under SICAP between 2018 and 2020 are highlighted below.

Local Community Groups (LCGs)

4,292 LCGs were assisted, and received 52,554 supports such as financial management and governance training, grant application and strategic planning.

Individuals

70,859 individuals have been supported by the programme. 34,471 participated in a lifelong learning activity with an 84% completion rate. 5,380 got a job and 7,309 individuals had progressed into self-employment.

Children and Families

1,993 activities have been organised for children and families. 104,651 children and 21,298 parents and guardians participated in activities such as sports/recreation/culture, welfare/wellbeing and tuition.

Social Enterprises (SEs)

651 SEs have been supported by the programme in areas such as business development and financial advice, creating 67 full-time and 45 part-time new jobs.

SICAP is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development, and co-funded by the European Social Fund under the Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020.

A recent development is the Community Development Pilot Programme. The aim of the 2021 Community Development Pilot Programme is to trial community development initiatives that address poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and to promote human rights. Over 120 applications were received from community development organisations, and 7 organisations were selected to be part of the pilot, which has overall funding of €1m for 2021. The number of applications received for the Pilot Programme demonstrates the strong need for community development supports in disadvantaged communities. The projects chosen are in Donegal, Clare, Dublin, Kilkenny, Longford, Wexford and Meath/Louth and will provide supports to Travellers, women living in poverty, migrants and people with disabilities.[37] Travellers and Roma are among the most disadvantaged in Irish society, despite making up less than one per cent of the Irish population. They experience extreme disadvantage in terms of employment, housing and health, as well as being subject to high levels of prejudice and discrimination (Watson *et al.* 2017).

An initiative worthy of note in response to the Covid-19 crisis is Community Call, which was an experiment in partnership between national and local government, and the community and voluntary sector. It was set up at great speed in response to the major public health emergency, and delivered co-ordinated support to vulnerable people remaining at home during Covid-19 lockdowns. Community Call helped local authorities to become more connected to community and voluntary groups in their areas.[38]

A key learning from these programmes and initiatives is the importance of state, community, and voluntary bodies working together to address disadvantage, whilst listening to and drawing on the knowledge and experience of people living in local areas. This is very much a bottom-up approach, supported by resources at a regional or national level, drawing on learning from similar initiatives, and exhibiting elements of co-design.

Concentrations of urban disadvantage

Approaches such as these have been taken in tackling concentrations of urban disadvantage, often with investment from the state. These areas are characterised by poverty; high levels of unemployment, especially among young people; low levels of educational attainment; rented housing often of poor design; and poor public transport connectivity and access; and are often associated with anti-social behaviour, drugs and crime. People living in these areas can experience violent intimidation and a poor quality of life. These areas are sometimes referred to as 'left-behind areas'.

State programmes have been put in place to tackle these concentrations of disadvantage and to support local community initiatives. Two of the most high-profile interventions are the Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan, and the Regeneration of Dublin's North East Inner City, as summarised in Box 1.4.

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[37]   See https://fingalppn.ie/minister-obrien-announces-new-community-development-projects/, accessed 22.10.21.
[38]   NESC has analysed how Community Call was established, how it developed, and the learning from the innovative programme, see
     https://www.nesc.ie/news-events/press-releases/nesc-publishes-secretariat-paper-no-22-community-call-learning-for-the-future/ accessed 05.11.21.

Box 1.4: Regeneration Initiatives in Concentrations of Urban Disadvantage: Dublin and Limerick

The Regeneration of Dublin's North East Inner City[39]

In July 2016, the Government launched a major initiative for Dublin's North East Inner City to oversee the long-term social and economic regeneration of the area, which had been plagued for years by ingrained deprivation, drugs and violence. Yet, it has suffered these problems despite being close to Dublin's city centre, financial services, third-level education and redevelopment, as well as having inherent assets within the community.

To support the work of a Ministerial Taskforce, Kieran Mulvey was appointed to engage with the local community groups, representatives, and other interests, and to report back with specific recommendations. Drawing on a co-design approach, the Mulvey Report recommended a number of new structures and appointments to lead the regeneration of the area.

A Programme Implementation Board was established in June 2017 to oversee the development of a detailed project plan, programme implementation, and to report progress on implementation. A Programme Office has been established to support the work of the Board.

