



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

***An Assessment of Ireland's Approach to Combating
Poverty and Social Exclusion among Children from
European and Local Perspectives***

Hugh Frazer and Maurice Devlin

Department of Applied Social Studies, NUI Maynooth

June 2011

Funded under the Combat Poverty Agency Research Awards

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CDB	City/County Development Board
COFACE	Confederation of Family Organisations in the EU
CPA	Combat Poverty Agency
CRA	Children’s Rights Alliance
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DEIS	Delivering Equality Opportunities in Schools
EAPN	European Anti-Poverty Network
ESN	European Social Network
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
EU-27	All 27 EU Member States
EU-SILC	Community Statistics on Income and Living Conditions
ESF	European Social Fund
ESSPROS	European system of integrated social protection statistics
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless
FIS	Family Income Supplement
HSE	Health Service Executive
NAP/inclusion	National Action Plan for social inclusion
NAPSI	National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016
NDP	National Development Plan
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSRSPSI	National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion
OMC	Office of the Minister for Children
OMC	Open Method of Coordination (for social protection and social inclusion)
OMCYA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
OSI	Office for Social Inclusion
PROGRESS	Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity
SPC	EU Social Protection Committee
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Contents

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	2
List of Tables, Figures and Text Boxes	6
Executive Summary	7
Methodology	12
Introduction	12
Desk research and key informant interviews	12
Case studies at local level.....	13
Conclusions.....	14
Part 1 – Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Ireland from a Comparative EU Perspective	15
1.1 Introduction.....	15
1.2 Extent and intensity of child poverty	16
1.3 Duration and persistence of child poverty	17
1.4 Factors most associated with the risk of poverty.....	18
Childhood.....	18
Lone parenthood and family size	18
Unemployment and low work intensity.....	19
Young motherhood	19
Low-skilled households.....	20
Rural location	20
1.5 Groups experiencing extreme poverty and exclusion	20
Traveller children	20
Immigrant children	21
Children in or leaving care	21
Children with a disability	21
Homeless children	22
1.6 Other observations on child poverty in Ireland	22
Poor households with children have a low proportion of income from work	22
Low levels of in-work poverty.....	22
High risk of poverty associated with part-time work.....	22
Increasing impact of social transfers towards children	23
Very high cost of childcare.....	23
1.7 Trends	23
1.8 Some conclusions	24
Part 2 – Lessons from the EU Social Inclusion Process	26
2.1 Introduction.....	26
2.2 The EU Social Inclusion Process	26
2.2.1 Child poverty as a key issue.....	27
2.3 Learning from the EU’s Social Inclusion Process.....	30
2.3.1 Nature of child poverty and social exclusion	30
2.3.2 Balanced approach.....	36
2.3.3 Positive environment	37
2.3.4 Comprehensive policy framework	46
2.3.5 Ensuring effective delivery.....	58

2.4	A framework for assessing national policies to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion	60
2.4.1	Effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements ..	61
2.4.2	Quality of overall strategic approach	61
2.4.3	Effectiveness of key policy areas	62
2.4.4	Ensuring effective delivery.....	63
2.4.5	Effective monitoring and reporting.....	64
Part 3 – Findings from Local Case Studies		65
3.1	Introduction.....	65
3.2	Things that work well or make a positive difference	66
3.2.1	Information.....	66
3.2.2	Increases in child income supports	66
3.2.3	The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS).....	67
3.2.4	Community Employment scheme.....	67
3.2.5	Other training – Primary Health Care for Travellers	68
3.2.6	Housing and environment.....	68
3.2.7	Services for children, young people and families	69
3.3	Difficulties and gaps	71
3.3.1	Living conditions	72
3.3.2	Services and supports.....	75
3.4	Groups most affected by poverty	83
3.4.1	Working class neighbourhoods and communities	83
3.4.2	Lone parents	84
3.4.3	Travellers.....	84
3.4.4	Rural dwellers.....	86
3.4.5	Asylum seekers	88
3.5	Conclusion.....	90
Part 4 – Assessment of the Irish Institutional and Policy Framework for Preventing and Reducing Child Poverty and Social Exclusion.....		92
4.1	Effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements	93
4.1.1	Political leadership.....	93
4.1.2	Child poverty mainstreaming	96
4.1.3	Effective policy coordination	97
4.1.4	Mobilisation of actors.....	99
4.1.5	Involving children.....	99
4.1.6	Ensuring adequate and timely data and analysis	100
4.2	Quality of overall strategic approach	102
4.2.1	An evidence-based approach.....	102
4.2.2	A comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach.....	103
4.2.3	Children’s rights.....	103
4.2.4	Balancing universal and targeted approaches	106
4.2.5	Clarity of overall objectives and targets.....	107
4.2.6	Setting specific objectives and targets	108
4.3	Assessment of key policy areas	109
4.3.1	Policies to ensure an adequate income.....	110
4.3.2	Access to services.....	115
4.3.3	Other areas.....	120
Part 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations		121
5.1	Introduction.....	121
5.2	Conclusions.....	121
5.3	Recommendations	125

Appendices	129
Appendix 1 – Child Poverty in Ireland in a Comparative Perspective	129
Appendix 2 – Key Informants, Meetings and Events	140
References	142

List of Tables, Figures and Text Boxes

Table 1.1: Levels of Child Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland in 2008 – EU Comparisons

Table 1.2: At-risk-of-poverty rates and material deprivation among children in Ireland, 2005–2008 (after social transfers)

Table 1.3: Changes in at-risk-of-poverty and consistent poverty among children aged 0–14 in Ireland, 2003–2006

Table A1: Proportion of the population ‘poor’, lacking at least 2 items in the strain dimension, and suffering from both problems, total population and children

Table A2: Probability of having job as manager, professional or technician for women and men aged 25–65 by occupation of father

Figure 2.1: Social benefits in % of GDP vs. child poverty rates, EU-25, 2004

Figure A1: At-risk-of-poverty rate (%), and summary measures of deprivation in 3+ items economic strain + durables, and 1+ item of poor housing condition, EU-25, 2005

Figure A2: Mean deprivation index in economic strain + enforced lack of durables dimension, by household type, SILC 2005

Figure A3: Early school leavers, 2000 and 2006 (% of the 18–24 with only lower secondary education and not in education or training)

Figure A4: Proportion of children with income below the poverty line, parents born outside the EU and parents born in country of residence, 2004

Figure A5: Children of parents born outside the EU and in country of residence by work intensity (WI) of households in which they live, 2004

Box 4.1: Social Partnership’s vision for Irish children until 2016

Box 4.2: Research Division of OMCYA

Box 4.3: Recommendations of UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in relation to Child Poverty (2006)

Box 4.4: ‘Vision for Children in Ireland’ (from *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016*)

Box 4.5: Four High Level Goals (from *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016*)

Executive Summary

The purpose of this research project has been to examine the Irish institutional and policy framework for combating child poverty and social exclusion from a European Union (EU) perspective and from the perspective of local disadvantaged communities, with a view to identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the Irish approach. The European perspective was developed through a detailed examination of the lessons learned on tackling child poverty and social exclusion from the European Union's Social Inclusion Process between 2000 and 2009. The perspective of local disadvantaged communities was developed through a series of case studies in disadvantaged communities in Ireland that involved people either experiencing poverty themselves or working with those who do.

The research was made possible through a grant from the Combat Poverty Agency Research Awards.¹ It was undertaken by the Department of Applied Social Studies, NUI Maynooth. The core research was carried out between 2007 and 2010. Thus it does not document changes in child poverty and social exclusion that have taken place since then nor does it discuss recent modifications to the institutional and policy framework.

Although it has taken some time to refine the final report and although the impact of the economic and financial crisis has, in the intervening period, had a severe effect on many children and their families, the core findings of this report and its recommendations for strengthening the Irish institutional and policy framework for combating child poverty and social exclusion remain valid. Indeed, they are even more urgent. Tackling child poverty and social exclusion is now a very important element in the *Europe 2020 Strategy* and in the EU's new commitment to reduce the overall level of poverty by 20 million people by 2020.² Making progress on child poverty will necessarily be a very important part of Ireland's contribution to achieving this target. This has been acknowledged by the new government in its *National Reform Programme for Ireland under the Europe 2020 Strategy* (NRP) which was submitted to the European Commission on 29 April 2008.³

It is hoped that the findings of this research will inform efforts to enhance Ireland's approach to tackling child poverty. It is also hoped that the lessons drawn from the past decade of work at European level on the issue of child poverty and social

¹ With the closure of the Combat Poverty Agency and its merger with the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) in 2009, funding subsequently came from the Social Inclusion Division of the Department of Social Protection.

² At their June 2010 meeting, EU Heads of State and Government adopted the target of 'promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion'.

³ The NRP (p. 26) states that 'Improving the position of vulnerable groups is critical to the achievement of the national poverty target and will require targeted interventions to address their multiple problems. In particular, a new approach is planned to break the cycle of child poverty where it is most deeply entrenched, as is outlined in the Programme for Government and also emphasised by the EU. Consideration will be given to the setting of subsidiary poverty targets for vulnerable groups in the context of updating relevant policies, such as the National Children's Strategy.' Ireland's and other Member States' NRPs can be found on the European Commission's Europe 2020 website at

http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/documents/documents-and-reports/index_en.htm

exclusion will contribute to the further development of work at European level on this issue.

The research report is in five parts.

Part 1 sets the scene by summarising the main characteristics of child poverty and social exclusion in Ireland on the basis of existing research reports and data. In particular it uses the most recent data available at the time (2008) from the EU's Social Inclusion Process to highlight how the situation in Ireland compares with other EU Member States. This shows that Ireland's position in relation to the EU average improved significantly between 2005 and 2008. However, when compared with the best performing EU Member States and in particular with those at similar levels of economic development, Ireland still lagged behind on most indicators of relative income poverty and material well-being. The data particularly highlight the high risk of poverty for children in lone parent families, the problem of joblessness and low work intensity, and thus the need to increase the proportion of income that families with children derive from work. The findings suggest that this will involve, among other things, reducing Ireland's levels of joblessness, further increasing the proportion of women with children at work, raising the skills levels of parents, tackling early school drop-out, ensuring that childcare is available and affordable to families, reinforcing policies that promote flexible working and the reconciliation of work and family life, and addressing the issue of poverty associated with part-time work.

Part 2 examines in depth the lessons that can be learned from the EU's Social Inclusion Process (the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion) between 2000 and 2009 about the nature of child poverty and social exclusion in the EU, and about how best to prevent and reduce it. The key learning points that emerge are grouped in five themes. First, the importance of a balanced approach which combines a focus on prevention and on alleviation and which balances universal provision for all children with some targeted measures for those at great risk. Second, the importance of ensuring a positive institutional and policy environment for preventing and tackling child poverty and exclusion. Key elements in this regard are: a high political priority and strong public support; a clear commitment to children's rights and to anti-discrimination; the establishment of clear political objectives, priorities and targets; effective mechanisms for mainstreaming a concern with child poverty and social exclusion across all policy areas and ensuring good coordination across all policy domains and between different levels of governance; strong arrangements for ensuring the mobilisation and ongoing involvement of all relevant actors and children themselves in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes; a strong system of data collection and analysis. Third, the importance of developing a comprehensive and multidimensional policy framework. Key elements in this regard are ensuring adequate income for all children and their families through increasing income from work and through ensuring adequate levels of child and family income support; ensuring access to high quality services and facilities (e.g. housing and environment, education and training, health services, transport); ensuring effective childcare and protection and social services; increasing opportunities to participate in sporting, recreational/leisure and cultural activities. The fourth theme is the importance of ensuring effective delivery of policies on the ground. Key elements in this regard are: ensuring effective links between different levels of governance (national, regional and local); developing partnerships of all relevant actors to ensure a coordinated and integrated approach at local level; delivering flexible support to children and families at risk that is tailored to their needs and creates pathways for progression; ensuring that there is a community development approach that promotes the empowerment and participation of children and their families, fosters respect for children's rights and is based on respect and

dignity. Fifth, the need to put in place effective systems for monitoring and reporting on the impact of policies and programmes so as to ensure a culture of continuous policy improvement leading to better policymaking and to a climate of accountability and transparency. On the basis of this research, a set of questions is then presented which can be used as a five-part framework for examining and developing national policy approaches to preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion.

Part 3 presents findings from four area-based case studies designed to investigate the experiences and perceptions of people ‘on the ground’ of policy and provision relating to children at risk of poverty. Respondents were asked to identify areas or aspects of policy and provision which worked well or made a positive difference, as well as difficulties, problems or gaps which needed to be addressed. The positive aspects most commonly identified included: increases in child income supports over time; assistance and support from the Money Advice and Budgeting Service; the ‘stepping stone’ provided by the Community Employment Scheme and other employment and training schemes; significant improvements in housing and amenities in some areas; and the services and supports provided by community-based projects and agencies, which were regarded as invaluable ‘lifelines’ by most respondents. The main problems and gaps identified were: persistent material deprivation for significant numbers of people, with related problems of self-image and self-esteem among children, young people and adults; availability, accessibility and costs of childcare (probably the single most commonly mentioned obstacle to economic and social participation); ‘traps’ and disincentives in the operation of training and employment schemes and supports; inadequate and inaccessible health services, especially at local level, and a lack of educational and learning-needs supports; poor or non-existent play and leisure facilities for children and young people; the absence of integrated and ‘holistic’ support focused on families; and insufficient coordination and integration of policies and services even where local groups and agencies were trying to work well together. The case studies confirmed the findings of other research to the effect that certain groups are much more at risk of poverty than others (including lone parents, Travellers, rural dwellers and asylum seekers), as well as the (related) pattern of the persistent inequality experienced by working class communities and neighbourhoods (or parts of neighbourhoods).

Part 4 assesses Ireland’s overall approach to preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion on the basis of the framework designed at the end of Part 2. In particular it focuses on the effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements, the quality of the overall strategic approach and the overall policy framework. The assessment is mainly on the basis of three things: first, it compares Ireland’s approach with the best EU practice as identified in Part 2; second, it is informed by insights gained from the interviews, focus groups and observations at local level documented in Part 3; and third, it is informed by a series of in-depth interviews with strategically placed senior actors in the field of child poverty and social exclusion. It is also informed by the findings from a number of recent Irish studies and by reports from a wide range of organisations active in the area of child poverty and children’s rights.

Part 5 brings together the findings from the assessment in Part 4 (together with the key findings from the other parts of the report) in a set of conclusions. Key points that are made are:

- there has been an increased focus on and significant development in relation to the well-being of children in Ireland in recent years but preventing and eradicating child poverty and social exclusion are still not sufficiently visible or high-level political goals;

- while progress has been made, Ireland in comparison with best practice in the European Union still does not have a fully coherent, joined-up and integrated strategy to prevent and eradicate child poverty; on the ground the approach is often still too piecemeal, disjointed and reactive; and the goal of eradicating child poverty and the social exclusion of children is not adequately mainstreamed across all relevant policy domains;
- the institutional arrangements at national level for coordinating efforts to eradicate child poverty and the social exclusion of children, while they have been strengthened in recent years, are still not sufficient; in particular there is insufficient coordination between the efforts of the Office for Social Inclusion and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and the Irish approach is still dominated by a 'silo' mentality in which the main government departments and agencies concentrate on 'doing their own thing';
- the link between tackling child poverty and the social exclusion of children and promoting the rights of children remains surprisingly weak; there is an insufficient linkage between Ireland's efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion and its efforts to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- there is often a wide gap between positive recent institutional and policy developments at national level and actual delivery on the ground; too often the approach to delivery remains piecemeal and often chaotic with, in many areas, a lack of effective integration and coordination of services on the ground, a lack of a sufficiently tailored approach to the needs of individual children, a lack of a holistic approach, inadequate emphasis on early intervention, insufficient focus on accountability and thus inadequate emphasis on and monitoring of outcomes for children;
- in disadvantaged communities local projects such as community and youth projects, family resource centres and local advice and information centres play a key role in supporting children and their families and acting as a point of contact and integration for other services;
- the HSE's role in delivering childcare services and providing social work support to children and families at risk appears to be under-resourced and underdeveloped; their role needs to become less a reactive response to children in crisis situations and more a proactive and preventive approach to supporting the welfare of children and their families;
- the policy efforts in recent years to increase the income of families with children (for example the significant increases in child benefit) have had a significant impact, but still more needs to be done. In particular, there is a lack of a sufficiently coordinated and strategic approach which integrates efforts to promote inclusion through a combination of active employment measures, adequate income support and access to high-quality and developmental public services;
- in recent years there have been positive efforts by the Department of Education to tackle educational disadvantage; however, educational disadvantage is an issue that is wider than schools and at present there is a lack of a sufficiently coordinated and integrated response involving a wide range of actors and agencies;
- the limited provision of early childhood care and education continues to be a serious barrier to breaking the cycle of child poverty and the intergenerational inheritance of poverty;
- there appears to be a degree of complacency about Ireland's performance on child poverty when compared to other European Member States, and Irish anti-poverty initiatives do not seem to give much attention to the lessons from the EU

In the light of these findings Part 5 concludes with 14 recommendations to address the weaknesses identified during the course of the research in Ireland's institutional and policy frameworks for preventing and reducing child poverty and social exclusion. They address the limitations identified in relation to institutional and governance arrangements, policy design, the delivery of policies and services, and the European dimension.

Methodology

Introduction

This study set out to examine Ireland's institutional and policy framework for reducing and preventing poverty and social exclusion among children from two contrasting perspectives: firstly in the light of the lessons learned from the European Union's Social Inclusion Process between 2000 and 2009, and secondly from the viewpoint of people 'on the ground' in disadvantaged communities, who had either been experiencing poverty themselves or working with those who did. The researchers also gleaned the views of a number of strategically placed informants on the insights and analyses emerging from the aforementioned perspectives. These informants included persons working in key positions in the statutory and NGO sectors and at national and EU levels. The research design was therefore a mixed-methods one comprising desk research (examining European and Irish data, policy documents and reports), case studies of local communities and interviews with key informants.

Desk research and key informant interviews

Part 1 of this report, which situates child poverty and social exclusion in Ireland in the broader comparative context of the EU as a whole, is based on an examination of existing data, in particular drawing on the 2007 and 2008 rounds of the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). In addition, the most recent Irish academic research reports and reports from key organisations active in the field of child poverty and social exclusion in Ireland were examined to see to what extent they confirm and/or add depth to the findings from the EU process. On the basis of this analysis some overall conclusions are then drawn regarding the key priorities that need to be addressed in combating poverty and social exclusion in Ireland.

Part 2 examines in detail the experience of combating child poverty and social exclusion as part of the EU's Social Inclusion Process, the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, between 2000 and 2007. All the major documents and reports on aspects of child poverty that emerged from the EU process over this period are identified and their main learning points highlighted. These learning points are then grouped as a series of themes: the nature of child poverty and social exclusion in the EU; the importance of a balanced approach to combating child poverty and social exclusion; elements that are necessary to create a positive environment for preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion; and the policy framework necessary to address child poverty and social exclusion. This thematic analysis provided the basis for the design of an original framework for assessing Member States in their approach to combating child poverty and social exclusion. This framework was tested through a series of interviews with a number of key individuals and organisations active in the EU Social Inclusion Process. The refined result is presented in Part 2 as a framework and set of questions that can be used to examine Ireland's and indeed other Member States' approaches to combating child poverty and social exclusion.

This framework is used to assess key elements of the Irish institutional and policy response to child poverty and social exclusion in Part 4 of this report. The

assessment is also informed by insights gained from the interviews, focus groups and observations at local level (see below). Additionally, it takes into account the findings of a number of Irish academic studies and reports from a wide range of organisations active in the area of child poverty and children's rights. Finally, the researchers undertook a series of seven in-depth interviews with strategically placed senior actors in the field of child poverty and social exclusion in Ireland to test and refine their initial conclusions. Four were with people involved in policy formulation and implementation in the statutory sector; three were with people involved in senior management and direction of agencies in key non-governmental organisations.