As of December 2019, the Programme Implementation Board has six workstreams. These are: enhancing policing; maximising educational, training and employment opportunities; family wellbeing; enhancing community wellbeing and the physical landscape; substance use, misuse and inclusion health; and alignment of services.

The Regeneration of Limerick[40]

Due to entrenched poverty and disadvantage, along with crime and anti-social behaviour, in four estates in Limerick (Moyross and St. Mary's Park; Southill and Ballinacurra Weston) the Limerick Regeneration Masterplan was drawn up following recommendations by John Fitzgerald in 2007. Two regeneration agencies were set up (northside and southside) to implement the plan. These agencies have since been brought under the Office of Regeneration in Limerick City and County Council.

The Regeneration Plan integrates measures under three themes: physical, social and economic. Delivery of the measures is through a multi-level structure within neighbourhoods, at local level and nationally as well as cross-sectorally. The Limerick regeneration programme is one of the largest in the state, with funding of more than €250m for physical measures, €30m for social measures and €10m for economic measures.

A review of the implementation of the plan found that there is a high level of co-operation between the public sector organisations and agencies, all working together, to deliver the programmes, with community involvement increasing as the programmes bed in. Recommendations for further action include: continued support and development of Community Enterprise Centres as community hubs; enhanced community involvement and maintenance of safety within areas; a focus on reducing youth unemployment; targeting specific skills development; increasing private sector involvement; and improving road access.

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[39] Further information is available at http://www.neic.ie/ accessed 04.11.21.
[40] Further information is available at https://www.limerick.ie/council/services/housing/regeneration/limerick-regeneration-framework-implementation-plan-review accessed 04.11.21.

A further initiative to tackle disadvantage, especially among young people and their families, is the National Area Based Childhood Programme. Initially developed in 2007, through a number of iterations, the programme currently supports organisations in 12 areas of urban disadvantage. The programme is funded by the Department of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration (DCDEI) and delivered through the Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) within Tusla. The focus of the work is on addressing child poverty through prevention and early intervention, on the basis of evidence-informed good practice. A recent report on child poverty, published by the Child Development Initiative in Tallaght West, found that while there was a positive and strong sense of community, income poverty was a key driver of household poverty. Mental health difficulties were identified and neighbourhood safety was a concern (Shumba *et al.* 2021).

To tackle drug and alcohol misuse, drug and alcohol taskforces have been set up in areas of urban disadvantage to implement drugs strategy action plans. These plans focus on reducing the supply of drugs and preventing illegal drug use, as well as treatment and rehabilitation for drug addicts. The drug and alcohol taskforces comprise representatives from a range of relevant agencies, such as the HSE, the Gardaí, education and training boards, and local authorities, as well as elected public representatives and voluntary and community sector representatives.

1.4.2   Northern Ireland

Social security – Universal Credit

Social security in Northern Ireland is a devolved matter, but in practice the social security system has been developed and maintained in close parity with the rest of the UK. In line with UK social security policy, many social welfare benefits are now administered through Universal Credit. Universal Credit has replaced six means-tested benefits for working-age households: Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit, and Child Tax Credit. Rolling six means-tested payments into one, across such diverse areas as income support, housing benefit, employment support, jobseeking and low-income work support has been a highly ambitious reform programme. It has been difficult to deliver, despite being introduced incrementally on an area basis, and only related to new claims or changes in an existing claim. There have been many reports of problems with Universal Credit (NAO, 2018).

The Report of the Expert Advisory Group (Department for Communities, 2020: 30) notes that the intention of these welfare reforms was to raise incomes through Universal Credit in ways that would 'make work pay', but that restrictions on public expenditure have meant that the value of benefits is now less than it was ten years ago. There has been a freeze on working-age benefits and tax credits, and the Disability Living Allowance is being replaced by a Personal Independence Payment. The Group states that the inadequacy of benefits, especially Child Benefit and the attrition in housing benefit value, has become a 'driver of poverty'. The five-week wait for payment of the benefit has been shown to increase food poverty and debt. Other elements of the reforms have also been shown to be detrimental, and to increase the risk of poverty. These include the benefit cap, the bedroom tax (social sector size criteria) and the two-child policy.[41]

In 2015, the Northern Ireland Executive decided that some of the elements of the UK welfare reforms should be mitigated in Northern Ireland. The NIE, through the Fresh Start Agreement,[42] committed £585m over four years to the welfare mitigations package. This meant that reforms like the bedroom tax and benefit cap have not been applied in Northern Ireland. The existing welfare mitigations came to a statutory end on 31st March 2020, but the New Decade New Approach deal included an extension of the mitigations beyond this date, requiring new legislation to be approved by the NI Assembly. In the meantime, the Minister for Communities has secured NIE agreement to continue delivery of the existing mitigation schemes in 2021-22.