Case studies at local level

Part 3 of this report attempts to portray the reality of child poverty and social exclusion on the ground in Ireland and to consider the effectiveness of policies and programmes designed in response, from the perspective of those most directly affected. It is based on a 'multi-site case study approach' (Burgess et al., 1994) which facilitates exploration of issues and experiences that are particular to a given type of area or neighbourhood and that might apply across diverse settings. In sampling terminology, the sites were selected 'purposively', on the basis that they were geographically dispersed (and therefore would enable consideration of regional or spatial factors) and also that they allowed for attention to be paid to a number of variables which previous research (such as that summarised in Part 1 of this report) had shown to have a high degree of association with child poverty. These variables included social and economic disadvantage (urban and rural), unemployment, lone parenting, ethnic minority populations (including Travellers), asylum seekers and refugees. An additional consideration was that the Department of Applied Social Studies at NUI Maynooth, which conducted the research, had extensive existing links with community-based organisations and agencies, which facilitated access to individuals, families and groups with experience (past or present) of living in poverty. While not a random 'probability sample' and therefore not claiming to be systematically representative of all parts of Ireland, the areas selected provided a good mix of the key factors associated with child poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, since the areas selected all had relatively well-developed support networks and services (cf. Part 3 of this research), the findings from these case studies may, if anything, have understated the difficulties of people living in poverty without such supports. The four case study sites selected were:

Ronanstown / North Clondalkin, County Dublin

The 'canal communities' in Dublin city (especially Rialto but also Bluebell and Inchicore)

Bagenalstown, County Carlow

County Mayo (with a focus on Castlebar and Ballyhaunis)

Initial contact in each area was made through existing links with community groups at local level. This also facilitated holding at least one in-depth contextual interview with a local informant in each area. Focus groups were then conducted with local residents (of all ages) and with staff, volunteers and participants in as full a range as possible of the relevant local services and supports (such as Family Resource Centres, Community Development Projects, drugs projects, community youth projects, Travellers' groups and groups working with asylum seekers or with an intercultural focus). Focus groups were also held bringing together key professionals at local level (including personnel in the agencies already mentioned, but also staff in

primary and secondary schools, home–school liaison services, local authorities, area partnerships). In all there were twelve focus groups across the four case study sites with a total of 91 participants.

Arrangements for informing participants in advance of the nature of the research project and securing their consent to participate were dealt with through the support and assistance of the community groups and projects cooperating with the research. Individual participants self-selected voluntarily on the basis of an invitation from the researchers and the participating groups. Therefore the sample of respondents, like the sample of case study areas, does not claim to be representative of all people experiencing poverty or all professionals working with them. For obvious reasons, those who volunteer for research projects such as this tend to have a certain level of confidence and motivation, and the findings may not therefore adequately capture the perspectives and experiences of the most marginalised or vulnerable among the poor.

Permission of the participants was sought and granted for the electronic recording of the discussions. Respondents were in all cases assured of anonymity and confidentiality; and where names are given in the research report these are pseudonyms (apart from the names of the researchers/interviewers).

Transcripts of the case study interviews and focus groups were subsequently subjected to thematic analysis, guided by consideration of the pre-existing research questions (relating to positive and negative aspects of current policy, programmes and services) and by an attempt to take adequate account of observations, insights or perspectives that might not have been anticipated by the researchers, in other words by combining 'deductive' and 'inductive' approaches to the data.

Conclusions

The main findings of this research project were first presented at a seminar hosted by the (former) Combat Poverty Agency as part of its Research Seminar Series, and the very constructive discussion at that seminar led to some adjustment in the detail of the final conclusions and recommendations as presented in this report. Other opportunities will be availed of to disseminate the findings among as wide an audience as possible in the fields of policy, research and practice, and among communities experiencing poverty, so as to generate further contributions to policy analysis, debate and – hopefully – development in the field of child poverty.

Part 1 – Child Poverty and Social Exclusion in Ireland from a Comparative EU Perspective

1.1 Introduction

Part 1 sets the scene for the rest of the study by summarising the main characteristics of child poverty and social exclusion in Ireland based on existing research reports and data.⁴ In particular we used the most recent data available (2008) from the EU's Social Inclusion Process to highlight how the situation in Ireland compares with other EU Member States.

In 2007, as part of a special thematic year on child poverty, the EU's Social Protection Committee undertook comparative research on child poverty and well-being. The research examined income poverty in particular, and looked at the impact of three main factors on overall child poverty: jobless households, in-work poverty and government intervention (Social Protection Committee 2008a). By examining these research findings from an Irish perspective it has been possible to build a picture of how Ireland has performed on key indicators relating to child poverty compared to other EU Member States. This has helped to highlight areas where Ireland has been doing well or lagging behind compared to the best performing EU Member States. These findings are outlined in detail in Appendix 1.

However, the Social Protection Committee report (2008a) was based on 2005 data, and since then more up-to-date data have become available with the 2007 and 2008 rounds of the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). These more recent surveys have shown some improvements in Ireland's position, which are

⁴ In this report, we define poverty, social exclusion and social inclusion as in the definitions used by the EU Social Inclusion Process (European Commission 2004a):

Poverty: People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantage through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.

Social exclusion: Social exclusion is a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feel powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day-to-day lives.

Social inclusion: Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights (as defined in the Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union).

discussed below. Nevertheless, they also reinforce many of the main points in the earlier analysis. The findings are also complemented by a summary of some additional evidence from recent Irish studies on child poverty and social exclusion.⁵

1.2 Extent and intensity of child poverty

A number of key points may be highlighted regarding the extent and intensity of child poverty in Ireland (see also Table 1.1).

- The at-risk-of-poverty level for children in Ireland in 2008 (18%) was slightly lower than the EU average (20%).⁶ This marked a significant fall from 23% in 2005. However, Ireland was still some way behind the six best performing member states (9%–13%) – Denmark, Slovenia, Finland, Czech Republic, Netherlands and Sweden – and ranked 14th in the EU in 2008.
- The depth of child poverty in Ireland (27%) was greater than the EU average (22%) in 2008. Ireland was still some way behind the four best performing member states (12%–15%) in 2008 and ranked 23rd.⁷
- In relation to material deprivation (i.e. children having an enforced lack of at least three of nine essential items), Ireland at 17% lay below the EU average of 20% in 2008. However, Ireland still lagged some way behind the four best performing member states (5%–9%) – Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden and Finland – in 2008 and ranked 14th.⁸

The share of children experiencing both material deprivation and relative income poverty (i.e. at risk of poverty) in Ireland fell from 9.9% in 2005 to 7.8% in 2007 and then to 6.5% in 2008. This was below the EU averages of 9.2% in 2007 and 8.8% in 2008. However, Ireland's average in 2008 was still significantly higher than the five

⁵ See the website of Eurostat, the EU's statistical office, for more information on EU-SILC and other relevant data: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/themes>. Recent analysis of EU-SILC and other relevant data can be found in reports by Eurostat (2010), the Central Statistics Office (2009) and TARKI (2010). Unless otherwise stated the figures reported in the following sections are taken from the Eurostat website and are based on 2008 data. Note: CSO figures differ slightly from Eurostat figures because of some differences between CSO and EU definitions of gross income and because of different equivalence scales. In the case of indicators for Ireland at State level, the effect of these differences has generally been that a higher at-risk-of-poverty rate is recorded using EU definitions than national definitions (see Central Statistics Office 2009, p. 83, for further details.)

⁶ A child 'at risk of poverty' is a child who lives in a household 'at risk of poverty', i.e. a household whose total equivalised income is below 60% of the median national equivalised household income. The figures here refer to the at-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers (see also Table 1.1).

⁷ The intensity or depth of poverty is measured by the relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap. This is the difference between the median equivalised total income of persons below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold and the at-risk-of-poverty threshold; the resulting indicator is expressed as a percentage of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold (cut-off point: 60% of median equivalised income); EU aggregate figures are calculated as population-weighted averages of national values.

⁸ Material deprivation is defined by Eurostat as the enforced inability (rather than the choice of not being able/having) to pay for at least three of a list of nine items: unexpected expenses; one week annual holiday away from home; arrears (mortgage or rent payments, utility bills, or hire purchase instalments or other loan payments); a meal with meat or fish every other day; heating to keep the home adequately warm; a washing machine; a colour television; a telephone; or a car.

best performing countries – Denmark, Sweden, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Finland (2.7%–3.8%) – and ranked 9th.⁹

Table 1.1: Levels of Child Poverty and Deprivation in Ireland in 2008 – EU Comparisons

	At-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers except pensions	At-risk-of-poverty rate after social transfers	At-risk-of-poverty rate: single parent with dependent children	At-risk-of-poverty rate: 2 adults with 3 or more dependent children	Depth of poverty: relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap	Material deprivation	At-risk-of-poverty and experiencing material deprivation
EU average (%)	33	20	35	26	22	20	8.8
4 best performing Member States (%)	20–26	9–13	16–26	11–13	12–15	5–9	2.7–3.8
Ireland (%)	40	18	42	13	20	17	6.5
Ireland (rank)	25th	14th	22nd	4 th	23rd	14 th	9th

Source: Eurostat/EU-SILC

1.3 Duration and persistence of child poverty

Up-to-date EU comparative data on the duration and persistence of child poverty were not available at the time of writing. However, a 2006 study (Layte et al. 2006) found that half of Irish children observed over an eight-year time period spent some time in income poverty. Of these almost a quarter (23%) spent a relatively short amount of time in poverty (one or two years). However, a higher proportion (27%) spent three or more years in income poverty. Within this latter category, 17% (approximately 182,000 children) spent five or more years in income poverty. Children's spells in poverty in Ireland had an average duration of 1.7 years. Comparative analysis with data for the Member States of the EU-15 showed that levels of persistent income poverty for children in Ireland were lower than in southern Member States and the UK, but higher than in other northern Member States.

The study by Layte et al. also showed that persistence of child poverty is affected by various household characteristics, for instance the age of the child and the presence of other children. Household expenses were likely to rise with the arrival of a child. In addition, children influenced the risk of household poverty through their impact on the

⁹ Central Statistics Office (CSO) calculations show that 6.3% of children experienced consistent poverty in 2008. This was a fall from 7.4% in 2007. However, the consistent poverty rate for children remains higher than for the population as a whole (4.2%) (Central Statistics Office 2009). (For further information on the CSO definition of consistent poverty see Central Statistics Office, 2009, Appendix 2, p. 101.)

labour force status of the parents, particularly the mother. Having a youngest child aged under 12 had a greater impact on a household's experience of poverty than when he or she was aged 13–17, with no difference between a child aged under 5 versus 5–12. While teenagers involved higher direct costs than younger children, this was generally outweighed by their lower indirect costs, as parental work is much less affected. Having three or more children in the household had a particularly marked increase on the persistence of child poverty.

1.4 Factors most associated with the risk of poverty

Childhood

Children in Ireland have a significantly higher risk of being in poverty than the population as a whole. EU-SILC data (2008) showed that the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children in Ireland was 2% higher than for the overall population, whereas the EU average for children at risk of poverty was 3% higher than for the population as a whole. Similarly, in terms of material deprivation, Irish children (17%) had a rate 3% higher than for the overall Irish population (14%), the same gap as for the EU population as a whole (i.e. children 17% versus overall population 20%).¹⁰

The consistently worse position of children compared to adults is not a new phenomenon. The report *A Social Portrait of Children in Ireland* (Dunne et al. 2007) shows that over the period 1994–2001 children were slightly more likely to be persistently poor than adults (21% of children versus 19% of adults) and to experience recurrent poverty (10% of children versus 8% of adults). The report also showed that over the same period children were a lot more likely than adults to be exposed to sustained consistent poverty. While 3.6% of adults had been in consistent poverty for four or more years between 1994 and 2001, the figure was 8.4% for children. Children were also slightly more likely than adults to have been consistently poor for one to three years (16% versus 12%). While no adult had spent eight consecutive years in consistent poverty, a very small percentage of children (1%) had. The authors concluded that 'children are more vulnerable to being disadvantaged than households without children'.

Lone parenthood and family size

The 2008 at-risk-of-poverty rate for children living in single parent households in Ireland was 42% compared to 35% for the EU as a whole. The at-risk-of-poverty rate for children living in large households (i.e. two adults with three or more dependent children) was 13% (EU 26%), down from 20% in 2007. Children living in households with two adults and two dependent children had an at-risk-of-poverty rate of 12% (EU 14%).

The adverse position of lone parent households is reinforced by an analysis of 2008 EU SILC data by the Central Statistics Office (2009). This showed that despite a fall in the deprivation levels of members of lone parent households in 2008, they remained the single most deprived group and reported the highest rates for eight out of the 11 deprivation indicators. Thus more than half of individuals in lone parent

¹⁰ The CSO, in its analysis of the 2008 EU-SILC, found that children were relatively over-represented in the group at risk of poverty, making up 26% of the population but nearly one third (32.7%) of those at risk of poverty (Central Statistics Office 2009).

households (55%) reported experiencing at least one of the deprivation indicators and 24.2% experienced more than three.

Unemployment and low work intensity

One of the findings to emerge most strongly from recent EU work on child poverty (Social Protection Committee 2008a; TARKI 2010) is that the work intensity of households is a key factor in explaining Ireland's level of children at risk of poverty. For instance, the Social Protection Committee report showed that in 2006, 42.8% of children at risk of poverty in Ireland lived in households where no one was working. This compared to an EU average of 26.6%.¹¹ The risk of poverty for this group of children was 73.9%. There was also a high risk of poverty (52.2%) for children living in households where the work intensity was 0–0.5. However, this group constituted only 14.1% of all children at risk of poverty and was very similar to the proportion (14.3%) of children at risk of poverty living in households where all adults were working full-time. Children living in households where the work intensity was 0.5–1.0, although exposed to a relatively low risk of poverty (15.3%), constituted 28.8% of poor children.

The TARKI (2010) research, using figures for 2007, showed that the Irish child poverty rate was high (62.6%) when both parents in a couple were jobless, and this group constituted 21.2% of all poor children. While the risk was much lower (17.5%) where one partner worked full-time and one was jobless, they made up 22.8% of all children who were poor. By contrast, it was striking that when both parents worked full-time the risk of poverty for children fell to 2.9%, and when a lone parent worked full-time it fell to 7.9%. However, when both partners worked part-time or a lone parent worked part-time the poverty risk for children was quite high (38.4% and 28.5% respectively).

The role of unemployment or low work intensity in the persistence of child poverty is reinforced by earlier Irish research (Layte et al. 2006). The study demonstrated that children in households where parents were unemployed or inactive in the labour force had a higher risk of spending time in poverty than children in households where two parents were employed. Analysis over an eight-year period showed that where neither parent was employed, nearly all children spent some time in income poverty. Where both parents were employed, children spent no time in poverty.

Young motherhood

The Social Protection Committee's (2008a) research showed that in 2005 Ireland had a fairly high risk (33%) of poverty among children of mothers aged under 30 compared to the EU average (26%), and a very high level when compared to the five best performing Member States (15%–16%). The share of children with a young lone mother was highest in Ireland (almost one in four) compared to an EU average of 12% and 5% or less in the four best performing countries.

¹¹ Figures for 2007 showed that 44% of children at risk of poverty in Ireland lived in households where no one was working. This compared to an EU average of 25%. The risk of poverty for this group of children was 71% (TARKI 2010).

Low-skilled households

The Social Protection Committee research also showed that in 2006 Ireland had a high proportion (60%) of children at risk of poverty living in low-skilled households compared to the EU average (33%) and lagged well behind the four best performing Member States (7%–13%). Ireland also had a notably high proportion (55%) of children living in unskilled lone parent families compared to the EU average (22%) and in unskilled large families (25%) compared to the EU average (13%).

Rural location

The TARKI 2010 research points to a significant rural dimension to Irish child poverty. In 2007 Ireland had a higher proportion (38%) of children living in thinly populated areas compared to children in the EU as a whole (25%), a similar proportion living in intermediate areas (30% compared to 29%) but a much lower proportion living in densely populated areas (31% compared to 46%). This is relevant as the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children living in thinly populated areas (20%) and intermediate areas (23%) was significantly higher than the rate for children in a densely populated area (16%).

1.5 Groups experiencing extreme poverty and exclusion

The overall figures on child poverty and well-being based on major national and international studies tend not to highlight sufficiently some groups of children who experience particularly extreme levels of poverty and related social exclusion. This seriously limits the potential for transnational comparisons. However, Irish research points to a number of groups being at particular risk, namely Traveller children, children from a migrant background, children living in or leaving care, children with a disability, and homeless children.

Traveller children

According to Census 2006, there were 10,929 Traveller children in Ireland. This accounts for 1.1% of the total child population and 48.7% of the total Traveller population. Children from the Travelling community have significantly poorer outcomes than children in the general population. The 2002 Census report on the Travelling community, for example (Central Statistics Office 2004), showed considerable demographic differences compared with the settled community, including a higher birth rate, lower life expectancy and larger family size. Travellers of all ages have higher mortality rates than people in the general population (Daly 2007). At a 2005 conference on Traveller health organised by the Department of Health and Children, Mary Murphy highlighted that the perinatal (first week) mortality for Traveller children was 28 per 1000 births compared to 10 for the general population and that the infant mortality rate was 17 compared to seven (Murphy 2005). Mary Daly (2007) pointed out that a recent survey of education provision for Travellers found that Traveller children living on unofficial halting sites had lower average rates of school attendance (68%) than those living on official halting sites (78%) or in houses (82%); the same survey found a learning disability rate of 15%, which is considered to be some 7% higher than the overall school-going population.

Immigrant children

In 2006 there were 569 children seeking asylum in Ireland who had been separated from their families. Approximately one in three (34.6%) of the separated children seeking asylum was under 10 years of age. According to Census 2006, there were 62,800 non-Irish national children in Ireland, of whom 28.3% were living in Dublin. The number of non-Irish national children had increased by 57.6%, from 39,838 in 2002 to 62,800 in 2006 (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs 2008). In spite of the increase in numbers there is still a lack of detailed information on poverty rates of immigrant children. However, as Kilkelly (2007) points out, children seeking asylum are more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion than many other groups in Irish society because of the following: higher levels of dependence on social welfare, direct provision, lower levels of welfare payments and higher levels of housing deprivation. Language difficulties, racism and institutional barriers, in addition to having fewer rights and entitlements, also mean that asylum seekers experience greater degrees of social exclusion than many other vulnerable groups. Kilkelly cites research by the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College Dublin showing that lone asylum-seeking and refugee mothers face particular problems of poverty and social isolation compounded by the lack of childcare, an inability to work and language barriers (Kilkelly 2007).

Children in or leaving care

The number of children in the care of the Health Service Executive (HSE) in 2006 was 5,247. This equated to an overall rate of 50.6 children per 10,000. Of all children in the care of the HSE, 87.6% lived in foster family homes (see Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs 2008). Kilkelly (2007) has pointed out that young people with care experience are significantly more disadvantaged in terms of education, income and employment. Statistics show that 'neglect' is the primary reason why children are taken into care, and poverty is the underlying cause. About half enter care because of neglect, family difficulties such as housing or finance, or their parents' inability to cope (see Department of Health and Children 2004). One study found that 68% of young people had experienced homelessness two years after leaving HSE care. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) recommended that the Government strengthen its efforts to ensure and provide for follow-up and after-care to young persons leaving care centres.

Children with a disability

In a study for the National Disability Authority and the Equality Authority, Gannon and Nolan (2005) analysed the relationship between chronic illness or disability and poverty. Controlling for other characteristics, they suggested that the predicted risk of poverty was between 11 and 22 percentage points higher where the individual had a severely hampering disability, and between 2 and 12 percentage points higher where he or she was hampered to some extent. In terms of consistent poverty, a severely hampering illness or disability raised the incidence of poverty by between 6 and 13 percentage points, while an illness or disability that hampered 'to some extent' increased the consistent poverty rate by between 2 and 4 percentage points. While the study concentrated on the position of adults, as that was the data available to the researchers, there is no reason to presume that the impact on children with a disability would be any less. The study also highlighted the strong correlation between educational disadvantage and disability.

Homeless children

In 2006, the total number of children recorded as homeless by the HSE was 449. This equated to an overall rate of youth homelessness of 43.3 children per 100,000. Of these, 55% (247) were aged 16–17; 27.8% (125) were aged 14–15; 8% (36) were aged 12–13; and the remaining 9.1% were under 12 years of age (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs 2008, p. six). A recent report for the Office of Social Inclusion (Nolan and Maitre 2009, p. 72) cites a 2005 study on homelessness in Dublin for the Homeless Agency which showed that of the 2,015 persons counted as homeless in Dublin, 463 (23%) were children (aged under 18). Of homeless children more than 40% were aged 5 or under, while a much smaller proportion, 27%, were aged 12 or over. Nobody aged 16 or under, and only one person aged 17, was reported as on their own and homeless (i.e. a single-person household) in 2005.

1.6 Other observations on child poverty in Ireland

Poor households with children have a low proportion of income from work

The Social Protection Committee research (2008a) showed that in 2005, poor households with children in Ireland had the lowest proportion of gross income from work in the EU (33.4% compared to EU average of 54.9%) and the highest proportion coming from family allowances in the EU (37.1% compared to EU average of 15.8%).

Low levels of in-work poverty

The Social Protection Committee research also showed that Ireland in 2005 had a relatively low overall at-risk-of-poverty rate (11%) for children living in in-work households, compared to the EU average (13%), but lagged behind the four best performing Member States (6%–7%). For couples with children the rate fell to 3% when both parents were in work and to 7% when one parent worked full-time and the other part-time, compared to EU averages of 7% in both cases. If only one parent was working full-time the risk rose to 17% in Ireland but was relatively low compared to the EU average of 25%.

High risk of poverty associated with part-time work

The same research showed that at-risk-of-poverty rates for children of lone parent households working part-time were relatively high (36%) compared to the EU average (30%), but if lone parents were working full-time the poverty rates were very low in Ireland (4%) compared to the EU average (15%).

Likewise, in 2005 the poverty rate for children in large families when parents were only working part-time was high in Ireland (72%) compared to the EU average (47%). However, if both parents worked full-time this fell to 5% compared to the EU average of 13%. If just one parent worked full-time Ireland's performance was also quite good (20%) compared to the EU average (33%), and if one parent worked full-time and one part-time, Ireland's performance was close to the EU average (11% compared to 10%).

Increasing impact of social transfers towards children

EU research (Social Protection Committee 2008a) also highlighted the important role played by social transfers in reducing poverty levels. For instance in Ireland in 2005, social transfers other than pensions reduced poverty for children by 43%, which was close to the EU average of 44%. The three best performing countries reduced child poverty by over 60%. The impact of social transfers in Ireland has further increased since then. The at-risk-of-poverty rate before and after social transfers for children in 2007 was reduced from 39% to 19% in Ireland compared to a reduction from 33% to 20% in the EU as a whole (Eurostat 2010). In 2008 it was reduced still further in Ireland, from 40% to 18%, i.e. by 55% (compared to a reduction by 39% in the EU-27).¹²

Very high cost of childcare

The Social Protection Committee report (2008a, p. 44) also drew on OECD research to conclude that the burden added by childcare costs to the effective tax burden on gross earnings was highest for a lone parent taking up work in Ireland, Slovakia and the UK.

1.7 Trends

Based on the available data for 2005 to 2008, there was a fairly strong downward trend in the at-risk-of-poverty rate in Ireland. This was especially evident in relation to larger families (i.e. two parents with three or more children). The picture in relation to material deprivation remained fairly constant, however.

Table 1.2: At-risk-of-poverty rates and material deprivation among children in Ireland, 2005–2008 (after social transfers)

	2005 (%)	2006 (%)	2007 (%)	2008 (%)
At-risk-of-poverty rate				
All children	23	22	19	18
Lone parent families	45	47	40	42
2 parents and 3 or more children	26	22	20	13
2 parents and 2 children	13	15	10	12
Material deprivation				
All children	17	16	14	17

Source: Eurostat/EU-SILC

¹² It is striking that the at-risk-of-poverty rate for children in Ireland before social transfers actually stayed constant between 2005 and 2008 (at 40%) while the rate after transfers fell from 23% to 18% over the same period. Indeed, in 2008 Ireland had the third highest at-risk-of-poverty rate for children before social transfers in the EU, after Hungary (47%) and Romania (43%). This highlights the growing impact of social transfers on the reduction of child poverty in Ireland over this period.

The CSO's figures (Central Statistics Office 2009) also showed that the consistent poverty rate¹³ for children, while higher than for other age groups, fell from 10.3% in 2006 to 7.4% in 2007 to 6.3% in 2008.¹⁴ Eurostat figures (EU-SILC data from 2010) showed that the share of children experiencing both material deprivation and relative income poverty (i.e. at risk of poverty) in Ireland fell from 9.9% in 2005 to 7.8% in 2007 and then to 6.5% in 2008.

Looking at a slightly longer period, the *National Report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010* (Office for Social Inclusion 2008) provides a table showing changes in at-risk-of-poverty and consistent poverty for children (aged 0–14) between 2003 and 2006. The data are reproduced here in Table 1.3.

	2003 (%)	2004 (%)	2005 (%)	2006 (%)
At risk of poverty	21.0	21.2	21.2	20.2
Consistent poverty	11.7	9.3	10.2	9.8

Source: Eurostat/EU-SILC

The downward trend in consistent poverty goes back even further. A report for the Office for Social Inclusion (Dunne et al. 2007, p. 22) reported:

Levels of consistent poverty have fallen sharply for both children and for adults over the past ten years, reflecting declining levels of deprivation and real improvements in living standards. However, the fall for children has been sharper. In the 1994 Living in Ireland Survey, 25% of children versus 14% of adults were in consistent poverty (based on the list of eight deprivation items). This meant that the rate for children was nearly 80% higher than that for adults. But in 2004, this gap narrowed to 64%. Although the gap between children and adults has narrowed in terms of consistent poverty over the 10 years, children are still more likely than adults to be in households experiencing basic deprivation.

1.8 Some conclusions

The overall conclusion from this comparative look at Ireland's performance in relation to other EU Member States is that Ireland's position had improved quite significantly up to 2008. However, compared with the best performing EU Member States and in particular with those at similar levels of economic development, Ireland still lagged behind on most indicators.

¹³ The consistent poverty rate used in Ireland refers to the proportion of people who are at risk of poverty and experience two or more of a list of eleven deprivation indicators.

¹⁴ This compares with a consistent poverty rate in 2008 of 4.2% for the population as a whole. Individuals in lone parent households had a consistent poverty rate of 17.8% in 2008 (down from 20.1% in 2007).

The comparative data suggest that it is necessary to investigate and address a number of issues in more depth. The areas identified are not new to anyone researching or working on child poverty issues in Ireland, but they serve to put Ireland's performance into a broader context. At the same time they also help to highlight the relative success of some of the policy initiatives that have been taken.

In spite of a significant drop in relative income poverty to 2008, Ireland was well behind the best performing countries, so continued effort is required in this area. Also, while there was considerable progress in reducing the share of children who are both materially deprived and in relative income poverty, Ireland was still some way behind the best performing Member States. Thus this is also an area requiring further attention.

The high rate of relative income poverty among children growing up in lone parent households, and the high proportion of the Irish child poverty problem represented by children from these families, argues for an especial policy focus on this group.

The data point to the problem of joblessness and low work intensity, and to the need to increase the proportion of income that families with children derive from work. The findings suggest that this will involve, among other things, reducing Ireland's levels of joblessness, further increasing the proportion of women with children at work, raising the skills levels of parents, tackling early school drop-out, ensuring that childcare is available and affordable to families, reinforcing policies that promote flexible working and the reconciliation of work and family life, and addressing the issue of poverty associated with part-time work.

The research also demonstrates the success of the policy trend to increase the level of social transfers to families with children. This appears to have contributed significantly to reducing the numbers of children at risk of poverty by 2008. It highlights the need to maintain and increase such support at the same time as working to improve connections to the labour market. The research also provides a warning to Ireland to be careful when increasing connections to the labour market to ensure that parents move into good quality jobs and to make sure that there is no increase in the levels of in-work poverty – this is a particular risk given the number of parents currently out of work who are low skilled.

One particular area requiring increased attention, as highlighted by the findings, is the position of children of parents born outside the EU.

The overall conclusion of the Social Protection Committee (2008a, p. 48) research in relation to income poverty in Europe was that

child poverty outcomes result from complex interactions between the key factors of joblessness, in-work poverty and the impact of transfers. The countries that achieve the best results are those that perform well on all fronts, notably by combining strategies aimed at facilitating access to employment, enabling services (childcare etc.) with income supports.

This is highly pertinent to the Irish situation. In Ireland, as the comparative data suggest, there is a need to make progress on a number of fronts at the same time. A comprehensive approach will involve facilitating access of parents (especially lone parents) to good quality employment, developing enabling services, especially childcare, and maintaining and further developing income supports for children.

Part 2 – Lessons from the EU Social Inclusion Process

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the many different actions on child poverty and social exclusion that took place between 2000 and 2009 as part of the European Union's Social Inclusion Process. It identifies the main lessons that can be learned from the EU process on how best to tackle and prevent child poverty and social exclusion. It then recommends a framework for examining national policy approaches in this area.

2.2 The EU Social Inclusion Process

Reducing poverty and social exclusion and promoting greater social inclusion have been key policy priorities of the European Union (EU) since 2000. At the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000, the Heads of State and Government established the EU Social Inclusion Process, the Open Method of Coordination on poverty and social exclusion (sometimes known as the Social OMC). The stated aim of this process was to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010.

The key elements of the social inclusion OMC that were agreed in Lisbon combined common objectives, National Action Plans and a programme presented by the Commission to encourage cooperation in this field. The Nice European Council in December 2000 adopted the first set of common objectives and detailed implementation arrangements. A set of commonly agreed indicators on poverty and social exclusion were developed by an Indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee;¹⁵ these were ultimately endorsed at the December 2001 European Council at Laeken, and have subsequently been further developed. A five-year Programme of Community action to encourage cooperation between Member States to combat social exclusion was subsequently agreed between the Commission, the Member States and the European Council and came into effect from January 2002.¹⁶

In 2005 a review was undertaken of the EU Social Inclusion Process and the separate social processes on pensions, and on healthcare and long-term care, which were also instituted by the Lisbon European Council. This was part of a wider mid-term review of the whole Lisbon process on economic growth, jobs and social cohesion. Following this review the three social processes (social inclusion, pensions, and healthcare and long-term care) were streamlined into one overall process on social protection and social inclusion. However, it was agreed that it would be important to respect the specificities of each strand and to take account of the rather different characteristics and stages of development of each while also building on progress to date (see Social Protection Committee 2006a, 2008b).

¹⁵ The Social Protection Committee consists of high-level officials from, in the main, employment and social affairs ministries in each Member State and representatives of the European Commission. It reports to the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council of Ministers.

¹⁶ This was followed by a new Community action programme, the Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity, 2007–2013 (PROGRESS).

Thus from the period 2001 to 2010 the EU had a social inclusion process which consisted of five main elements:

- a set of common EU objectives for combating poverty and social exclusion;
- two yearly National Action Plans on poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/inclusion) which are the means by which Member States translate the common objectives into national policies and which are drawn up on the basis of a common framework;
- an agreed set of common indicators to enhance the analysis of poverty and social exclusion and to measure progress towards achieving the common objectives;
- a process of regular monitoring and reporting on progress by the European Commission, which has resulted in regular EU-level reports on social inclusion and the identification of areas requiring further action by Member States;
- a Community action programme to underpin and reinforce the process and, in particular, to encourage mutual learning and dialogue between Member States that will stimulate innovation and the sharing of best practice. This has supported data collection, transnational exchange projects, peer review seminars, conferences, European-level networks of organisations working to tackle poverty, and thematic studies on different aspects of poverty and social exclusion.

2.2.1 *Child poverty as a key issue*

Child poverty and social exclusion has emerged as an increasingly important issue in the EU Social Inclusion Process since 2001. For instance, child poverty has:

- featured as a priority concern in many National Action Plans on poverty and social exclusion (NAPs/inclusion), even though the actual coverage has been rather uneven and piecemeal and in many cases has lacked a comprehensive and multidimensional approach;
- been highlighted, since 2002, in every *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion* (called *Joint Report on Social Inclusion* until 2005) agreed between the European Commission and the Social Protection Committee as the key annual policy statement on the development of the EU's Social Inclusion Process;
- been given special focus in the work on indicators, as the 2004 Joint Report (European Commission, 2004a, p. 224) noted: 'As far as possible, children and the elderly population must be given a special focus within indicators of social exclusion and poverty';
- mbeen a key theme of the Community action programme on social exclusion from the outset, and subsequently under PROGRESS. It has been covered under many of the different activities supported under these programmes and their precursor, a programme of Preparatory actions on poverty and social exclusion (1998–2001), the results of which became available during the early years of the Social Inclusion Process.¹⁷

Key activities supported under the Community action programmes and PROGRESS included the following:

¹⁷ Some 20 out of 249 projects funded between 1998 and 2001 addressed aspects of child poverty.

- Publication under the Preparatory Actions outputs of an important report on child poverty and social exclusion from Euronet, the European Children's Network (Ruxton and Bennett 2002) and several other focused reports, e.g. from the European Forum for Child Welfare on families under stress (Williams 2003);
- Projects under the first Transnational Exchange Programme that examined aspects of child poverty, most notably A Lobby for Children, European Social Network and Homestart International; and a further three projects under the second Transnational Exchange Programme that specifically looked at aspects of child poverty.¹⁸ Another two projects are being supported under the current Mutual Learning on Social Inclusion and Social Protection programme;¹⁹
- Seminars in the Peer Review programme on aspects of child poverty, e.g. in Italy to examine policies to prevent exclusion of families with difficulties, and in the UK to look at the Surestart programme;²⁰
- Prioritisation of child poverty within the core funding programme for European networks. From the outset Eurochild has been supported, and more recently the Confederation of Family Organisations in the EU (COFACE) and the European Foundation for Street Children Worldwide. Other funded networks such as the European Anti-Poverty Network, the European Social Network, FEANTSA and Caritas Europa have also addressed this issue;²¹
- Making child poverty a key theme of each annual Round Table Conference on poverty and social exclusion (this has been the case since the first one in 2002, under the Danish EU Presidency). It has also been a recurring topic at the annual European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty since the first one in 2001, hosted by the Belgian Presidency. The conference on Taking Forward the EU Social Inclusion Process during the Luxembourg Presidency in 2005 was based on a report which made 'children mainstreaming'²² one of its key themes (Marlier et al. 2007);
- Thematic studies: the first transnational thematic study commissioned under the Community action programme in 2002 examined policies to tackle child poverty in six Member States and the United States (Hoelscher 2004); child poverty was also an important issue in other thematic studies commissioned under the programme.²³

¹⁸ Cyprus College (Integrating children's perspectives in policy making to combat poverty and social exclusion experienced by single parent families; see Spyrou et al. 2007), Associazione Amici dei Bambini (Social Inclusion for Out of Family Children and Young People in Public Childcare) and Istituto degli Innocenti (Conditions of children placed in out of home care and the construction of child-oriented welfare policies).

¹⁹ Amici dei Bambini (Life after Institutional Care Equal Opportunities and Social Inclusion for Young People Identification and Promotion of Best Practices) and a project led by the Greater London Enterprise (European Cities against Child Poverty).

²⁰ Details of the different Transnational Exchange Projects and the Peer Reviews can be found on the European Commission's social inclusion web site, http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/activities_en.htm.

²¹ See for instance European Social Network (2010), FEANTSA (2007) and Caritas Europa (2004).

²² 'Children mainstreaming' has been described as viewing social inclusion from a child's perspective and integrating a concern with the well-being and social inclusion of children into all areas of policy making (Marlier et al. 2007).

²³ For other thematic studies commissioned by the Community action programme in which child poverty was an important issue, see European Commission (2004b), Walther and Pohl (2006) and Trifiletti et al. (2007).

The increasing importance of the issue of child poverty and social exclusion was reflected in the conclusions of the 2006 Spring European Council: In endorsing new objectives and working arrangements for the OMC on social protection and social inclusion, and in stressing the need to achieve a significant reduction in poverty and social exclusion by 2010, the Heads of State and Government asked ‘the Member States to take necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background’ (Council of the European Union 2006). The growing political importance of the issue received a further boost with the publication of a Commission Communication on the rights of the child. This gave particular attention to the issue of children’s social inclusion and to the EU Social Inclusion Process (European Commission 2006a).

Also in 2006, Member States and the Commission agreed that, in the ‘light’ years of the EU’s Social Inclusion Process, i.e. the years when countries were not producing NAPs/inclusion (as part of National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion [NRSSPSI]), they would focus in detail on key issues within the different strands. For 2007, it was decided that the key issue to be examined in depth within the social inclusion strand would be child poverty and the social inclusion and well-being of children. This led to a further intensification of work on the issue and a number of important developments:

- A Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being was established by the Social Protection Committee (SPC). This led to the publication of a report (Social Protection Committee, 2008a) which analysed child poverty and social exclusion in the EU and examined approaches to policy monitoring and assessment in Member States. The final part drew out conclusions and made recommendations aimed at better monitoring and assessment of child poverty and well-being. The recommendations were adopted by the Social Protection Committee in January 2008 and therefore by all Member States and the European Commission. They thus provided an important framework for the future development of the child poverty and well-being strand of the Social OMC in general and Member States’ policies in particular.²⁴
- The SPC sent a questionnaire to Member States in April 2007 which gathered detailed information on the policies being developed by Member States to prevent child poverty and social exclusion.
- The EU’s Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion produced reports for each Member State on child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children, with an overall synthesis report (Frazer and Marlier 2007).
- In addition to work being undertaken by the Commission, the Task-Force, Member States and national experts, many of the European networks active on social inclusion issues also gave particular attention in 2007 to child poverty and social exclusion and prepared reports on the issue. They included networks such as EAPN, Eurochild, the European Social Network and FEANTSA, all supported under the Community action programme on social inclusion.

Drafts of all these various reports fed into and informed a Social Protection Committee Peer Review on child poverty in October 2007. This in turn informed the

²⁴ The recommendations adopted by the SPC cover setting quantified objectives, assessing the impact of policies on child poverty and social exclusion, monitoring child poverty and well-being, a common framework for analysing child poverty and well-being, reinforcing statistical capacity and improving governance and monitoring arrangements at all relevant policy levels.

preparation of the 2008 *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion* (European Commission 2008c)b), the SPC's *Guidance note for preparing national strategy reports on social protection and social inclusion 2008–2010* (Social Protection Committee 2008b), as well as the European Commission's communications on a renewed social agenda (European Commission 2008a)d) and on reinforcing the OMC on social protection and social inclusion (European Commission 2008b)c).

In 2009 the European Parliament responded to the growing attention being given to child poverty by producing a report on social inclusion which gave special attention to the issue of combating child poverty (European Parliament 2009). In December 2009 a consortium commissioned by the European Commission produced a major report, *Child Poverty and Child Well-Being in the European Union* (TARKI 2010), which built on the earlier SPC report.

Another important development was the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, which came into force on 1 December 2009 and included, for the first time, the promotion of children's rights as an objective of the European Union. Also, at the end of December 2009 a Commission Working Document on the EU 2020 strategy (European Commission 2009) recognised that child poverty and social exclusion present a long-term social challenge for the EU which has been further exacerbated by the economic and financial crisis. This, together with the fact that the issue was also one of the key focuses for the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, held out the prospect of increased attention being given to the issue of child poverty and well-being in the EU's post-2010 agenda.

2.3 Learning from the EU's Social Inclusion Process

As the EU's focus on the poverty and social exclusion of children developed, a consensus emerged around some of the key considerations that should be taken into account when developing prevention and eradication policies. A paper prepared for UNICEF (Frazer 2006) analysed the main learning on the nature of child poverty from the EU Social Inclusion Process between 2001 and mid 2006 and highlighted the implications for the development of policies to prevent and eradicate child poverty and exclusion. Many of the key learning points identified in that paper were then reinforced by work undertaken during 2007 as part of the Social Inclusion Process's special focus on child poverty and social exclusion. The key findings are outlined in the following sections, 2.3.1 to 2.3.5.

2.3.1 Nature of child poverty and social exclusion

The key learning points on the nature of child poverty and social exclusion can be summarised under the headings below.