The Cliff Edge Coalition NI, a group of over 100 organisations across Northern Ireland, have come together to highlight concerns about a potential 'cliff edge' at the end of the welfare reform mitigations, and the negative impacts of

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[41]   The benefit cap is an upper limit on the amount of benefit a household can receive. The 'bedroom tax', or spare room subsidy, is where tenants in social housing have their benefit reduced if they have a spare bedroom. The two-child policy is where no allowance is made for a third or further child in a family born after April 2017.

[42]   A Fresh Start - The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan (also referred to as the 'Fresh Start Agreement') was published by the Northern Ireland Executive and the British and Irish Governments in November 2015.

implementing some of the reforms. In particular, they are concerned about the two-child limit, the five-week wait (before the initial welfare payment is paid), and the need for more support for people in the private rented sector.

Educational disadvantage

Northern Ireland has recently published an action plan to address educational disadvantage. A Fair Start sets out 47 actions involving a number of government departments and public agencies.[43] It was drawn up by an expert group, established to examine the links between persistent educational underachievement and socio-economic background and to propose actions that would ensure all children and young people, regardless of background, are given the best start in life. Following a wide-ranging consultation exercise, it was concluded that addressing educational underachievement – brought about as a consequence of social and economic disadvantage – is wider than education alone. Therefore, in order to bring about fundamental change to address disadvantage, equality of opportunity through education and learning should be prioritised.

The Fair Start Action Plan prioritises investment in early years development, and gives prominence to emotional health and wellbeing. It also proposes that schools work more collaboratively with the communities they serve, through the Extended Schools Programme.[44] The Plan also proposes a new programme for reducing educational disadvantage, RED, which would be a more targeted intervention to encourage partnerships with the community and voluntary sector, as well as with other schools. The RED proposal reflects elements of the Irish DEIS initiative, as well as similar programmes in Scotland and Wales. There are also specific proposals in relation to supporting boys in education, based on evidence that boys are underachieving.

A number of people interviewed for this NESC research emphasised the importance of education, and especially the need to promote more integrated education. The promotion of lifelong learning and community education is also seen as critical.

Local and community development

Support for community development and community programmes is delivered through the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland, whose overall aim is tackling disadvantage and building sustainable communities. Programmes are available to target social need through social, economic and physical regeneration; neighbourhood renewal; supporting disadvantaged and rural women; and funding support for the community and voluntary sector. As in Ireland, many community programmes were reduced or discontinued in the aftermath of the economic recession of 2008. Currently, the Department for Communities is in a period of reflection and review in relation to many of their community programmes.

Like in Ireland, with the onset of Covid-19 and its subsequent restrictions, national and local government worked in partnership with the voluntary and community sector to provide an emergency response. This has led to consideration of the relationship between government and the voluntary and community sector, with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) publishing a Manifesto for Change (NICVA, 2021), and the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) publishing an options paper on shaping the relationship between government and the voluntary sector (SIB, 2021).

There is a Joint Forum in Northern Ireland, made up of representatives from central and local government (Public Sector Group) and the voluntary and community sector (Voluntary and Community Group), which provides a mechanism to facilitate discussion of key issues shaping the relationship between the voluntary, community, and public sectors. A review of the operation of the Joint Forum concluded that there is a need to realign, update, and agree the role and potential outcomes of the Joint Forum, with a need to build a trusting relationship between both sectors (SIB, 2021). NICVA have identified three ways of unlocking the full potential of voluntary action by: improving government understanding and policy on the role and contribution of community and voluntary action; unblocking key barriers and creating a more supportive environment; and valuing the voice of community and voluntary actors and civil society (NICVA, 2021).

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43   See https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/fair-start-final-report-action-plan, accessed 14.06.21.
44   The Northern Ireland Department of Education's Extended Schools Programme aims to improve levels of educational achievement for disadvantaged children and young people by providing the additional support that they might need to help them reach their full potential.

One of the community programmes delivered by the Department for Communities is the Community Support Programme (CSP). This programme provides funding to local councils to support community development and advice services. Councils match the Department for Communities funding. The CSP, which has been in existence since 1975, aims to strengthen local communities, increase community participation, and promote social inclusion. Community development is a devolved matter, but at the moment there is no community development strategy in Northern Ireland. However, the Department for Communities works closely with local government on community development issues, including community planning. The Local Government Act 2014 gave responsibility to the 11 local councils to lead the community planning process in their areas, and all councils now have community plans in place. See Box 1.5 for an example of a community plan in Derry City and Strabane District Council.

> **Box 1.5: Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Plan**
>
> Following an extensive consultation, the Derry City and Strabane District Council Community Plan *Inclusive Strategic Growth Plan 2017-2032* was published in 2017. The overall vision is 'a thriving, prosperous and sustainable City and District with equality of opportunity for all' with the plan structured around the three themes of economic, environmental and social wellbeing.
>
> Support for community development is dealt with under the social theme, with an aspiration 'to live in a shared, equal and safe community'. It is noted that the approach of involving people and working with the community and voluntary sector is central to tackling poverty, disadvantage and inequality; linking local people to jobs; engaging in creative and artistic practices; and moving people closer to the labour market.[45]

More recently, a UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF) was launched by the UK Government in March 2021. The UKCRF is intended as bridging finance, in order to fill the gap between the end of the Brexit transition period – when the UK ceases to be eligible for the EU's European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIFs) – and the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the UK Government's longer-term replacement for the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The UK Community Renewal Fund has four overarching investment priorities: investment in skills; investment for local business; investment in communities and place; and supporting people into employment. Although bidding for the UKCRF is an open and competitive process, 100 'priority places' have been identified in Great Britain based on an 'index of economic resilience', which takes into account the area's productivity, household income, unemployment, skills, and population density. Of these priority places, 73 are in England, 14 in Wales, and 13 in Scotland. Separate arrangements are in place for Northern Ireland, which will be treated as a single geographical area for the purpose of bids. The Welsh and Scottish devolved administrations have reservations about the UKCRF, seeing it as an initiative that side-lines them and encroaches, to a considerable extent, on areas of devolved competence (McStravick & Soares, 2021).

Urban disadvantage

One of the main programmes for tackling urban disadvantage in Northern Ireland is 'People and Place – a strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal', which has been running since 2003. Neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10 per cent of wards in Northern Ireland have been targeted for interventions, encompassing about 16 per cent of the population. These areas include: 15 in Belfast; six in the north-west (including four in the city of Derry/Londonderry); and 15 in towns and cities across Northern Ireland. Neighbourhood Partnership Boards, with representatives from the political, statutory, community, voluntary and private sectors, have been established in each area to oversee delivery.

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45   For further information see https://www.derrystrabane.com/getmedia/1eb99e2e-e657-45a1-8b27-e2b35a36d65c/SGP_22-November2017_lowres.pdf accessed 05.11.21.

In the region of 300 projects have been supported across the four interlinking objectives of community, economic, social and physical renewal. The scheme is supported by funding of £18m per annum in revenue and £3m in capital. The funding has been spent on a range of initiatives including community development, health and wellbeing, parenting supports and after-school activities, youth engagement activities, employability, and community safety.

Reviews of the neighbourhood renewal strategy in 2010-2011 and in 2014 refer to the problems of these areas being deeply embedded, so that sustained investment over time is needed to effect change (Department for Social Development, 2010-11; RSM McClure Watters, 2014). While some improvements have been noted in physical infrastructure and educational attainment, the strategy has not delivered on its aim of helping to close the gap in quality of life between those in neighbourhood renewal areas and the rest of society. This is perhaps best captured by the mid-term review:

> *Given the scale of the problems still remaining in the most deprived areas, the regeneration programmes will not be enough on their own to achieve significant change. The biggest changes to the levels of poverty in the most disadvantaged areas will come from mainstream programmes (Department for Social Development, 2010-11: 7).*

Despite being somewhat dated, this sentiment rings true today, and acknowledges that the neighbourhood renewal programme is due for a refresh.

A Communities in Transition programme is being run in eight areas in Northern Ireland where there has been paramilitary activity and organised crime, with the objective of supporting transition into communities where paramilitary activity no longer plays a role. This is done through building the capacity of individuals and groups to affect positive change for themselves and their communities. The initiative is led by the Department of Justice, with the support of Cooperation Ireland and academics from Queen's University and University of Ulster.