Multidimensional

In the EU Social Inclusion Process child poverty is seen as multidimensional. This means that child poverty involves more than surviving on a low income and often lacking basic necessities such as adequate diet or warm clothes. It can also involve living in substandard housing; being homeless; living in a derelict and badly serviced neighbourhood experiencing high levels of crime, drug-trafficking and anti-social behaviour with a concentration of marginalised groups; suffering poor health; having

poor access to health services; being at higher risk of infant and child mortality; having limited access to social and family services; experiencing educational disadvantage and low quality educational opportunities; having limited or no access to playgrounds, sporting and recreational facilities or cultural activities. Some children face more than one disadvantage. As different disadvantages accumulate they can interact and reinforce each other to deepen a child's experience of poverty and increase the cross-generational inheritance of poverty and exclusion. The multidimensional nature of child poverty is well covered by several members of the EU's Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion in their 2007 national reports on child poverty (Frazer and Marlier 2007). For instance, the UK experts emphasised the following:

Child poverty matters because there is a mass of evidence, reviewed recently in an HM Treasury document, that poor children have constrained lives, poorer health, worse diets, colder and more dilapidated housing conditions, higher risks of accidents and injuries, more physical abuse, more bullying and less access to childcare. They also do less well at school and their outcomes in terms of skills and employment are worse. Recent work using data from the 1980 birth cohort survey shows that disadvantages at 22 months continue to have an impact on employment and earnings right through to later life. (Bradshaw and Bennett 2007)

A key lesson for policy makers resulting from this is that there is no single solution for all target groups and all national contexts. What is necessary to tackle child poverty is a multidimensional approach involving integrated and coordinated action across a broad range of policy areas. For instance the Social Protection Committee's Task-Force on child poverty and well-being concluded in its report that, 'given the multi-dimensional nature of the phenomena at stake, no single policy is sufficient to ensure the social inclusion and well-being of children and their families' (Social Protection Committee 2008a, p. 128). Similar arguments are evident in the report of the *Lobby for Children* project (Bohn 2005) and in Frazer and Marlier's report for the European Commission (Frazer and Marlier 2007).

Relative

Underpinning the European approach is the understanding that poverty means more than just lacking the basic necessities for survival²⁵ Poverty is also a relative concept, that is to say adults' and children's situations have to be considered in the context of the society in which they live. Thus poverty is about lacking the income and resources necessary to lead a normal life with dignity in the society that people are living in. Poverty is therefore connected to inequality.²⁶ However, this does not mean that the actual level of income and resources does not matter. With the

²⁵ A useful discussion on the use of relative poverty definitions and other definitions in the EU Social Inclusion Process has been developed by EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network 2007).

²⁶ The 2004 *Joint Report on Social Inclusion* (European Commission 2004a, p. 10) contains the following definition of poverty, which also highlights that poverty is connected to inequality: 'People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantage through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted.'

enlargement of the European Union in 2004 it became clear that it could be misleading to only consider people's relative income, as this tended to suggest that quite poor and rich countries often had similar levels of poverty – which was clearly not the case. Thus, while the relative income position is important, it is also necessary to take into account the overall level of resources in a country.²⁷

The implication of this for policy makers is twofold. First, it implies that reducing child poverty involves reducing extremes of inequality, whether in terms of income or access to services and opportunities. Second, it means that policy makers need to ensure that all adults and children attain a sufficient baseline of resources to meet basic needs. The lower the overall level of national resources in a country, the more important it is to concentrate on ensuring that this is the case.

Linked to social exclusion

The EU approach also recognises that poverty is about more than just inadequate income. It is about being excluded from participation in the normal economic, social and cultural activities of society; it is also about being marginalised and thus made to feel powerless and often isolated. It is thus linked to the concept of social exclusion.²⁸ This was stressed in the final report of one of the European Commission's Preparatory Measures projects on tackling social exclusion in families with young children. The report (Home Start International 2002) emphasised that social exclusion can be measured as a lack of participation in society, in five dimensions: social networks, consumption, production, resources and public services. It also stressed that social isolation can be considered as a cross-cutting and dominant dimension that impacts on most other dimensions and may be associated with feelings of loneliness, isolation, apathy, powerlessness and depression.

The emphasis on social exclusion leads to recognition that the situation of adults and children is not static but changes over time and is affected by a range of different economic, social and cultural factors which interact and reinforce each other. Thus poverty and social exclusion are not primarily the result of individual weaknesses or failings. They are the product of dynamic processes which marginalise and exclude people from normal participation in economic, social and cultural life. These, then, are structural problems that need to be addressed if poverty is to be prevented and reduced.

²⁷ This is in line with the EU's overall approach to relative income poverty. In order to take account of the different economic situations in different Member States, when the EU list of commonly agreed indicators for social inclusion was endorsed by the 2001 Laeken European Council, it was emphasised that the value of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold should always accompany the indicator of those at risk of poverty (i.e. those falling below 60% of median income in the country they are living in). This means the value of the low-income threshold in national currency and in euros expressed as purchasing power standards.

²⁸ The EU process constantly links the terms poverty and social exclusion. At the same time as giving an EU definition of poverty, the 2004 *Joint Report on Social Inclusion* also defined the term social exclusion in the context of the EU Social Inclusion Process as 'a process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feel powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives.' (European Commission 2004a, p. 10)

This understanding is important because it means that tackling child poverty is not something that can be left to individual or charitable responses. It requires action by policy makers that will address the underlying causal and structural problems. It thus requires a long-term approach and not just short-term palliative measures.

Long-term effect and intergenerational inheritance

A recurring theme in the EU Social Inclusion Process, notably in Hoelscher's important study for the European Commission (Hoelscher 2004), is that growing up in poverty limits personal development and has long-term consequences for the development and well-being of children and increases their risk of being poor as adults and experiencing unemployment and social exclusion.²⁹ This long-term impact was well captured in the 2007 *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, which concluded that 'children growing up in poverty are less likely than their better-off peers to do well in school, enjoy good health, stay out of dealings with the criminal justice system, and – as young adults – to find a foothold in the labour market and in society more broadly' (European Commission 2007a, p. 52). The extent to which poverty is inherited from one generation to the next is also a recurring theme in the EU process.³⁰

Three important implications for policy makers arise from this. First, early intervention is essential to reduce the long-term impact of poverty and social exclusion. Second, given the intergenerational inheritance of poverty, policy makers need to pay particular attention to breaking the cycle of poverty. Third, actions to prevent and eradicate child poverty need to be seen as an investment in the development of the human capital that is essential for a sustainable and stable economy and society in the long term.³¹ As the Portuguese Presidency's conclusions of the 2007 Round Table Conference on Social Inclusion stated: 'The eradication of poverty among children and young people is a key factor for the long term effects and sustainability of the fight for an inclusive society.' (Portuguese Presidency of the EU 2007, p. 5)

High risk for lone parent families, large families and jobless households

Although the depth and intensity of poverty and social exclusion among children varies significantly across the EU, there is a general pattern that children in lone parent families, children in large families and children in jobless households are the largest groups of children at risk of poverty.³² The significance of poverty among lone

²⁹ See also the important report on child poverty from the French Conseil de l'Emploi, des Revenus et de la Cohésion Sociale (CERC) which stated that 'poverty affects not only the child's well-being at the moment when resources are insufficient, but also the child's well-becoming. It hinders their capacity to develop, to build the required capabilities, including knowledge capital, cultural capital, social capital, health capital.' (Council for Employment, Income and Social Cohesion 2004, p. 24)

³⁰ See for instance the 2007 Social Situation Report for a first analysis of the results from the 2005 EU-SILC module on the intergenerational transmission of disadvantages. These findings are summarised in the EU Task-Force's report on child poverty and well-being (Social Protection Committee 2008a). See also Frazer and Marlier (2007).

³¹ This was well put by Ruxton and Bennett (2002, p. 13): 'The economic, social, political and cultural development of the EU depends on all its 90 million children achieving their full potential.'

³² For instance, a Caritas Europa study (2004, p. 9) noted: 'Lone parents, especially single mothers, emerge as one of the greatest concerns. Other poor families include: families with a large number of children; families with one or more member with one of the following conditions – chronically sick, disabled, mentally ill, drug or alcohol addiction; returning displaced people or refugees following the resolution of a conflict situation. And – the flip side of the coin – migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; the low paid or unemployed.' Caritas is

parents has been reinforced by work undertaken as part of the EU social inclusion process (see, for instance, Social Protection Committee 2008a; Frazer and Marlier 2007; Trifiletti 2007). The 2007 *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion* concluded that 'living in a lone parent and/or jobless household or in a family with many children further compounds the risk' (European Commission 2007a, p. 52). The implication for policy makers is clear – a key part of addressing and preventing child poverty must be to improve the position of lone parent families and families with many children, and in particular to give high priority to increasing the employment levels of parents in such families and indeed in all jobless households. However, as Frazer and Marlier reported from their analysis of the reports of national experts, 'lack of work is not the only explanation of child poverty. Several experts point to the high proportion of poor children with one or more parents in employment' (Frazer and Marlier 2007, p. 24). Thus another key implication for policy makers is to ensure that work pays, through raising skill levels, reducing the costs associated with working, ensuring decent jobs and adequate minimum wage levels, and ensuring a supportive tax and welfare system for parents entering the labour market.

Groups at very high risk

In addition to the main groups at risk of poverty, the social inclusion process has served to highlight particular groups of children who are at high risk of severe or extreme poverty in the EU. Frazer (2006) reported that children identified in surveys as being at risk of extreme poverty include: children with disabilities; children from ethnic minorities, especially the Roma; young asylum seekers and immigrants;³³ children experiencing abuse, maltreatment or neglect; children whose parents have mental health problems; children in care; homeless children; children who are the victims of domestic violence; or children who are the victims of trafficking.³⁴ The position of children living in very poor and isolated rural areas that lack many basic facilities has also been particularly highlighted, especially in some of the new Member States and candidate countries, as has the position of children in families who have left such areas to live in large shanty estates on the periphery of major urban areas. Another significant concern emerging as part of the EU process is the position of children of migrant families and some ethnic minorities (see Frazer and Marlier 2007).

A key implication of these findings is that general policies in favour of children must respond to the needs of those children most at risk. This may seem obvious. However, it can be difficult to achieve if some of these children come from groups that are politically marginalised or experience high levels of discrimination and racism. Some children need additional or particular help to overcome barriers that hinder their social inclusion. In other words, strategies to tackle child poverty require

currently one of the networks supported under the EU Community action programme's European Networks Programme.

³³ It is estimated that there are in excess of 100,000 separated (unaccompanied) children in Europe (European Social Network 2005).

³⁴ This pattern was reinforced in the 2007 reports from the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion. In their synthesis of these reports Frazer and Marlier concluded: 'Two groups of children stand out in a significant number of countries as being at very high risk and of experiencing severe poverty and social exclusion: children living in or leaving institutions and Roma children. However, there are also a number of other situations that are highlighted quite often: children drawn into child labour; children who are victims of violence, sexual abuse, trafficking, addiction and are involved in crime; children with a disability; unaccompanied minors; children in homeless families and street children.' (Frazer and Marlier 2007, p. 27)

a combination of universal and targeted policies and programmes. It is also important to ensure that effective policies are in place to counter discrimination.

A structural and changing problem

An important and recurring lesson from the European Union experience is that child poverty is essentially a structural problem, not just a residual one. This means that economic and employment growth, while important, are not sufficient to solve the problem. Furthermore, as successive European Commission reports on social inclusion have emphasised, there are a number of very important structural changes happening in European societies (and further afield) which are creating opportunities for enhancing and strengthening social inclusion and at the same time leading to new risks of poverty and social exclusion (see, for instance, European Commission 2004a, p. 32). These new risks impact on children as well as adults. For instance:

- Major industrial and agricultural restructuring and changes in the labour market arising from very rapid economic transformation and globalisation can result in parents facing increasingly insecure, temporary and low-paid employment with an obvious negative impact on their children.
- Rapid transition to the knowledge-based society can benefit some children but others can be left further behind if they have limited or no access to the technology.
- Significant demographic changes in terms of ageing populations and lower birth rates can create issues about who provides childcare and can also risk resources being transferred away from children and children's services.
- Increased migration and growing cultural and social diversity can increase the risk of discrimination for some children.
- Changing household structures with increasing numbers of family break-ups, more births outside marriage and a growing number of lone parent families can result in more children being at risk of poverty and with less extensive networks of support.
- The trend to greater equality between men and women and in particular higher labour market participation by women, while overall being a positive development, can, if there is not adequate and affordable childcare, be detrimental for some children.

The first lesson for policy makers arising from this is that tackling poverty and social exclusion will not be solved just by depending on the positive effects of economic growth. Positive intervention is required which puts the issue of child poverty in the mainstream of policy-making and ensures that there is a strategic, comprehensive and well-resourced approach to preventing and addressing child poverty.³⁵ The second lesson is that policy makers must learn to understand and predict the potential impact of these changes if they are to develop appropriate policies to increase the positive and reduce the negative impacts resulting from them.

³⁵ This point was well made by one commentator who, having surveyed policies across a range of countries, concluded that 'there is considerable truth in the view that a nation gets as low a child poverty rate as it is willing to pay for' (Sweeney 2002, p. 57).

2.3.2 *Balanced approach*

A recurring theme in the EU social inclusion process has been the need for a balanced approach. This involves balancing a focus on prevention and on alleviation; and balancing universal provision for all children with some targeted measures for those at great risk.

The 2007 national reports produced by the EU Network of National Experts on Social Inclusion demonstrated that most Member States seem to combine both universal and preventative policies with more targeted policies aimed at alleviating poverty and social exclusion of children. However, the balance between the two varies significantly across Member States.

At the one end of the continuum, one can identify countries where there is a very strong emphasis on universal provision aimed at all children. This is the case in Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden. Of course, this does not mean that targeted policies do not exist in these countries. Even though universalism is the main strategy, targeted and means-tested measures are sometimes used. As Halleröd pointed out in his 2007 report for the European Commission, 'Sweden has a general and comprehensive policy in order to promote child well-being. This policy is complemented with targeted measures for the most vulnerable individuals' (Halleröd 2007, p. 4). In some Member States a predominantly universal approach is focused primarily on the family rather than on children. This is particularly true in the cases of France and Luxembourg. In several Member States, such as Belgium, Denmark and Luxembourg, the tendency is to supplement universal services and measures targeting all children, with a more targeted approach addressing children at risk. Italy and the Czech Republic also seem to have a mixed or balanced approach. Even the UK, which is often seen as having an overwhelmingly targeted strategy, in fact has a strategy of 'progressive universalism' which combines universal and targeted elements.

At the other end of the spectrum, some countries such as Portugal appear to put more emphasis on alleviating poverty and social exclusion and on remedial action, compared to a more universal approach focused on the population as a whole and thus aimed at preventing poverty and social exclusion arising.

The main strengths of a predominantly universal approach, as they emerge from examining the EU process, are that it can:

- be efficient in alleviating and preventing poverty and social exclusion;
- deliver income security and quality health and social services to all;
- generate widespread political and public support for a generous system;
- avoid stigmatisation;
- reduce inequality and provide equal opportunities regardless of social background;
- place the analysis of the issue of child poverty in a broad context.

However, a number of risks can arise from over-reliance on a predominantly universal approach. These include:

- low visibility (and lack of monitoring) at national policy level of specific groups of children growing up in poverty;
- insufficient attention to identifying and attacking pockets of child poverty or groups of children at risk or in danger of exclusion;

- stretching resources too thinly with too many priorities – when everything is a priority nothing in fact is;
- insufficient targeting of specific groups of children at risk or in danger of exclusion, and excessive focus on families.

On the other hand, a targeted approach also involves a number of risk and weaknesses. Those identified include:

- an overly complicated approach;
- a lack of focus on prevention;
- fragmented measures that are not brought together under one holistic approach;
- an *ad hoc* approach which tends to emphasise immediate problems instead of the development of more coherent and general strategies for preventing and combating child poverty;
- a focus on meeting basic needs (minimum standards), not ensuring real equality;
- too narrow an approach focusing just on lack of resources.

Overall, as Frazer and Marlier pointed out in their synthesis report for the Commission:

It would seem that the most successful Member States are those that adopt a predominantly universal approach based on a strong belief in preventing problems arising and in ensuring equal opportunities for all children backed up as necessary by targeted policies to address particular extreme situations – a sort of *tailored universalism*. While there may be pressure in Member States with the most severe problems to focus on alleviation, it is nevertheless true that the structural nature of the phenomenon makes it urgent to combat poverty and social exclusion under a more preventative approach as well. (Frazer and Marlier 2007, p. 6)

Similarly, the European Commission stressed in the key messages of its 2008 *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion* that ‘the best performers target the most disadvantaged children within a broader universal approach’ (European Commission 2008b, p. 108).

2.3.3 *Positive environment*

Ultimately, preventing and tackling the poverty and exclusion of children depends on having the right policies in place and delivering them effectively. It is clear from the EU experience that a number of factors are important in ensuring that this is the case. Looking at best practice across EU Member States, in countries that have been successful in preventing child poverty arising and in those that have put effective initiatives in place to address an existing problem, six factors stand out in particular, which are discussed in more detail below. These are: a high level of political and public support for the well-being of children; a commitment to recognising and upholding the rights of children and preventing discrimination; the establishment of clear objectives, priorities and targets; a commitment to mainstream concern for children in national (and regional and local) policy-making and to ensure effective coordination of different policy areas and different levels of governance; the mobilisation and involvement of all relevant actors, including children themselves; and the availability of good quality data and analysis.

2.3.3.1 Political priority and public support

The 2007 reports of the EU Network of Independent National Experts on Social Inclusion made it clear that many Member States have been placing increasing emphasis and political leadership on the issue of child poverty. It is certainly evident that the countries with the best track record on the social inclusion and well-being of children, or who were doing most to address problems of poverty and social exclusion, were those where there was high political priority and broad public support (see Frazer and Marlier 2007, p. 43). The importance of giving political priority to the issue was stressed by Hoelscher in her 2004 report for the European Commission, in which she concluded 'first of all make children and families in general and child poverty in particular a political priority' (Hoelscher 2004, p. 110). Various ways of ensuring this can be identified across the Union:

- promoting the inclusion of children or the eradication of child poverty as a specific goal or priority in a country's programme for government or in key policy documents like National Development Plans or Partnership Agreements;
- appointing a Minister with particular responsibility for coordinating and developing policies in relation to children;
- making a political commitment to develop a strategy for children;
- making tackling child poverty one of the three or four key objectives in the social inclusion strand (NAPs/inclusion) of a Member State's National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

2.3.3.2 Commitment to children's rights and anti-discrimination

A growing theme in the EU process has been the trend to link child poverty with children's rights issues, in particular to stress that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides a good framework for developing policy in this area. To quote a report from the European children's network, Euronet, the UNCRC 'provides an extremely useful and dynamic tool for promoting and protecting children's rights, both for central government and for groups and individuals working with and for children at all levels' (Ruxton and Bennett 2004, p. 14). The 2004 *Joint Report on Social Inclusion* noted that 'some Member States emphasise the rights of children in the Framework of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child ... For instance Sweden emphasises that the UN Convention should be taken into account in all decision making and measures that affect them' (European Commission, 2004a, pp 105-106). At the same time, Hoelscher concluded in her report for the Commission that 'the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child should be used as a framework for the development, implementation and monitoring of policies at EU and Member State level. The EU should integrate the principles of the CRC into policy and legislation in order to make children visible at EU level and to better promote children's rights and well-being' (Hoelscher 2004, p. 128). Then the 2005 *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion* noted that 'several countries also put increasing emphasis on promoting the rights of the child as a basis for policy development' (European Commission 2005a, p. 10). And the 2007 Independent Experts' reports showed that there is certainly a growing awareness in many countries of the importance of children's rights (see Frazer and Marlier 2007).

The importance of adopting a children's rights perspective has been advocated strongly by several of the EU networks active in the process, such as Eurochild (see

Fernandes 2007; D'Addato 2008), Euronet and the European Social Network, and also by UNICEF. The European Parliament has also stressed 'the importance of a holistic approach to material security and well-being of children, based on the UNCRC child rights-centred perspective' (European Parliament 2009, p. 11).³⁶ In this context it is striking that the EU Commission's 2006 Communication on the rights of the child strongly links the promotion of children's rights to the EU's Social Inclusion Process and to the reduction of child poverty. It stresses that 'respecting and promoting the rights of all children should go hand in hand with the necessary action to address their basic needs' (European Commission 2006a, p. 2).