1.5 Areas of Cooperation

Collaboration takes place between many organisations on an all-island or north-south basis, especially through network approaches. The North South Ministerial Council provides a forum for more structured and formal north-south deliberations. This section presents a number of areas of north-south formal collaboration related to poverty alleviation and social inclusion, while acknowledging there are many more informal channels, some of which have been explored in the place-based work on the north-west. Online focus groups have taken place in the north-west, involving participants from across a range of civic, public, community and voluntary, and business sectors, on good jobs, green transformation, poverty and mental health, and mechanisms for cooperation.

Peace Plus

Past EU-funded PEACE and INTERREG programmes contained funding for projects associated with peace and reconciliation, and with socio-economic development, on a cross-border basis. An EU PEACE PLUS programme 2021–2027 is on track to become operational this year. While the programme applies mainly to the core areas of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth in Ireland, there is flexibility to include partners or activities outside the core area, in a wider functional area, where appropriate. There are six themes within the €1bn programme, a number of which will contribute to tackling poverty and promoting social inclusion. The six themes are:

    i   building peaceful and thriving communities;

    ii   delivering economic regeneration and transformation;

    iii empowering and investing in young people;

    iv   healthy and inclusive communities;

    v   supporting a sustainable and better connected future; and

    vi   building and embedding partnership and collaboration.[46]

A number of these themes contain investment areas, which can have a positive impact on addressing poverty – for example, through empowering communities; building positive relations; skills development; education; youth mental health and wellbeing; rural regeneration and social inclusion; as well as maintaining and forging relationships.

Social welfare summer schools

Collaboration has taken place between the government departments, north and south, responsible for social security and social inclusion through annual summer schools. These involve civil servants from both jurisdictions coming together for a week to listen to inputs on a range of social welfare issues, including poverty and social inclusion, and undertaking group projects.[47]

Post Brexit reciprocal social welfare arrangements

In relation to Britain's withdrawal from the EU, social welfare recipients will experience no change to the reciprocal social welfare arrangements between Ireland and the UK. The rights and entitlements of both EU and British citizens to Irish social welfare payments remain as they were before Brexit. Thus, Irish and British citizens living in either country maintain the right to benefit from social insurance contributions made when working in either country and the right to access social insurance payments in either country.[48]

The potential for an all-island social security network has been mooted, with possibilities for developing exchange of information and collaboration on social security and social inclusion issues. It has been argued that there is an opportunity for new thinking in social security policy development, that can more effectively encompass the contemporary socio-economic needs of society with a focus on poverty, inequality, housing, health and labour market issues (Fitzpatrick & O'Sullivan, 2021).

Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB)

Adult and community education plays an important role in tackling disadvantage and increasing social inclusion, through empowering individuals to be part of active and engaged communities. It can help to ensure people are well-placed to make the most of opportunities brought about by economic and societal changes.

The Network for Adult Learning Across Borders (NALAB) is a partnership of adult and community education organisations in Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. The organisations involved are AONTAS (Ireland), Learning & Work Institute (England and Wales), Scotland's Learning Partnership, and The Forum for Adult Learning Northern Ireland. Individually each organisation conducts advocacy work and research to promote adult participation in quality education and learning. NALAB's regional network advocates for educational equality for adults across the five jurisdictions, and shares best practice and challenges in both policy and practice.

It is noteworthy, however, that the level of participation in adult learning is lower in Northern Ireland than the rest of the UK and Ireland, with future projections continuing to highlight this trend (Neilands, 2021). A key challenge to reversing this trend is funding for community education providers, accentuated by the impact of Brexit and loss of European Social Fund (ESF) funding. Nevertheless, there are suggestions for meaningful shared island collaboration, including an all-island festival of learning, research, and an online all-island community college.

Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South (SCoTENS)

SCoTENS is a network of 24 colleges of education, university education departments, teaching councils, curriculum councils, education trade unions and education centres on the island of Ireland with an interest in teacher education. It was established in 2003 to create a space for teacher educators, north and south, to come together and discuss issues of

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46   See https://seupb.eu/sites/default/files/styles/PEACE%20PLUS%20Public%20Consultation/PEACE_PLUS_Consultation_Information_Document_FINAL.pdf, accessed 14.06.21.