The issue of rights is closely linked to discrimination in the EU discourse, which suggests strongly that racial discrimination or discrimination on the grounds of gender, religion or belief, age, disability or sexual orientation can both cause and intensify poverty and social exclusion. Some groups of children are especially at risk of discrimination, such as those from ethnic minorities, particularly Roma children, children from migrant families, and children living in institutions.³⁷

Advocates of a rights-based approach identify four main advantages. First, it puts the needs of the child at the centre of policy-making. Addressing their needs becomes a core political obligation and not just a possible policy choice. Second, it puts the focus on addressing the specific needs of the child here and now and not just on improving the position of their families and the communities in which they live. Third, a focus on children's rights provides a useful framework for developing a comprehensive strategy to prevent and reduce child poverty (see, for instance, Halleröd 2007). This view has been reinforced by evidence from the EU's social inclusion process: countries like Sweden which have a very strong emphasis on children's rights have been very successful in preventing child poverty and social exclusion. Fourth, it puts a focus on the importance of adopting and enforcing strong legislation against discrimination as an essential element in preventing and reducing poverty and social exclusion. As the European Commission noted in its 2004 Commission Staff Working Paper analysing the memoranda on social inclusion prepared jointly with the new Member States prior to their accession, 'ensuring the transposition and effective implementation of European Community legislation on discrimination ... is an important element in strategies for promoting the integration of vulnerable groups who are often subject to discrimination' (European Commission 2004c).

2.3.3.3 *Clear objectives, priorities and targets*

A consistent message emerging from the EU's social inclusion process in relation to all aspects of tackling poverty and social exclusion is the importance of Member States setting clear objectives and priorities backed up by concrete, quantified targets. As early as the first *Joint Report on Social Inclusion* in 2002, one of the three key elements identified for developing a strategic approach was 'the establishment of clear priorities, on the basis of the common objectives adopted in Nice, including the

³⁶ In 2000 the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) produced a set of indicators for the protection, respect and promotion of the rights of the child in the EU. These cover family, environment and alternative care; protection from exploitation and violence; education, citizenship and cultural activities; and adequate standard of living (see Fundamental Rights Agency 2009).

³⁷ A CERC study on child poverty in France pointed out that of the 1 million poor children, one in four belongs to a family whose head of household originates from a country outside the EU, and that 'this excess risk of poverty also reflects events pertaining to discrimination in the job market' (Council for Employment, Income and Social Cohesion [CERC] 2004, p. 47).

setting of specific goals and targets' (European Commission 2002, p. 29).³⁸ This emphasis has been reinforced consistently since then (European Commission 2005a; European Commission 2005b; European Commission 2008b). Eurochild has stressed the need for a more systematic and analytical approach in many Member States in order to ensure that ambitious and realistic targets are set for the reduction of poverty in each country (Eurochild 2009a).

In his report for UNICEF Frazer (2006) identified four main types of objectives that might be set in relation to child poverty: overall or general objectives, objectives relating to a specific policy domain, objectives relating to the most vulnerable groups, and process objectives. A strategic approach would be likely to involve a combination of objectives at the last three levels being related to achievement of the overall objective. The four types of objectives for tackling and preventing child poverty and social exclusion can be summarised as follows.

An **overall** objective might be to:

- make a significant reduction in the number of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion by an agreed deadline; or
- significantly reduce the proportion of children experiencing basic deprivation (or experiencing persistent poverty) by an agreed deadline.

Objectives in relation to **specific policy domains** could cover things such as:

- ensuring that all children have an adequate minimum level of income;
- reducing the number of children living in jobless households;
- ensuring that all children stay in education until age 16 or reducing the number of children dropping out of school;
- increasing the healthy life expectancy at birth;
- increasing access to basic health and social services;
- reducing the number of children living in substandard accommodation;
- ensuring that all children have access to cultural, sporting and recreational activities.

Objectives in relation to particularly **vulnerable groups** of children could cover things such as:

- improving the position of Roma children, children from ethnic minorities, children of migrants, children with disabilities or children from lone parent families to ensure that they achieve the same average standard of living and access to services as all children in the country;
- making a decisive reduction in the number of homeless or street children;
- reducing the number of children living in institutions;
- ensuring that all unaccompanied children awarded a legal status within that country have access to a systematic programme of integration.

Process objectives could include areas such as:

- ensuring that children experiencing poverty, their families and the organisations that work with them are involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of the national strategy;

³⁸ The other two key elements identified were a high-quality analysis of key risks and challenges and a multidimensional approach to policy development.

- developing arrangements to ensure that children living in poverty have a voice in matters which affect them and that their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity;
- ensuring that children have the information necessary to access essential services and rights;
- strengthening the institutional arrangements for mainstreaming and coordinating efforts to eliminate child poverty across all areas and levels of government;
- developing effective local networks or partnerships of government agencies, social partners and NGOs to coordinate the delivery of policies and programmes to promote the inclusion of children;
- identifying and addressing gaps in data and analysis on child poverty and social exclusion;
- developing clear procedures for monitoring and reporting on progress on child poverty.

The application of these different types of objectives by Member States was further elaborated by Frazer and Marlier in their analysis of the reports by the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion (Frazer and Marlier 2007).

The European Commission provided a useful paper on setting targets in its guidance notes for the 2006–2008 and 2008–2010 National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (NRSSPSI).³⁹ And Marlier et al. (2007) included an extensive discussion on target-setting in the EU social inclusion process in their report ‘Taking Forward the Social Inclusion Process’ for the Luxembourg Presidency Conference in 2005.

The importance of setting targets has been increasingly stressed in the EU process because they provide: a significant political statement of purpose and ambition in terms of eradicating poverty and social exclusion, which can lead to increased policy effort; a goal against which to measure progress and thus a means of creating a dynamic process characterised by openness and accountability; a tool for promoting awareness of the process and thus for encouraging and mobilising all actors in support of it; a focal point around which to concentrate the efforts of policy makers and practitioners. However, in spite of this, the evidence from the 2007 national reports of national independent experts on social inclusion is that only a few countries have established quantified targets for reducing levels of poverty and social exclusion among children.⁴⁰ A recurring criticism to date in the EU’s process is that objectives are often too general and aspirational and lack concrete and realistic targets against which progress can be measured.

This issue was addressed by the SPC Task-Force on child poverty and well-being, which suggested in its 2008 report on current status that ‘Member States who have not done so yet should consider establishing elaborated and quantified objectives for the social inclusion and well-being of children’ (Social Protection Committee 2008a, p. 126). In the light of this the SPC, and therefore all Member States, adopted the recommendation that:

³⁹ See, for instance, Appendix 2 on Setting Targets in the guidelines for preparing the 2006–2008 NRSSPSI (Social Protection Committee 2006a).

⁴⁰ See Frazer and Marlier (2007) for a summary of targets set by Member States.

National overall quantified objectives for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion need to be based on a diagnosis of the causes of poverty and social exclusion in each country and have to be supplemented by specific objectives relating to the key factors identified by the diagnosis (e.g. jobless households, in-work poverty, social benefits...). In making their diagnosis, Member States should use the analysis and recommendations of the report prepared by the EU Task-Force on 'Child poverty and child well-being' as part of their overall framework. (Social Protection Committee 2008, p. 134).

The July 2008 Commission Communication on strengthening the Social OMC (European Commission 2008c) argued that setting targets would introduce a new dynamism in the EU social inclusion process as a whole and that they could be set for the reduction of poverty in general 'as well as for specific forms of poverty, such as child poverty'. The communication argues that at national level

the introduction of these quantified targets, supported by the commonly agreed indicators, based on robust analytical tools, will help Member States to sustain commitment and work more concretely towards the achievement of common objectives. In order to take account of their diversity, particular national context and different points of departure, Member States could define national targets. (European Commission 2008c, p. 5).

2.3.3.4 Policy mainstreaming and coordination

The emphasis on a multidimensional approach to child poverty requires that a broad range of policy areas address this issue (see the discussion on multidimensionality in section 2.3.1 of this report). The EU experience suggests that this is much more likely to be the case if the issue of promoting the social inclusion of children is prioritised and mainstreamed in national policy making. The importance attached to 'mainstreaming' in the EU social inclusion process has been highlighted by the transnational project Mainstreaming Social Inclusion, which was funded under the Commission's Community action programme. The final report of this project contains a useful definition of mainstreaming:

Mainstreaming social inclusion is the integration of poverty and social inclusion objectives, including an equality perspective, into all areas and levels of policy-making and that is promoted through the participation of public bodies, social partners, NGOs and other relevant actors. (O'Kelly and Litewska 2006, p. 10)

In relation to children's issues, Eurochild suggested that mainstreaming means: 'a children's rights perspective is used to inform policy design and implementation in relevant policy areas; policy design and implementation contribute to furthering the objective of promoting children's rights' (Eurochild 2006, p. 4). Similarly, in 2008 the SPC's Task-Force report concluded:

A children mainstreaming approach, i.e. integrating a concern with the well-being and social inclusion of children into all relevant areas of policy-making, therefore appears as the most successful way to adequately respond to the EU political commitment to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. (Social Protection Committee, 2008a)⁴¹

⁴¹ For a discussion on children mainstreaming, see Marlier et al. (2007); for a more general discussion on mainstreaming, see O'Kelly and Litewska (2006).

Frazer (2006) stressed that mainstreaming strategies are more likely to be effective if there are formal arrangements for coordinating the efforts of government ministries. If such mechanisms do not exist policies are likely to become very fragmented, disparate and less efficient; potentially reinforcing synergies between policy areas may be lost. Examples of such coordinating mechanisms identified across the EU included:

- requiring all Ministries to include promoting social inclusion in general or the social inclusion of children in particular into the objectives of their ministry;
- appointing an official in each ministry who is responsible for social inclusion issues;
- requiring all policies to be proofed before they are adopted for their potential impact on the social inclusion of children and/or on children generally and also monitoring their impact subsequently;
- creating a committee of the cabinet to ensure political coordination;
- creating a high-level committee of senior officials to regularly review progress and to link a strategy on child poverty or social inclusion with other key national strategies and programmes;
- making child poverty a key priority in the annual budgetary process;
- creating a committee or working group of officials from all ministries to meet regularly to prepare a strategic approach, to oversee its implementation and to ensure that it is monitored and evaluated. In some countries this may also include representatives from regional and local government, social partners, NGOs and experts. (Frazer 2006, p. 12)

Frazer and Marlier (2007) assessed the extent of children mainstreaming across the EU. They concluded that mainstreaming of the social inclusion of children is increasing across the EU but noted that in a significant number of countries there was little evidence of a systematic or coordinated approach. On a positive note they commented:

In the countries where long-term inclusive policies favouring all children are the norm, such as Finland and Sweden, it is fair to say that there is already effective mainstreaming. Many of the countries that have over the past decade or more recently prioritised child poverty and social exclusion are in the process of mainstreaming the issue and some like Ireland and the UK have developed quite elaborate arrangements. (Frazer and Marlier 2007, pp 47-48)

Progress is also evident in Belgium, Cyprus and Luxembourg in this regard. However, it is clear that in countries where such arrangements for mainstreaming do not exist then there is a danger that a very low priority may be given to considering the impact of policies on children in many important policy areas.

2.3.3.5 Mobilisation and involvement of all actors

A key learning point from the EU process is that efforts to promote the social inclusion of children are greatly strengthened when effective arrangements are in place for involving all actors, particularly NGOs and social partners alongside national, regional and local authorities, in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of national strategies. Member States' NAPs/inclusion and other documents demonstrate an increased involvement of NGOs and, to a lesser extent, social partners in the development of policies to promote the social inclusion of children in many countries. In Belgium, for example, civil society organisations are

represented in the policy-making that addresses children's social inclusion. They participate in the activities of the National Commission for Children's Rights, where they have consultative status. Civil society organisations participate in the provision of specific services to children at risk, such as childcare, education, healthcare and counselling. They co-organise the conference on children's rights with the Flemish government, the French Community, the Flemish Children's Rights Coalition and its Francophone counterpart CODE – Coordination des ONG pour les Droits de l'Enfant ('Coordination of the NGOs for children's rights').

The arguments that emerge from the EU process for mobilising and involving a wide range of actors are: first, that it leads to better and more informed policy-making; second, that it mobilises a broader range of resources and actors who can contribute to implementing policies; third, that it leads to better monitoring of policies. The involvement of children and other actors defending children's needs, such as NGOs, in the policy-making process is important in order to 'reflect [children's] needs appropriately and to stimulate bottom-up benchmarking processes which could help to enhance political commitment at all levels of governance (local, regional, national and international) to the agenda of child poverty and child well-being' (Frazer and Marlier 2007, p. 10).

Arrangements for involving those directly experiencing poverty and social exclusion are crucial. The 2006 European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, held under the auspices of the Luxembourg Presidency of the EU, pointed out that there are two major arguments for their involvement:

First, it is because people living in poverty have a right to be heard and to have their views valued. [...] Secondly, it is because people who live in poverty are the experts on their lives. Thus their participation is the only way to ensure effective policies to prevent and eradicate poverty and social exclusion. (European Anti-Poverty Network 2006, p. 17; see also European Anti-Poverty Network 2009 for a more detailed discussion on the importance of participation.)

In the case of child poverty this means not only involving and listening to the parents but also to the children themselves. While the participation of children in the EU social inclusion process has been somewhat limited to date, the need to find ways of including them has increasingly been stressed by organisations active in the process. For instance, a Euronet study funded under the EU Preparatory Measures on Social Inclusion concluded that 'children should be involved in decision-making processes on issues which affect their lives; and participation exercises which involve children should make special efforts to reach out to those who are poor and excluded' (Ruxton and Bennett 2002, p. 8). Subsequent reports by various agencies stressed the need to consult children and families – not just tokenistically – when designing services aimed at combating poverty (Home Start International 2002; Williams 2003; European Social Network 2005; UK EU Presidency 2005). However, in spite of this emphasis on involving children experiencing poverty and their families, there is very limited evidence of improvements in this regard in Member States' policy processes.

2.3.3.6 Good research and data

Finally, the EU process has shown that access to high-quality, timely data and analysis is fundamental to a positive environment for tackling child poverty. Careful analysis and understanding of the issue of child poverty and exclusion is essential for setting clear objectives, establishing quantified outcome targets and monitoring progress. This means diagnosing the cause of poverty and social exclusion in each

country, identifying appropriate indicators, including non-monetary indicators of well-being, researching the persistence and duration of child poverty, setting specific objectives, and ensuring that the necessary data are collected on children in general and those at high risk of poverty in particular (see Cocker 2003; UK EU Presidency 2005; Frazer and Marlier 2007; Marlier et al. 2007; Social Protection Committee 2008a, Eurochild 2008).

The need for a broad range of data analysis was stressed in the conclusions and recommendations of the SPC Task-Force in 2008, which recommended that Member States use a combination of:

- all relevant indicators that have already been agreed upon at EU level (age breakdowns of poverty risk EU indicators, children living in jobless households and indicators in the area of education);
- the yet-to-be developed indicators in the areas of material deprivation, housing and child well-being, as identified by the 2006 SPC report on indicators;
- relevant child well-being indicators available at country level. (Social Protection Committee 2008a, p. 135)

While in the first instance the data sources on children may not be comprehensive, most countries already have a considerable range of data pertinent to children (see Bradshaw et al. 2007). A key initial task in developing an overall strategy on child poverty can be to assess the existing data sources and to include a research and data strategy as part of the overall strategy.

Useful discussions on indicators to measure child poverty can be found in Marlier and Atkinson's report for the Luxembourg Presidency (Marlier et al. 2007), Hoelscher's report for the Commission (Hoelscher 2004) and work that has been done by Bradshaw, Hoelscher and Richardson on *An Index of Child Well-Being in the European Union*, which has helped to inform much of UNICEF's recent work in this area (UNICEF 2007).

The issue of indicators and data was a key challenge for the Task-Force on child poverty and child well-being established by the SPC in 2007 and its report contains an extensive discussion and a series of valuable recommendations. The report highlights the importance of Member States developing effective data sources on child poverty. While noting that EU-SILC and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are important sources of data, their report also draws attention to the importance of using administrative and registers sources and specific data sources on children in vulnerable situations.⁴² The report draws particular attention to the value of longitudinal surveys implemented at national level for measuring long-term impacts of events experienced by youth, and it is vital for analysing the inter-generational transmission of poverty. It also notes the value of direct interviews of children.

The TARKI report on child poverty and child well-being in the EU suggested that 'a balanced and comprehensive picture can only be gained through a dedicated and separate child indicators portfolio, with indicators reflecting all the most relevant

⁴² The report also draws attention to other international data sources that can be useful to countries analysing their situation, such as the survey on Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (HBSC) by the World Health Organisation, the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD) by the Council of Europe, the Gender and Generations Surveys by the United Nations Economic Commissions for Europe, and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) by the OECD.

dimensions and covering all relevant child ages' (TARKI 2010, p. 9 of summary). It also stressed that datasets like EU-SILC are 'not particularly well suited for issues such as the situation of children of migrants and children of minority ethnic groups (like the Roma, in particular), [nor for] exploring the situation of those categories of children who do not generally show up in national/international surveys – e.g. children in institutions; victims of violence, crime and trafficking; children affected by addiction problems etc.' (TARKI 2010, p. 22).

2.3.4 *Comprehensive policy framework*

It is evident from the EU experience that the countries most effective in preventing high levels of child poverty have developed comprehensive and integrated policy frameworks that address the multidimensional nature of children's needs (see 2.3.1 above). This was emphasised by the SPC Task-Force which concluded:

Member States who are most successful at preventing child poverty and social exclusion are those who have developed policy frameworks which combine increasing access to adequately paid work for parents with ensuring effective income support for all families with children and increasing access to key enabling services (child care, education, housing, health and social services, etc.). (Social Protection Committee 2008a, p. 127)⁴³

Likewise, TARKI (2010) concluded that improving the present well-being of children and their future prospects calls for multidimensional policy combinations including income support, promoting labour market participation of parents, facilitating access to enabling services and creating opportunities to participate in social, cultural, recreational and sporting activities.

The need for a multidimensional approach is also evident when one looks at particular groups of children living in poverty. For instance, FEANTSA's (2007) study on child homelessness in Europe identified the broad range of needs that have to be addressed to break the cycle of homelessness – housing, social, health, financial and educational.

This emphasis on a comprehensive approach was reinforced by the 2007 reports of the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion. These identified four core groups of policies which seem necessary to promote the social inclusion of children, and which are detailed below. Group 1 involves developing employment, tax and social protection policies to ensure adequate income. Group 2 involves improving access to services (especially childcare, education, health and housing). Group 3 involves developing social services and child protection services which protect the rights of children in vulnerable situations. Group 4, a less developed group, involves policies to promote the involvement of children in social, recreational, sporting and cultural activities. These reports also identified two themes which cut across most policy areas: the importance of early intervention and ensuring that children have a good start to their lives; and the need to improve delivery of policies at regional and local levels (see Frazer and Marlier 2007, p. 8).

⁴³ The importance of a balanced policy mix covering a broad range of areas including access to work, income support and access to services is also developed in Hoelscher (2004) and European Commission (2004a).

2.3.4.1 Group 1 – Increasing income

Ensuring that children grow up in homes with an adequate level of income is recognised as fundamental for their well-being and for their participation in a broad range of activities that ensure their personal development. The evidence from the EU process is that the most effective approaches to ensuring an adequate income involve a combination of policies which increase parents' access to work and provide generous income support for children and parents. These are often also supplemented, to a greater or lesser extent, by subsidising the cost of key services (see Social Protection Committee 2008a). Increasing access of parents to employment is vital but not sufficient. It is clear from the reports of the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion that there will always be a substantial proportion of poor children whose parents cannot work; out-of-work benefits therefore also play an important role (see also Frazer and Marlier 2007).

The Member States who are most successful in preventing and reducing child poverty are those with policies which maximise the opportunities of parents to earn a decent income from work. In terms of increasing income from work, two issues emerge as particularly important. The first is increasing access to employment, particularly for parents of children in jobless and low work intensity households. The second is about ensuring that income from work is sufficient, in other words about making work pay.

Increasing access to decently paid work

On examining Member States' policies in the NAPs/inclusion and other documents four main priorities can be identified for effective policies in this area. These are: developing a comprehensive approach, reconciling work and family life, promoting flexible working, implementing active inclusion measures.

- *Developing a comprehensive approach*

It is clear that there is no one policy approach that works. There is a need for a comprehensive and well-developed policy package which aims at making work accessible through a broad range of policies which meet the differing needs of different families. In particular it is important to have a mix of policies which allow for effective family–work combinations and aim to increase employment for both parents. Special attention needs to be given to increasing and supporting the participation of mothers in paid work.

- *Reconciling work and family life*

Policies that support efforts to reconcile work and family life are seen as essential to increase the participation of parents, and especially of women, in work. In this regard equality legislation is a key element. Childcare also emerges as a vital requirement. A key issue here is its accessibility and affordability. Where childcare is expensive and the infrastructure is underdeveloped, the chances of reconciling work and family life or taking up work are curtailed.

- *Promoting flexible working*

Closely linked to reconciliation of work and family life are policy measures to promote flexible working. Across the EU a wide range of measures have been identified in this regard, including the granting of extended leave periods (beyond the legal right); specific measures to ensure that men are available to exercise their rights and responsibilities towards the family; the granting of interruption periods within the professional career; flexibility in the management of working time, according to family or personal needs; giving mothers and fathers in specific enterprises the right to work

part-time until their child enters primary school; introducing parental leave; increasing the possibility of alternating periods of work and non-work; an allowance for parents at home to compensate for the negative effects on pensions from periods of non-work. Sweden is interesting, in that it gives clear legal rights as opposed to voluntary possibilities for flexible working.

- *Implementing active inclusion measures*

In the EU's social inclusion process, increasing emphasis has been placed on active inclusion.⁴⁴ The relevance of active inclusion in addressing child poverty is highlighted in the 2008 *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*:

[T]he implementation of balanced, comprehensive active inclusion strategies is an indirect but major element in promoting well-being of children and young people. This involves a combination of quality job opportunities allowing parents to integrate and progress in the labour market, adequate and well-designed income support and the provision of necessary services for children and their families. (European Commission 2008b, p. 108)

The importance of ensuring that active inclusion measures target the parents of children at high risk of poverty, such as lone parents and parents in jobless households, is reinforced in the reports of many of the EU's Network of Independent experts and in documents from Member States. For instance, in the Netherlands efforts are made at local level to increase the labour market participation of people living in poverty, involving municipalities and NGOs, such as the Centres for Work and Income. In Belgium measures have been developed for the reintegration of jobless parents who receive training while employed in a specific project, thus helping to increase their chances of sustainable employment in the future.

Making work pay

Given the evidence that 'in-work' poverty affects many families with children, an important aspect of increasing income from work is ensuring that work actually pays sufficiently to lift families out of poverty. The question of making work pay is often linked to the quality of work, and this raises the need to combat precarious forms of labour such as illegal and clandestine work, insecure part-time work and temporary jobs. There is considerable concern among experts that several Member States put emphasis on 'making work pay' so as to increase the take-up of employment without giving enough attention to assuring an adequate income from work. As the Belgian experts in the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion point out:

All too often, 'making work pay' has been the key argument to keep benefits down (or indeed, cut them back) and to activate job seekers into precarious jobs. [...] The rise of 'working poverty' and the Americanisation of European labour markets (including, to some extent, the Belgian labour market) must be largely attributed to this approach. (Nicaiese and Morissens 2007, p. 4)

Making work pay to ensure adequate income from work for families with children is a complex subject requiring a range of interrelated actions. Looking at the policies outlined by Member States in European Commission policy documents on social inclusion and employment (see Frazer and Marlier 2008), seven elements stand out:

⁴⁴ See, for instance, the European Commission's October 2007 Communication on active inclusion (European Commission 2007b).

- ensuring adequate wage levels particularly through setting a relatively high minimum wage;
- recognising that the transition from unemployment to work is a critical moment and allowing parents to retain social benefits for a period when moving into work to ensure that there is a real increase in income;
- recognising the additional costs of bringing up children and thus providing benefits to parents on a low income who are in work;
- introducing measures to reduce employment traps that act as a disincentive or barrier to taking up employment, such as reducing personal taxes, ensuring that the difference between wages and unemployment benefits increases relatively more for small-income earners, and by diminishing childcare costs.
- prioritising low-income and large families in the tax system by using it to foster redistribution in favour of families with children and to reduce the burden of tax on the lower paid;
- reducing costs associated with employment, especially by reducing the costs of childcare but also in other areas such as affordable public transport;
- tackling the problem of inadequate income from insecure employment, part-time work and fixed contracts by reducing the prevalence of fixed-term contracts and precarious jobs.

Increasing child and family income support

Member States' efforts to increase income for children and families through tax and income support measures encompass different objectives. Frazer and Marlier (2007) identified four objectives that stand out in particular. First there is the aim of evening out costs to parents with children compared to adults without children. Second, and related to the first, there is the wish to address the decline in fertility rates and to encourage more families to have children. Third, there is the aim to support more parents, and particularly women, to enter employment. Fourth, there is the objective of ensuring an adequate income for families with children where one or both parents cannot work. Within these four objectives there are a couple of recurring themes: how best to balance universal and targeted benefits for children and how to adjust benefit payments to take account of the additional costs of older children or the number of children in a family.

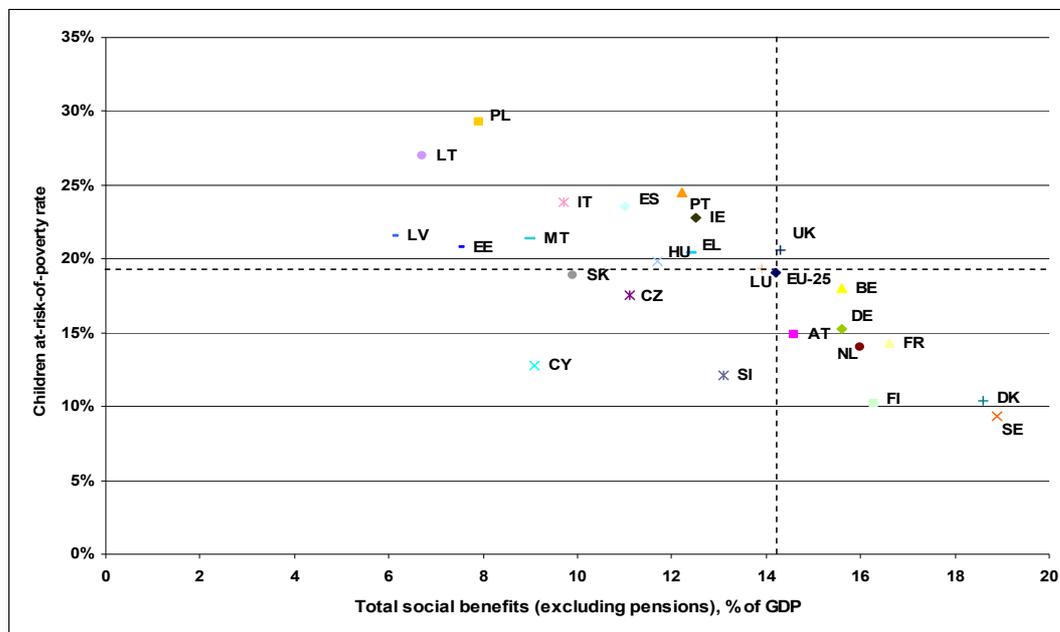
As Hoelscher (2004, p. 115) points out, benefits, especially child-related benefits, should, as far as possible, 'be universal on a generous level. Targeted benefits have to be designed carefully in order to actually reach the target group and they have to be phased out gradually with rising income to ensure that employment really increases a family's financial resources.'

The importance of social transfers in reducing child poverty in the EU has been highlighted by the Social Protection Committee (see Social Protection Committee 2008a). On average in the EU, social transfers other than pensions reduce the risk of poverty for children by 44%, which is a higher impact than for the overall population (38%).⁴⁵ However, there is a very wide variation across countries. In Sweden, Finland and Denmark social transfers (other than pensions) reduce the risk of poverty for children by more than 60%, whereas in Bulgaria, Greece and Spain this reduction is less than 20%. Having examined the differing impacts in different

⁴⁵ For figures for Ireland in EU comparison, see Part 1 of this report.

countries the report concludes that ‘the countries with the lowest child poverty rates are clearly those who spend most on social benefits (excluding pensions), with the notable exception of Cyprus and – to a lesser extent – Slovenia’ (Social Protection Committee 2008a, p. 38). This point is illustrated by Figure 2.1 below from the report.

Figure 2.1: Social benefits in % of GDP vs. child poverty rates, EU-25, 2004



Source: SILC (2005) – income year 2004 (income year 2005 for IE and UK).

On average across the EU (averages are represented by dotted lines), family benefits represent approximately half of cash social transfers to families with children. They include benefits to support income during maternity leave, birth/adoption grants, parental leave benefits, family or child allowances to partly offset the costs of raising a child and other cash benefits for families with specific needs (handicapped children, lone parents, foster families, etc.). Family benefits may vary depending on the age and number of children (see European Commission 2008a).

2.3.4.2 Group 2 – Increasing access to services

Across the European Union access to basic services emerges as a key element in the development of policies to promote the social inclusion of children. This is seen as particularly important in order to combat the negative consequences of poverty on the child’s development and to empower children.

Access to decent housing and a safe environment

The importance of children being brought up in decent housing with good basic services and in a safe environment is widely recognised as being essential for their long-term development. Hoelscher (2004) stresses that the housing needs of children should be taken into account explicitly in the allocation of social housing and in the design of new housing estates. Apart from ensuring decent housing conditions, she emphasises that ‘overcrowding should be prevented to ensure that children have enough room to play, to do their homework, to invite friends and to find some privacy. Neighbourhoods need to be safe and free from drugs and crime and have to offer safe space for playing or just spending time’ (Hoelscher 2004, p. 120).

It is clear that some children face very particular risks in relation to poor housing. For instance, a study on housing for migrants and ethnic minorities, funded under the European Commission's Community action programme, noted that policies to address the housing needs of the Roma need to be nuanced to reflect a number of different situations, e.g. lack of basic infrastructure and poor housing quality in rural areas, segregation in ghettos in urban areas, and problems of illegal occupancy compounding poor housing quality in shanty towns. More generally the report highlighted the need to address the lack of affordable rented housing and discrimination issues to ensure the integration of migrants and ethnic minorities (Edgar 2005).

Interestingly, a study on poverty and social exclusion among lone-parent families in 13 EU countries showed that although lone-parent families have easier access to public and free-rent housing in almost all countries studied, in most cases these housing policies only offset a small part of the economic disadvantage of lone parents. However, the study noted that in Ireland and the UK public housing policies have had some significant impact on lone parents' conditions (see Trifiletti et al. 2007).

In the course of the EU social inclusion process, Member States have highlighted a number of strategies to improve the housing situation of families with children, including the following:

- eradicating slum areas;
- subsidising more social housing;
- promoting more efficient use of land;
- developing measures to prevent the eviction of children from their homes;
- reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation;
- providing temporary shelters for families with children who have lost their homes.

Child homelessness in the EU is an aspect of extreme poverty and social exclusion. FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with Homeless, and one of the networks funded under the EU Social Inclusion Process, produced an important report on this topic in 2007 (FEANTSA 2007). This highlights two main trends. First there are children in homeless families (children in temporary accommodation, children in domestic violence refuges, children in families threatened with eviction, children living in very poor housing conditions). Secondly there are unaccompanied homeless adolescents (chronically homeless children, runaway youths, unaccompanied asylum seekers, children leaving care institutions). The report stresses that child homelessness is a complex problem and cannot be tackled in isolation from poverty and homelessness experienced by adults. Considerable emphasis is put on a prevention ethos and the need to catch problems as early as possible. The importance of structural policies linked to housing, social welfare, education and health that serve to prevent crisis situations and to detect imminent crisis situations is stressed. At the same time it is recognised that some children cannot benefit from these mainstream measures and that specialised policies are also needed that target children (and their families) who are already living in difficult situations. Thus, as well as better research, measurement and monitoring of the issue, the report recommends: the development of national evidence-based homelessness prevention strategies to tackle homelessness experienced by adults and children which focus not only on 'at risk' groups (and hence individual deficits), but also on the broader, community-wide contexts in which

they occur; the inclusion of the needs of children in all housing needs assessments; and mainstreaming homelessness in all national policies.

Access to education and training

Given the strong correlation between educational disadvantage and poverty and social exclusion, it is not surprising that improving access to education emerges as a key issue in many Member States' approaches to tackling child poverty. This is seen as particularly important to combat the negative consequences of poverty on the child's development, to empower children and to break the intergenerational inheritance of poverty and social exclusion. Four themes emerge particularly strongly from the social inclusion process (see Frazer and Marlier 2007): the importance of early childhood education and development; the need to develop strategies to tackle school drop-outs and educational disadvantage; the importance of integrating minorities (i.e. ethnic minorities, migrants, children with a disability) in the school system; and reducing costs and financial barriers to participating in education.

- *Early childhood education and development*

The importance of early educational opportunities as key to the future educational success of children, especially children from disadvantaged backgrounds, is a strong theme in several reports (see, for example, European Commission 2005b). The importance of early educational opportunities is also highlighted by many of the Independent Experts on Social Inclusion in their 2007 reports for the European Commission.⁴⁶

The role of pre-schooling is strongly emphasised by Member States:

There is a clear recognition that it can play a vital role in compensating for economic disadvantage and effectively paving the way for a child's future successful development. Some make reference to the rich evidence that the return to society on investing in pre-school education is particularly high. (European Commission 2008a, p. 24)

The range of approaches adopted by Member States to increase access to early childhood education includes the following:

- setting quantitative targets to increase the number of places available and the number of teachers in pre-school education;
- increasing access in urban and rural disadvantaged areas and focusing resources on the most deprived schools where children are failing;
- developing integrated school systems encompassing kindergarten, primary and junior secondary school systems in order to provide additional support to children with special needs and to increase access for immigrant children;
- providing language teaching in kindergarten in areas with high immigrant populations;
- adapting universal pre-school provision to screen for children at risk who need extra help and support in learning;
- providing comprehensive support and learning to pupils with a disability, illness, delayed development or other disadvantages in order to promote equal opportunities for these children;

⁴⁶ The reports of the EU Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/expert_reports_en.htm#2007

- developing individual learning plans for children.
- *Tackling school drop-outs and countering educational disadvantage*
In many Member States there is a concern that failure in school, and especially dropping out early, leads to unemployment or to becoming and remaining low-skilled workers. It is widely recognised that the problem is a complex one requiring a comprehensive approach and also that there is a need to pay more attention to problems arising during the transfer from primary to secondary school. A number of approaches are evident in Member States. These include:

- developing an integrated approach tailored to different needs;
- expanding all day schools;
- developing a whole child rather than just a school-based approach;
- developing integrated multi-level responses involving home, child, school, adult education, community and relevant services;
- creating mechanisms to combine the efforts of schools, other agencies such as social services, employment services and also parents to work together on the issue;
- identifying early on if problems outside the classroom are leading to difficulties and ensuring that the necessary help can be provided;
- providing support and counselling to parents;
- making changes to the curriculum to adapt it better to pupils' skills;
- providing courses fostering self-confidence and intercultural respect;
- providing more training for teachers on how to handle potential drop-outs;
- developing pathways for re-entry and pathways for progression including special second chance programmes for children who have dropped out;
- developing structures outside school to help young people who have dropped out to access continuing education and training opportunities and perhaps to combine school and work.

Of course, the issue of education is not only an issue in relation to children. Very often the parents of poor children have a very low level of educational attainment, and supporting their life-long learning can indirectly benefit their children. Indeed there often seems to be a correlation between child poverty and the educational level of mothers (see for instance Social Protection Committee 2008a p. 58; TARKI 2010, p. 157).

- *Integrating minorities*
There is quite widespread recognition of the need to give specific attention to the education of groups at high risk, particularly ethnic minorities, migrant children and children with a disability, and to ensure their full integration into the 'mainstream' school system. In several Member States this has meant moving away from separate schools, eliminating segregated classrooms and providing a common educational space for children with different socioeconomic backgrounds or learning abilities.

In the EU Social Inclusion Process, a number of countries have given high priority to countering the racial segregation of Roma children in 'special' schools and ensuring their integration in mainstream schools. Initiatives that can be identified across Member States include the creation of the position of teacher's assistant and development of special educational plans and teaching materials in order to increase participation. A project on the social inclusion of Roma populations funded under the

Commission's Preparatory Measures stressed that illiteracy and unemployment were two of the main problems facing Roma/Traveller children and young people. Their report recommended a holistic approach to education and training, direct liaison with parents, providing professional training to educators (including on interculturalism and culturally appropriate teaching methods and processes), and raising awareness of Roma/Traveller culture and history among educators and the communities themselves (Save the Children Greece 2000).

Another aspect that is becoming increasingly evident is the need to address the educational difficulties facing children whose mother tongue is not the primary language of their host country. A number of different initiatives can be identified. For instance:

- providing tutorials in kindergarten and arranging intermediate classes in primary school for pupils with problems with the country's native language;
- involving 'cultural mediators' who can enhance the sense of belonging and encourage children to stay at school;
- ensuring that there is equality of access for boys and girls.

- *Reducing costs and financial barriers*

Several Member States recognise that there are costs and financial barriers to poor children participating fully in the education system. Steps taken to encourage participation through assistance with related costs include:

- providing means-tested support for educational expenses for all levels of education;
- providing a universal back-to-school grant;
- providing means-tested assistance with school-related costs.

Access to health services

Given that children born into low-income families are more likely to experience unhealthy lifestyles and have poorer access to health services, it is not surprising that policies to overcome health inequalities and increase access to healthcare are seen as important within the EU social inclusion process (see European Commission 2006, p. 27).

This is an issue also highlighted by the Independent Social Inclusion Experts in their 2007 reports for the Commission (see Frazer and Marlier 2007). They identified the main approaches adopted by Member States to improve access to health services, promoting prevention and controlling costs as well as giving special attention to children from ethnic minorities and children with disabilities.

Several Member States have identified ways to increase access to health services for children and their families. These include:

- antenatal services for vulnerable pregnant mothers;
- preventive care such as healthcare for young children;
- regular check-ups for children and free maternity and child clinics;
- developing health centres targeted at young children and their mothers;
- promoting health at schools, for example by having health staff in schools who offer vaccinations, provide dental care, give advice on mental health,

- providing more and better information on services available;
- training staff to work in a multicultural environment and taking special initiatives to assist immigrants and ethnic minorities in accessing health services.

The European Commission (2008a) has highlighted that universal health insurance has a strong influence on access to healthcare and noted that many countries, including those with a well-developed health service, are focusing on how to tackle those not covered by health insurance, such as recipients of social assistance and migrants.

Access to transport

The importance of access to affordable transport is highlighted several times in the Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, normally in the context of guaranteeing equal access to and investing in high-quality public services. Access to affordable transport is often 'critical to accessing jobs for people who are unemployed, to enable vulnerable people to access basic services and to facilitate participation in social and cultural life' (European Commission 2005a, p. 67). Two projects supported by the Commission, MATISSE and ECLIPSE, have particularly demonstrated the impact that transport policies can have on causing and combating social exclusion, and raised awareness of the important links between transport policy and social policy achievement. They have also provided practical guidance to transport planners on how to appraise the problems and design appropriate strategies to improve accessibility, in tandem with social policy agencies.⁴⁷

The importance of transport emerges most often in relation to increasing access to employment. It is seen as a key factor in determining the possibility of people moving from unemployment to employment, in terms of costs, frequency and reliability. This becomes especially important in the context of child poverty, as access to affordable and efficient transport is a key consideration both in making work economically worthwhile for parents and in allowing flexible working and thus the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities. However, access to affordable transport is also seen as important in terms of enabling families with children to access essential services, enabling children to take part in social, sporting and cultural activities, and overcoming social isolation, especially in remote rural areas. A particular issue is also the availability of suitably adapted transport to enable children with disabilities to access services and social activities.