47   The person-to-person contact has not taken place in recent years because of Covid-19 restrictions.

48   See https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/6f4f07-brexit/, accessed 14.06.21.

common interest, and explore ways of co-operating together. Since its establishment SCoTENS has been involved in supporting a wide range of research, conferences and exchange projects.

As part of the Shared Island initiative a new research funding scheme was launched on 1st October 2021, with funding of up to €25k to be awarded to four projects. The projects will be based on an action-research model on the two themes of educational underachievement, and teaching and learning. The research must involve north-south partnerships.[49]

Grant Funding

An All-Island Fund was established in April 2021 through a partnership between the Community Foundation for Ireland and the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. Since then 30 partnerships which pair communities and civil society groups north and south of the border have been funded. The partnerships cover a broad range of issues including equality, migrant and refugee rights, as well as climate action.[50] Other organisations, such as Co-operation Ireland and the International Fund for Ireland, also provide resources to support disadvantaged communities on a cross-border basis.

Cross-border strategic partnerships

The possibility exists at local government level to work cooperatively to address poverty and social exclusion, especially in border areas. The development of collaborative and strategic partnerships in the north-west with the potential to tackle poverty and promote social inclusion has been examined in some detail.

1.6 Conclusions

1.6.1 Key Lessons

This paper has examined poverty and social exclusion in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Both jurisdictions measure poverty, have anti-poverty strategies in place or in development, and have a number of policy initiatives, programmes and practices to reduce poverty.

There could be further collaboration on poverty measurement, especially in relation to deprivation measures and to develop an all-island perspective on poverty levels.

Both jurisdictions are concerned with child poverty, in particular the need to give children a good start in life. Both can learn from each other in the effectiveness of a range of initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage.

Tackling child poverty is central to combating the intergenerational transmission of poverty, which matters to both children and wider society (Frazer *et al.* 2021). Acknowledging, and measuring, the persistence of poverty can inform the channels through which the perpetuation of poverty is tackled in the areas of health, housing, education and employment (De Schutter, 2021).

The growth of inequalities leads to people in poverty facing systemic discrimination. Some groups, such as people who are homeless, Travellers, and migrants have been identified as very disadvantaged in both jurisdictions. It would be useful to share knowledge and to cooperate on how best to address the needs of these marginalised groups.

Hidden rural poverty has emerged as a theme in both Ireland and Northern Ireland, with the need to deal with rural disadvantage through regional development and the creation of good jobs.

Digital exclusion has been identified as an issue in both jurisdictions, with those most likely not to use the internet being people in rural areas, older people and people living in poverty. As well as lack of access to the internet, digital exclusion relates to lack of access to devices, lack of skills to use the internet and devices, and a lack of confidence to engage with

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[49] For further information see https://scotens.org/call-for-funding-applications/, accessed 28.10.21.
[50] For further information see https://www.communityfoundation.ie/insights/latest-news/grants-issued, accessed 29.10.21.

ICT. In addition, there is a concern about the impact of climate change and other environmental harms on people who are poor, e.g. energy poverty, and health concerns related to poor air quality and poor housing conditions

There has been a reliance on charitable efforts in both jurisdictions during the Covid-19 pandemic to address issues of food and energy poverty, in particular. There has been a call for greater government support to combat these issues, with the Community Call initiative in Ireland being cited as an example.

Both jurisdictions have identified the importance of community development in supporting people in disadvantaged communities. Support for community development was curtailed following the economic recession, and there is currently a recognition of the need to rebuild this support.

The possibility exists to build on current joint initiatives, such as regular informal exchanges, funding initiatives, and summer schools; and also more formally through the NSMC and PEACE PLUS programme, with potential for an all-island social security network. Joint initiatives to tackle educational disadvantage are also worthy of support and further development.

The legacy of the conflict is an underlying issue in Northern Ireland, where the impact of the violence associated with the Troubles is marked by high rates of deprivation, poor physical and mental health, and significant differences between those who experienced little or no conflict and those with a high experience of conflict (Tomlinson, 2016).[51] There is a need to learn from successful interventions to address legacy issues, with a particular focus on providing opportunities for young people.

In both jurisdictions there is concern to address concentrations of urban disadvantage, which are often associated with poverty; high levels of unemployment, especially among young people; low levels of educational attainment; rented housing often of poor design; poor public transport connectivity and access; along with anti-social behaviour, drugs and crime. There are specific interventions to address such issues in both Northern Ireland and Ireland, where lessons could be usefully shared.