2.3.4.3 Group 3 – Ensuring effective social services and child protection

The third group of policies emphasises the importance of effective child protection systems and social services to protect children who are vulnerable as a result of adverse parenting practices such as maltreatment, neglect, sexual abuse, drugs and alcohol, mental health problems.

⁴⁷ More information on the MATISSE (Methodology for Assessment of Transport ImpactS of Social Exclusion) project can be found at <http://www.matisse-eu.com/deliverables.html> and on the ECLIPSE (European Cooperation and Learning to Implement Transport Solutions to combat Exclusion) project at <http://www.eclipse-eu.net/>

Frazer and Marlier (2007) noted the importance given in many Member States to developing social services so as to ensure high levels of social protection for vulnerable children, particularly at local level, and they cited several interesting examples (Frazer and Marlier 2007, pp 69-70).

An important theme in the European process is the need to move away from institutionalised provision and focus more on families and care in the community. This is especially, but not exclusively, evident in several of the newer central and eastern European Member States. Two of the transnational exchange projects supported by the Commission (the ATD Fourth World and the Families Under Stress projects) emphasise that the aim should normally be to try and support families and keep children in their family setting. However, sometimes the best interests of a child make this impossible. In such situations it is important to have good systems for taking children into care. There is a clear recognition that, wherever possible, children should be placed with foster families rather than in institutions.

The key role played by social services in working for children's welfare and well-being, empowering them, their families and carers to overcome poverty and marginalisation, is well presented by the European Social Network (ESN). Funded by the European Commission under the Social Inclusion Process, ESN is one of the main independent European networks in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The network members are key providers of vital social services and work closely with health, employment and education services, as well as with voluntary and private providers. The European Social Network (2007) has summarised the role of social services as follows:

- Social services provide care and protection to the most vulnerable and marginalised children in society. They most often work with children in care or leaving care, with victims of abuse, with those who are 'hardest to place' and increasingly with unaccompanied children seeking asylum.
- Social services employ early intervention and prevention methods with parents-to-be and with families whose lives are complicated by drug abuse, alcoholism or indebtedness. There are services which help to divert from criminal activity and to provide alternative housing and care.
- Social services work across public agencies and service providers (health, schools, police, psychosocial support) to ensure that children with potential problems are identified early and get the full range of support they need.
- Social services manage fostering and adoption services, residential daycare and sheltered accommodation, and provide associated support services for vulnerable children and parents, including victims of abuse and children whose parents have an alcohol problem.
- Social services work with children with disabilities and learning difficulties to improve their life chances. They make assessments of need and arrange the provision of specialist support in the home or in school. They support their parents and carers through psychosocial advice and respite care. Social services work with other local and regional authorities, e.g. economic development and investment bodies, to highlight problems in pockets of deprivation and promote social inclusion in local development and investment plans.

- Social services learn from each other locally, nationally and across Europe. Professional development, peer review, best practice development and exchange, service assessment and inspections are vital to the continuing improvement of social services.

2.3.4.4 Group 4 – Increasing participation

A key element of the social inclusion and well-being of children is that they are given opportunities to participate in normal social, recreational, sporting and cultural activities. This is essential to ensure their personal development and their active inclusion in society.

Sport and recreation

Access to sporting and recreational opportunities has been gaining recognition as an essential element in anti-poverty strategies. It promotes participation in social life, personal development and better health. In the UK, for instance, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to increase the participation of 'priority groups' (aged 16 and above) in sport and cultural activities. The government announced increased funding for sport, drama and music after school specifically for disadvantaged children as part of its plan for 'extended schools' (Bradshaw and Bennett 2007).

Cultural activity

Participation in cultural activities can contribute to the social inclusion of young people in several ways. A thematic study on cultural policies to reduce poverty and social inclusion in the EU (Woods et al. 2005) noted, for instance, that participation in cultural activities can help young people to build their skills and self-confidence. It can enhance their self-esteem and identity. It can promote respect for cultural diversity and counter discrimination. Thus policies which increase the access of young people at high risk of poverty and social exclusion to such activities are particularly important.

In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports has taken initiatives to encourage equal opportunities for children from disadvantaged families to participate in meaningful activities during their free time, e.g. sports and social activities. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has encouraged participation in a broader sense through its action plan 'Reach of Culture'. The Ministry facilitates municipalities and provinces in their efforts to improve access to and participation in culture among youngsters. It stimulates a more intensive involvement of particular groups, such as adolescents and allochthonous people (the latter meaning anyone with one or both parents born outside the Netherlands). Another Dutch project is 'Culture and School' (see Nederland et al. 2007). In Latvia, Guidelines for National Cultural Policy for 2006–2015 have been issued: A National State identified the strengthening of the role of culture and cultural education in reducing social inequality and poverty. The need to ensure the availability of culture for children and youths in Latvia, particularly children with special needs, has also been emphasised (see Lacey 2007).

2.3.5 Ensuring effective delivery

In terms of combating child poverty and social exclusion, the EU social inclusion process has focused on analysing and monitoring the extent and nature of the issues and identifying key policy areas. However, having the right policies and programmes is not sufficient if they are not delivered effectively, and a growing body of learning has emerged about effective delivery of policies. For instance, the first Joint Report on Social Inclusion identified '10 key principles for inclusive services and policies' which it saw as necessary for 'delivering policy as good as it needs to be' (European Commission 2002, p. 72). More particularly, the European Forum on Child Welfare (EFCW) project on Families Under Stress has produced a set of Good Practice Principles which highlight a series of key principles in relation to services for children (Williams 2003).

Some of the key principles for effective delivery that seem to be generally transferable and relevant in all countries when addressing child poverty are summarised below.

2.3.5.1 Effective linking of central and sub-national levels

As the EU process has evolved it has been increasingly recognised that effective delivery of national strategies to tackle poverty and social exclusion can only happen at the local level. In its 2007 *Fact Sheet on Child poverty and Social Exclusion in the EU*, one of Eurochild's key recommendations was that 'there must be greater awareness among, and coordination between, the different levels and departments of government' (Eurochild 2007, p. 6). Thus it is vital to involve local actors in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of plans. It is important to define the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of governance clearly and ensure that they are mutually reinforcing. This point was made strongly by Martin Hirsch, French High Commissioner for Active Solidarity, speaking at an EAPN conference, when he said that it was essential 'to establish links between local and national measures and to avoid clashes between the two' (Frazer 2008, p. 7). In the UK this issue has also been addressed through the Child Poverty Accord between central and local government which has been proving effective in securing more 'buy-in' to the child poverty strategy from local government.

2.3.5.2 Partnerships for a coordinated and integrated approach at local level

As the 2005 European Commission report on the first NAPs/inclusion from the new Member States noted, 'Partnership and dialogue at local levels are important tools for delivering social inclusion. They can help with the identification of problems and disadvantaged groups, in directing social assistance and in activating people experiencing poverty and social exclusion' (European Commission 2005b, p. 103). The importance of partnership is also stressed in various activities supported by the Commission (see Eurochild 2006; Walther and Pohl 2006). The Transnational Exchange Project, A Lobby for Children, particularly concentrated on the role that local networks or partnerships of actors can play. It identified five levels of action in networking: identification of problems, participation of the people concerned (i.e. poor children and their parents), needs-oriented services which intervene early and involve committed volunteers, identification with the community, and shaping public opinion (Bohn 2005). The European Cities Against Child Poverty project's final report summarised the importance of coordination well, concluding that

the most successful projects bring together professionals from a range of sectors and establish a network that is focused on the family's well-being. Roles are clearly defined and joined-up working is made easier through the involvement of intermediaries and information sharing. Again, this approach is not necessarily costly; rather it makes better use of the expertise and resources available. (European Cities Against Child Poverty 2009, p. 68)

Belgium is an interesting example of recent evidence of Member States' efforts to strengthen the coordination of services and different actors. In the Flanders region, children's rights and youth policy are coordinated by a Reflection Group in which all policy sectors are represented. On the provincial and local level there are autonomous consultation and adaptation structures. The municipalities develop an integrated youth policy in coordination with other authorities. In the French community, the General Delegate has a mandate to coordinate as well as to promote children's rights and interests. A key strength of the Belgian approach is the collaboration between a broad range of partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors at various policy levels. Given these conditions, multi-level partnerships are likely to be formed. The participation of stakeholders from various sectors, such as the economic and educational sectors, is also a positive feature which helps to ensure coordination between social policies at local and regional level.

2.3.5.3 Flexible and tailored responses with pathways for progression

A key learning point is that services need to be delivered in ways that respond to the needs of each child and his or her family. Thus they need to be flexible and delivered in a way that is tailored to meet their particular needs. A study for the European Commission on disadvantaged youth concluded that access to services depends on support being 'flexible or unconditional as this helps to ensure that individuals do not remain excluded due to bureaucratic rules' (Walther and Pohl 2006, p. 17). While some families and children may only need assistance intermittently or in the short term, others will need longer-term and consistent support which fosters their personal growth and development over time. This, of course, means ensuring that services are developed with a long-term perspective. A major factor that adversely affects the delivery of services is insecurity over funding (see Williams 2003).

2.3.5.4 A community development approach that promotes empowerment, respect and dignity

A recurring theme is that policies and programmes must be delivered in ways which empower people and avoid stigmatising them (see European Social Network 2007; Williams 2003; Walther and Pohl 2006). It is thus very important to encourage community development approaches. Community development can contribute significantly to strengthening the quality of life in disadvantaged communities by promoting strong family, social and community networks and a healthy infrastructure of community and voluntary organisations. It is also an important means of empowering individuals and groups who are at risk of exclusion and isolation. It can help them to act together to change their situation and to work together with others to overcome barriers to their active participation in society such as poverty, lack of access to resources, rights, goods and services and discrimination. Community development must thus be a core element in any strategy to overcome poverty and social exclusion and to building more inclusive and cohesive societies. That is true whether one is talking of the European, national, regional or local level (see also Frazer 2005).

2.3.5.5 Effective monitoring and reporting

As the EU process developed, monitoring and evaluation to ensure effective delivery of policies and programmes, and the accountability of those responsible for delivering them, gained increasing prominence. This was particularly evident at the Luxembourg Presidency conference on Taking Forward the EU Social Inclusion Process and the subsequent publication (see Marlier et al. 2007), but also in many other reports (see Frazer and Marlier 2007; European Commission 2008b Social Protection Committee 2008a).

Key elements of effective monitoring and evaluation that can be identified from the EU process include:

- ensuring an evidence-based approach;
- having clear objectives and targets;
- setting appropriate and multidimensional indicators;
- ensuring the availability of good quality data;
- establishing a focus on the link between specific policy measures and outcomes and, to this end, undertaking regular impact assessments of policies;
- establishing good links between the policy and research communities;
- involving all relevant actors, especially organisations working with children and children themselves;
- reporting regularly on findings.

The EU SPC Task-Force report (Social Protection Committee 2008a) stresses the importance of making the link between the specific policy measures implemented by governments and the expected related social outcomes. In doing this, micro-simulation models and the modelling of the impact of policy changes on representative families can play a key role. This approach is reflected in the recommendations adopted by the SPC, which urged Member States, in setting-up or enhancing their monitoring of child poverty and social exclusion, 'to ensure that the systems they develop at country level can feed into a common EU framework. In particular, countries' monitoring systems should allow better links to be made between policy measures and expected social outcomes, as well as between EU and national indicators'. Undoubtedly the development of a common monitoring framework as part of the EU process would increase the potential for Member States to learn more from each other about what works best in tackling child poverty, and what is thus in each country's interest.

2.4 A framework for assessing national policies to prevent and combat child poverty and social exclusion

Part 2 has reviewed the learning from the EU Social inclusion Process on effective ways of preventing and tackling the poverty and social exclusion of children. On the basis of this review a set of questions has been designed which can be used as a framework to assess and further develop any Member State's national approach to tackling child poverty and social exclusion. The framework covers five main areas: effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements; quality of overall strategic approach; effectiveness of key policy areas; ensuring effective delivery; and effective monitoring and reporting.

This framework is multidimensional and tries to identify all the different aspects that need to be taken into account for making an overall assessment of a Member State's approach. However, we have tried to design it in such a way that different parts of it can be used selectively at any given moment in time. Thus the framework has been used selectively to guide the questions and observations in the fieldwork for this research project (see Part 3) and to assess Ireland's approach to preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion (see Part 4).

2.4.1 Effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements

A key area to assess is how effective and comprehensive arrangements are for preventing and tackling the poverty and social exclusion of children. In particular:

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

2.4.2 Quality of overall strategic approach

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

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

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

2.4.3 Effectiveness of key policy areas

Within a multidimensional approach it is important to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the measures in key policy domains: income, access to key services (i.e. housing, education, healthcare, childcare, child protection), participation in sport, recreation and cultural life, etc. In particular:

Income

- Is enough being done to focus employment policies towards parents of families with children, with a particular focus on jobless households, lone parents, parents with 3+ children and groups at high risk (e.g. Roma, immigrant families)? For example, through policies to:
 - reconcile work and family life
 - encourage flexible working
 - target active inclusion measures to these parents
- Is sufficient attention given to addressing the issue of a high level of low skills among parents at risk of poverty, especially lone parents?
- Are there effective policies to ensure that income from work is sufficient to lift families with children who are at risk of poverty out of poverty? For example, through policies on:
 - minimum wages
 - retaining benefits
 - reducing employment traps
 - pro-family/child tax arrangements
 - reducing costs (of transport, childcare)
 - reducing insecure employment
- Are there adequate levels of income support? For example:
 - are overall expenditure levels sufficient?
 - are payments levels adequate?
 - is spending effective/efficient in reducing poverty?
- Is the existing combination of employment and income support measures likely to be sufficient to significantly reduce/prevent relative income poverty, material deprivation and consistent poverty?

Access to services

- Are families with children assured decent housing and environment conditions? For example, through:

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

Child protection

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

Participation in sport, recreation, social and cultural life

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

2.4.4 Ensuring effective delivery

The EU experience has shown that how policies and programmes are delivered is critical, apart from the quality of the framework and the individual policies. Thus it is important to assess delivery to ensure adequacy, accessibility and coverage. In particular:

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

2.4.5 *Effective monitoring and reporting*

The EU experience has shown that, in order to ensure continuous improvement in policies and delivery, effective and rigorous monitoring and evaluation arrangements are required at all levels and involving all relevant stakeholders. It has also highlighted the advantages of developing an EU-wide social inclusion monitoring framework for children which makes full use of the agreed EU indicators on social inclusion. Such an assessment should ask, in particular:

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

Part 3 – Findings from Local Case Studies

3.1 Introduction

This part of the report presents findings from four area-based case studies designed to investigate the experiences and perceptions of people ‘on the ground’ of policy and provision relating to children at risk of poverty. While not systematically representative of all areas in Ireland, the case study sites were selected ‘purposively’ (in sampling terminology) on the basis that they were geographically dispersed and that they allowed for consideration of variables which previous research (such as that summarised in Part 1 of this report) had shown to have a high degree of association with child poverty: namely social and economic disadvantage (both urban and rural), unemployment, lone parenting, ethnic minority populations (including Travellers), asylum seekers and refugees. An additional consideration was that, since the Department of Applied Social Studies at NUI Maynooth was conducting the research, its existing links with community-based organisations and agencies could facilitate access to individuals, families and groups with experience (past or present) of living in poverty. It is important to acknowledge therefore that the areas featured in these case studies were ones where a certain level of organised response to the negative effects of poverty was already in place. Thus the findings, if anything, underestimate the impact of poverty in communities or on individuals without such supports.

Within the parameters just outlined the sampling approach adopted was to select two areas within the greater Dublin area (one central and one suburban), one ‘country town’ and one western county where access would be available both to urban communities and people in rural areas. The key concern was to maximise the opportunities for hearing diverse voices of people affected by poverty and of those who work with them, even if the areas in question were not very precisely delineated in physical or geographical terms. The resulting case study sites were:

Ronanstown / North Clondalkin, County Dublin

The ‘canal communities’ in Dublin city (especially Rialto but also Bluebell and Inchicore)

Bagenalstown, County Carlow

County Mayo (with a focus on Castlebar and Ballyhaunis)

In each case, interviews and focus groups were conducted with local residents (of all ages) and with staff, volunteers and participants in as full a range as possible of the relevant local services and supports (such as Family Resource Centres, Community Development Projects, drugs projects, community youth projects, Travellers’ groups and groups working with asylum seekers or with an intercultural focus). Focus groups were also held bringing together key professionals at local level (including personnel in the agencies already mentioned but also staff in primary and secondary schools, home–school liaison services, local authorities, area partnerships). Interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis, with the consent of participants. Further details are provided in the Methodology section.

In all of the interviews and focus groups, respondents were free (and encouraged) to contribute ideas and opinions and to highlight whatever issues or concerns they thought important. However, the researchers were guided by two broad questions (or clusters of questions):

What areas of policy and provision relating to child poverty work well, make a positive difference or alleviate the effects of poverty on children and their families?

What are the difficulties or problems or gaps in policy and provision relating to child poverty (and what would help to alleviate its effects)?

In what follows the experiences, opinions and perceptions of respondents are presented thematically under each of the above questions, with an emphasis on the words of the participants themselves. All names, apart from those of the researchers/interviewers, are pseudonymous. Attention is drawn to the particular location of the respondents, or their professional/organisational affiliation, only where it is deemed directly relevant.

3.2 Things that work well or make a positive difference

3.2.1 Information

Information about entitlements and services was one of a number of themes which emerged, both under 'things working well' and 'gaps and problems', indicating that different individuals or communities may have different levels of access to and/or awareness of information services. Some particularly positive comments were made about the services of the Citizens Information Board, including this one from a male respondent with two young children who had been granted refugee status:

Information, I find the best place to get any information you want, about anything you want, is the Citizens Advice Bureau [sic]. There is excellent people in there, like very, very nice people. They help and they spend time with you and they go and search, they show you how to search as well like. You know it is not hard at all. Information, word of mouth as well, you know like people talk to each other.

Respondents also mentioned having positive experiences of the information-giving role of community welfare officers, CDPs, FRCs and other community-based groups and projects.

3.2.2 Increases in child income supports

There were some very positive responses to the improvements since 2001 in the range of benefits and allowances for children, including child benefit (CB), child dependant additions (CDAs) and the Early Childcare Supplement introduced in mid-2006.

You can see where the things that have been positive like for example, you know, the increase in the amount of children's allowance I think has been really helpful to families, you know, and the early childcare payments have been really helpful to families. I think direct payments for families are much better than, you know, outside interventions where the contrast say for example, you know, where that's very empowering where their income is increased and they are able to manage

their own money and make decisions about how that money is paid and how it's spent. [Coordinator of Springboard project⁴⁸]

Similarly, respondents in a Travellers' group commented that 'the family allowance [CB] is a great help to kids...it helps you bring up kids', and that the childcare supplement was a very welcome support but that 'the six-year-old [ceiling] should go to about ten...they still need childcare after six, like'.

3.2.3 *The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS)*

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) was referred to frequently as playing a vital role in supporting people living in poverty. A coordinator of a Community Development Project highlighted its direct support for families:

MABS can be very helpful for families, particularly if they get into financial difficulties; they help them to resolve things or get them to levels where they can be back on track again. But again, it's nearly like when it's a huge crisis people come forward, they don't realise that they can maybe take a step before it gets too bad.

Elsewhere a Springboard project coordinator gave an example of MABS acting in an advocacy role and challenging the behaviour of financial institutions:

I suppose there is another form of money lending which is quite sinister that we have encountered over the last three or four years and that is where people are on CE [Community Employment scheme] and they get their payments paid into the bank, the banks were very keen and interested in offering loans to people... So in those situations we would have encountered so many parents who had got into desperate situations and couldn't pay the money back and if they got sick or anything like that happened, you know, so they wouldn't have, like you know, protection on their loan or anything like that. So that's when MABS came in and proved to be very effective in our area where they kind of took on the banks, well, one particular branch here who was doing that and kind of then became the buffer and was able to question fundamentally whether these loans should have been given... We would have a very good relationship with MABS.