The links between poverty and mental health issues are evident. Poverty increases the risk of mental health problems, while mental health is influenced by the social, economic and physical environments, including the inequalities, within which people live.

1.6.2   Potential for Further Cooperation

There are a number of areas which would warrant further consideration. These include:

- Sharing knowledge on effective initiatives to address child poverty and the inter-generational transmission of poverty, and to enhance educational attainment. The implementation of the European Child Guarantee will potentially lead to a rich exchange of learning across Europe, which could be shared and discussed on an all island basis.

- The European Pillar of Social Rights will provide a very important framework for action on social policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion across the EU over the next decade. This raises an interesting issue about how best to incorporate the issue of rights, and particularly socio-economic rights, into policymaking, and this could be a useful area for dialogue between actors in both jurisdictions in the future.

- The role of the state, the community and voluntary sector, and charities in addressing poverty should be explored, including how to build more collaborative and partnership-style relationships between national government, local government, and the community and voluntary sector.

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[51]   Based on an analysis of the 2012 UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey. The 2012 survey in Northern Ireland included a special 'Troubles' module designed to measure individual experience of the conflict – see www.poverty.ac.uk.

- The role of social security in tackling poverty, drawing on recent NESC work, should be examined, possibly through the hosting of a cross-border event.

- Consideration should be given to how the green and digital transitions can be managed in ways which include those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and avoid making their situations worse. Thus, regular exchanges and dialogue, involving policymakers and a wide range of stakeholders, on how to ensure a just transition could be a very useful area for cooperation in the future.

- Poverty measurement should be better aligned so that we have an all-island perspective on the extent and nature of poverty.

- Further exploration of the links between poverty and mental health is needed, especially in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

- The role of special initiatives in tackling concentrations of poverty should be examined. For example, it may be useful to engage in dialogue on the extent to which there are similarities between the factors that lead to violence and anti-social behaviour (and drugs) in disadvantaged communities in Ireland, and the factors that lead to violence and paramilitary activity in deprived communities in Northern Ireland, and to what extent some (but not all) of the solutions are similar.

These issues will be considered further in the context of the overall NESC Shared Island research programme.

Annex

Table A1: Poverty Levels in Ireland among Subgroups of the Population in 2019

	At Risk of Poverty Rate %	Deprivation Rate %	Consistent Poverty Rate %
State	**12.8**	**17.8**	**5.5**
Sex			
Male	12.6	17.4	5.4
Female	12.9	18.3	5.6
Age Group			
0-17	15.3	23.3	8.1
18-64	12.3	17.1	5.1
65+	10.5	11.2	2.3
Principal economic status (aged 16+)			
At work	4.6	11.4	1.3
Unemployed	35.4	36	20.2
Student	19.4	17.3	5.4
Home duties	22.8	24.2	9.9
Retired	11.1	9.4	2.1
Not at work due to illness or disability	37.5	43.3	18.1
Highest education level attained (aged 16+)			
Primary or below	21.2	23.3	9.5
Lower secondary	19.9	19.3	7.1
Higher secondary	12.8	20.6	5.8
Post leaving cert	13.0	21.1	3.2
Third level non-degree	8.6	12.0	2.8
Third level degree or above	3.0	5.3	0.8
Household composition			
1 adult aged 65+	17.6	14.3	4.1
1 adult aged <65	28.8	20.9	10.0
2 adults, at least 1 aged 65+	6.1	9.3	1.0
2 adults, both aged <65	10.0	11.2	4.2
3 or more adults	6.7	14.1	2.1
1 adult with children aged under 18	29.7	45.4	17.1
2 adults with 1-3 children aged under 18	11.9	17.1	6.1
Other households with children aged under 18	12.7	22.1	5.2
Number of persons at work in the household			
0	34.1	31.9	17.3
1	14.0	20.0	4.5
2	3.0	10.9	0.8
3+	0.0	7.4	0.0
Tenure Status			
Owner-occupied	7.3	10.3	1.8
Rented or rent-free	24.8	34.4	13.5
Urban/rural location			
Urban areas	13.2	19.8	6.5
Rural areas	11.8	13.5	3.1
Region			
Northern and Western	18.6	19.5	6.9
Southern	13.3	17.1	5.7
Eastern and Midland	10.4	17.7	4.8

Source: (CSO, 2020: Table 3.1).

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