3.2.4 *Community Employment scheme*

The Community Employment (CE) scheme was frequently identified as a 'stepping stone' or as something which helped people to 'break the cycle' of unemployment and/or poverty, although it was also stressed that this can take time and the scheme may be unduly limited.

...the CE scheme is very targeted and has gone out and targeted and offered it to people who would have needed it and wanted it, men and women, you know, it has definitely, those kind of targeted interventions you can see have really benefited and reduced loads of child poverty. [Project coordinator]

I think that they actually are managing to break the cycle, you know. The only concern I would have is the fact that they are only two or three years long and I think people need some time longer than that period of employment, you know,

⁴⁸ Springboard is an early intervention family support programme funded by the Department of Health and Children.

to...have those skills...it's a really good thing but why end it, why not let it continue on. [Family Resource Centre worker]

A manager of a community youth project was able to cite a very successful job placement rate for former CE participants:

We have an 82% rate here of people going into employment from here, when they come through CE. That's extremely high.

A young woman parenting alone commented on the significant difference the scheme had made to her:

Well, paying bills and buying extra food. On the single parent [allowance] I was only, say, paying bills and spending 50 a week on food and me money was gone, now I have more money and extra money to buy the little lad clothes.

For another, participation in the scheme had provided access to training opportunities:

Well, I'm going to college in September to do Level 6 now, it's Level 6 in Childcare... That's the only good thing about doing it, like, the CE scheme, like you don't have to pay for your courses, that's the good thing.

3.2.5 Other training – Primary Health Care for Travellers

In the Mayo Travellers' Support Group, participants spoke enthusiastically about their learning on a Primary Health Care programme (run in association with the Health Service Executive) and of enhanced employment opportunities afterwards:

[You] have a qualification at the end of the day like...Then, after I think it's two years, with the Mayo Travellers' Support Group, the Western Health Board is supposed to employ you then, as being a...Primary Health Care Worker. Basically what that's about is going out into our own Traveller families, not our own but anyone who is in the Travellers and promoting good health and also good accommodation and education. You know, where they mightn't know about the services like.

3.2.6 Housing and environment

In one of the case study areas which had been undergoing a process of regeneration in recent years, attention was drawn to the positive impact of improvements in housing, and in the environment more generally, on child poverty and on general quality of life:

...one of the major factors [here is] people being put in to new housing and proper housing. They were living in awful conditions in terrible physical conditions in their house and the physical health and the mental health was much affected by that and their social health because they weren't able to socialise or play out in the way, you know. It was a very unsafe environment for a lot of children so definitely we would see in that aspect of poverty there has been an improvement because of that regeneration and there is absolutely no doubt about that and with the social regeneration here...you can see, you know...a number of initiatives in terms of sport, the arts, you know, health and well-being...

Specific comments were also made about the advantages of social housing as a way of enabling families to get out of certain 'poverty traps':

[W]here people have got social housing that's much better because they're paying designated rent. Where we would see a poverty trap is, you know, where we would work with some families who would be in private rented accommodation who would have to get a rent allowance to pay the rent while they are waiting for public housing and in that situation they can't avail of those types of schemes because they are penalised. They don't receive the full education allowance. They get their full CE but they don't get a full rent allowance. So there is kind of a poverty trap there. If they went to get a job they wouldn't be able to, they would have to earn a huge amount of money to pay that kind of rent to private landlords, you know what I mean. So definitely it's much better to provide social housing to families who are on low incomes because it gives them more opportunity to step out, get education, get training and work part-time.

Local residents and professionals in another area noted considerable improvements in housing provision: 'The council are putting in gas heating. There is hot water...all houses are up to a good standard, which is important.'

3.2.7 Services for children, young people and families

Respondents in the case study interviews and focus groups gave numerous examples of very tangible benefits from a range of services and supports available locally. In one case the Family Resource Centre (FRC) was regarded as an essential 'hub' where services and supports for people of all ages were available and without which the situation of children and families would be intolerable. It provided information services and a range of programmes working with lone parents, unemployed, older and younger people and those seeking to return to education.

I reckon only for the centre, there would be nothing in the town, there wouldn't be a thing like. It is, it's really a benefit.

In this particular case the FRC also appeared to provide the only accessible childcare facility in the town. There were private facilities in nearby areas but these were costly and could be availed of only by those who could afford them and had their own transport. (This was perceived by some respondents as introducing an element of segregation among very young children which continued through to primary and second levels, a point returned to below.)

Breakfast and lunch clubs were available in schools in a number of areas and were generally regarded as making a vital contribution to young people's well-being. A school principal thought they had educational and social benefits as well as nutritional ones:

You can't teach a child when it's hungry and if I was to answer you the best programme in any school in the country at the moment is the breakfast and lunch club provided by the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs [sic]. It's the most under-utilised programme, because there is a few restrictions in it, but by far the best programme in any school in the country. ... As well as that if you have a breakfast club in the morning, you have the social integration of children coming in, in the morning, getting a breakfast, with other children who have had

their breakfast or just didn't want their breakfast or just want to hang out with other kids... Then there is the lunch club that the same thing happens...

Participants in a focus group with young lone parents were equally positive:

It's from eight, the kids can get there from eight o'clock and their school starts at ten to nine, but like they have up to fifty or sixty kids some days in it. And on a Friday they do them like, sausages and scrambled egg, they get something nice instead of cereal, they get something and they do be looking forward... they kind of pick what they want, you know. They get a lot. They get the likes of the strawberry and chocolate milk, which is still very good for them, they love it, they wouldn't get that at home, it is expensive enough you know. They love going, they are really, really good... They want to get up and go to school.

The junior now, if they get into school for twenty to nine, there's fruit and Actimel for them. They can pick whatever, an apple or banana or a mandarin and an Actimel. There's actually new lunches provided as well, they get a good lunch, don't they?

In one area where some children did not have time to go home at lunchtime the youth project stepped in to provide them with something to eat, because the youth workers were concerned that if the young people did go home they might not come back:

They would be first or second years or whatever. We would be trying to encourage them, when they'd be coming up to school time we'd be saying, now come on, even to the point where they would be marched up the road and back into school...

Some of the breakfast and lunch clubs were part of the School Completion Programme of the Department of Education and Science, designed to promote retention at both primary and secondary levels through in-school, out-of-school and after-school initiatives (including 'homework clubs') organised in partnership with other relevant services locally. The experience of this programme among participants was generally very positive, including in terms of its impact on Traveller children, although in the case of young Travellers it was noted that while progression from primary to second-level had improved significantly, retention at second level remained a problem. Similarly, participants reported very positive experiences of the home-school liaison service. A community youth worker employed by a Partnership company (an independent local development company funded by the State) commented that 'I work very close to the home-school liaison in the school and find it so helpful and vice versa...', while a school principal in the same area commented:

... that's a good programme, the home-school liaison is an excellent programme, because you're supporting the parents, not the student. You support the child through the parent. But the energy that takes.

The above are examples of inter-agency work in support of children and families experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and it was a more general finding of the case study research that there are numerous examples of fruitful cooperation and partnership between organisations and groups at local level. Sometimes this was formal, for instance when relevant agencies were represented on the management committee of a particular project ('Our management group is integrated, you know, its membership is from all different types of agencies'). It was also common for staff in a number of local groups and services to take the initiative to cooperate and

collaborate ('All the projects have a good relationship with the local community Garda... we work very closely with the schools as well...'). It was suggested that such informal partnerships had often played a vital leadership role in relation to improving local services for people affected by poverty.

There was a core group of, you know, project leaders from different agencies that used to meet on a monthly basis to work on those kind of integrating services and how to move forward.

Respondents in the focus groups (not just staff, but participants in groups and projects) generally took the view that agencies and organisations at local level, in addition to working collaboratively where possible, were also inclined to be flexible in their response to local and individual needs, and this was regarded as a good thing. However, staff often felt that their capacity for flexibility was constrained by bureaucratic or administrative requirements, a point which will be taken up again below.

An example of such flexibility was the youth project providing lunches for young people as just described, although this would not normally be regarded as a role of youth work. The workers in this case believed that such steps were necessary to enable the young people's other, more developmental needs, to be met. Young people themselves commented on this in a focus group:

Nearly every club gets a dinner because some of the kids that come in, like, they would be just like out on the roads playing and wouldn't go in [home] for a dinner or whatever. Like, they come in for their drop-ins or whatever in the evening and there is usually food and all prepared for them.

Young people also commented on the many positive opportunities which youth work and youth services provided for them and the support offered in dealing with challenges and difficulties relating to education and lifestyle (including alcohol and drugs).

I think places like this have more time for you [than school]. You know, if you're thinking of leaving school, like, I think like youth leaders would have more time to talk to you.

The young people also gave examples of ways in which involvement had enabled them to participate actively both in the youth groups themselves and in the local community:

I've been coming here five years. Before coming here, we weren't heard; if you wanted to get a point of view across you'd have to tell an adult for them to say it. But now we're listened to ourselves like. We've gone to different seminars, got up and spoke to like other young people and adults and our voice has been heard and different things have been put in place because of our thoughts and feelings of different things. So it is like, our voice is being heard now.

3.3 Difficulties and gaps

Analysis of the interview and focus group data from the case studies suggested that experiences and perceptions at local level of the major difficulties, problems and gaps in policies and provision relating to child poverty can be grouped under three

main headings (which are not mutually exclusive). These are: living conditions and lifestyles; services and supports; and groups most severely affected.

3.3.1 *Living conditions*

3.3.1.1 *Material factors*

Not surprisingly, respondents in the case studies (both local residents and professionals) drew particular attention to the negative impact of poverty, and of inadequate policies or provision, on the direct living conditions of members of the community, in the form of inadequate income, poor housing, homelessness and an unattractive environment, all of which were perceived and described as having a negative effect on physical and mental health and on individual and community morale.

While it was acknowledged by many respondents (as stated above in 3.2.2) that there were considerable improvements in recent years in child benefit and other child income supports, it was still believed that significant numbers of people were finding it very difficult to manage at all in financial terms, meaning they were at risk of abuse by moneylenders. This view was expressed forcefully by the coordinator of a Springboard project:

There is absolutely no doubt in our mind that people who are surviving on lone parent's or any welfare payments only...you know it's not possible for a family to survive on those kind of incomes. ... And one of the big kind of issues would be people go to moneylenders, so they would be in debt, you know, very serious debt, with maybe, you know, some of our families would have six or seven loans.

In a group of lone parents, part of the discussion focused on the inadequacy of the fuel allowance:

...the heating allowance it's like...they give it to you [in October] and then they take it [in April] but a lot of places, like my own house actually, needs heating, even during the summer... It's only €12 a week like and then they take it off you...Coal is like €14 to €15 a bag like. So you're lucky to get a bag of coal and you'd burn more than one bag a week.

It was noted in section 3.2.6 above that some respondents drew attention to positive changes in the housing stock in their areas. Elsewhere, the view was that local authority housing remained very poor. A young person in a focus group of teenagers commented that 'in the private housing estates, the houses are absolutely fine but the council houses, like half of them are boarded up and then left for months on end'. A friend added: 'And there's homeless people out there looking for houses'.

According to the participants some of those looking for houses were encouraged to 'go homeless' so as to gain points on the waiting list:

My sister was told that as well, she has one baby, he's three and she's been on it six years like and they said you could be another four or five years waiting on it, if you go homeless you'll have it in a year or two, encouraging people, you know what I mean. She has a three-year-old baby like.

Another participant spoke of family members with drug addiction and health problems being similarly encouraged to 'go homeless':

...he was a heroin addict and him and his girlfriend wanted to get on the housing, they were both clean at the time, they were told no, you have to be homeless, go homeless and we'll put you on the list, just to be put on the list. Like for two recovering heroin addicts, to go homeless, it's not the best idea.

According to the participant, the young man in this case did go homeless and subsequently became ill and died. For others in the same group waiting lists for housing seemed a common family experience:

...my sister, like, she was on the housing list for six years and then, this was her sixth year and she's after being in rental accommodation but she moved and she went up and told the council that she moved but, like, they sent out three letters to her old house and because there was no reply, they cut her off the housing list. Now she had to reapply and go back down the end... To deal with them is just a nightmare.

By contrast, in another area a project coordinator was able to highlight the positive impact of social housing on all aspects of families' and children's lives:

Anything that kind of offers people the opportunity to improve the quality of their own lives. So obviously like, I have said them already, they sound very simple, but having good housing, having more money in your pocket. Money is not everything but it does make a huge difference and I have seen people's well-being completely changed from being moved into a house that is decent and that has some good furniture... it's a huge issue and the fact that it is affordable and that it's sustainable, you know what I mean.

A colleague contrasted this situation with the generally very negative experience which people affected by poverty had of private rented accommodation:

... when you think of the private rented sector it's just awful. I don't know anybody who is living in a nice flat that's rented.

Many of the most severe difficulties involved unemployed people but respondents were keen to stress that poverty and its effects are not just about unemployment. As one local professional suggested, 'People are still under-paid [and] the minimum wage is not enough.'

3.3.1.2 Self image and self-esteem

A number of adult respondents suggested that for young people affected by poverty there are likely to be considerable problems relating to self-image, self-confidence and self-esteem. According to one professional:

For children and young people in poverty it is often the exclusion and marginalisation which result from poverty that [are] the most difficult. For children living in direct provision and other children living in poverty, they feel a sense of being different or excluded because they don't have the popular accessories which other children have. Even something as simple as the schoolbag or the shoes can lead to a child feeling left out. This can further isolate a child who may already be excluded on the basis of race or ability.

This view was confirmed in a focus group discussion with young people themselves:

Anna And do you think it matters to the young person themselves? How would they feel if they feel they can't afford the gear that everyone else has?

Ger It's really horrible for them because they'd feel really bad coming into school looking terrible. That sounds really so bad but you know what I mean.

Kay No, if I didn't have proper things or whatever I wouldn't go into school, I'd be like...

Ger Like people would laugh at you, they wouldn't mean to.

Adults experiencing or at risk of poverty also reported difficulties relating to self-image, which were sometimes compounded by their experience of dealing with 'officialdom'. One lone parent commented:

You feel like you're begging...they look at you like, Ah, here's another one of them looking for money.

In general low morale was seen as a problem for people experiencing poverty. The depression which could result from this could make even getting out of bed in the morning a challenge. The following exchange took place between two professionals working in different services in the same locality. They were discussing the take-up of early childhood care and education services.

Ann Most marginalised are not able to get their act together to do stuff like that. You know it's two hours in the morning, so you have to get up, for starters, which is a huge factor. You bring your child, you go home, you go back down to collect that child, like there is a huge effort involved in that. Marginalised people don't do that kind of thing.

Joan That's where you need people to come into the house; that might sound horrendous, maybe invasion of privacy or something like that, but it's so hard to get up that effort for some people... and various people in departments and policy makers in ivory towers have no concept of what that is like.

Ann The same for school attendance, exactly that same thing. In my case, in the junior school, it's because parents don't get up and the babies can't get up.

Other respondents confirmed that there was often a link between parental depression or other mental health problems and children's experiences of education or other services. The manager of a Springboard project suggested that anxiety and depression among parents is 'the most prevalent issue' affecting children in poverty:

...therefore, not being present for the children so they might not be able to kind of stick to a routine as well or, you know, sleep well at night, you know, all the kind of normal things that people do in their day-to-day routine. That would impact on the child in lots of different ways particularly their education and their routine and day-to-day life...

The same respondent took the view that services such as breakfast and lunch clubs, while fulfilling important health and welfare needs of children, might in effect be

'disempowering' for parents and families and might lead to problems or difficulties in the home not being addressed.

The schools have grants for breakfast clubs to provide lunch for children, yet, you know, I think that's very disempowering and I think that kind of thing...almost like takes the power away from parents, you know, that they don't feed their own children, it creates a culture of dependency, you know.

3.3.2 *Services and supports*

3.3.2.1 *Childcare*

In relation to services and supports for people experiencing or at risk of poverty, the difficulties identified most commonly, by both local residents and by people working with them, had to do with childcare. The availability, accessibility and cost of facilities and the negative impact of changes to the childcare subvention scheme in 2008 were all highlighted. The problems were particularly acute for lone parents and for people on CE schemes or on low incomes. The following are examples of the experiences and observations reported.

The biggest thing is childcare ...if you have no one to mind your children you can't go to work, you can't go to college, you can't go on CE. So it's trying to match that need and, I mean, if they are in school it's great. And then there is the issue about holidays, after school. Nobody minds minding a baby because you can stick them in a buggy and bring them with you but after-school care is really difficult and, you know, you've got to balance the needs of children and the needs of parents. [Project coordinator]

Childcare is ridiculous...the prices and all. My sister is sending hers to play school now and, like, trying to find one that is affordable is a nightmare. Everywhere is like €200 a week, you don't even get that, like...You might as well stay at home like. [Teenager (f)]

Well, one of my young mothers here, I only had a conversation with her the day before yesterday, because she does want to go on and study, and of course literacy is an issue and she is a single parent, and she has two small children ...sharp as a tack, intelligent, very low self-esteem, she doesn't even know how good she is, this kid. She wants to go back to education; if she is working here on a CE scheme and the total amount she gets here goes for childcare, the total amount. Now that cannot be right. [Youth service manager]

Staff running local services were very conscious of the way in which their own ability (or lack of it) to provide childcare facilities had an influence on composition of the groups taking up opportunities. A Family Resource Centre had trained 'sixteen childcare workers who are now employed, in their own right, within the resource centre', and the provision of a crèche within the Centre was regarded as vital in facilitating parents to return to education and training. This contrasted strongly with the experience in a Community Development Project (CDP) in another location:

And there's childcare as well, we don't have a childcare facility in the centre. It's a big issue because we can't get, when we get funding to do any programmes, the one thing that is actually specified within that is that you can't use any of it for childcare so you exclude women with children immediately... It's a massive issue.

There were strong reactions to the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme (CCSS) introduced late in 2007, which led to the implementation of a tiered fee system in community childcare facilities, whereby differential rates were payable, on a four-band scale (social welfare recipient; low-income working family with Family Income Supplement (FIS); low-income above FIS threshold; middle and higher income). It was considered that this system, while leading to lower costs for parents on social welfare, would penalise low-income working families and lead to segregation in childcare services.

...the community one [before the changes] has been grant-aided for years by some capitation, the number of people who attend the crèche and also the number of people that have been...on lower incomes or on social welfare, so that means they are able to get money based on that, you know, but it's a universal service so everybody [who] uses it gains, you know what I mean, and the individual that's on low income can get a subvention from the HSE to help support them. But everybody is the same, you know... It's kind of mixed integrated kind of childcare as well.

...that whole shift in subvention has meant that crèches now are going to have to raise their money, they are going to have to look at the commercial enterprise approach as opposed to a community approach. [CDP worker]

3.3.2.2 *'Traps' and disincentives*

In discussing their experiences of the services and supports for people living in poverty or socio-economic disadvantage, many respondents drew attention to situations where the systems and requirements relating to different allowances, entitlements and programmes operated in such a way as to act as a disincentive to taking up training or employment or educational opportunities. A CDP worker gave the following example.

On most FÁS schemes one of the problems would be like ... that you may have a woman for instance wanting, a lone parent, wanting to go on a FÁS scheme but when she does ... if she's in private rented accommodation [and has] childcare costs, she is actually out of pocket by doing the FÁS. So there is no financial incentive for her to go out on the FÁS course. So it's just... it defeats the purpose.

In a focus group with young lone parents, a participant described the experience of her sister; although there was no 'penalty' involved in this case, there was no incentive to work:

...they kind of encourage you not to work. Because my sister, she'd love to be working again, she loved work and she loved going out every day, but if you're on rent allowance and say you earn a hundred euro a week, they take exactly one hundred euro out of your rent allowance, so like you're working for nothing basically.

In another area respondents referred to a 'trap' whereby taking up work and just marginally crossing the eligibility threshold meant that people lost their entitlement to a medical card.

As well as such 'traps' some respondents expressed dissatisfaction with what they saw as the unreasonable requirements for availing of some schemes and

programmes, such as the need to be unemployed for a year to qualify for a place on a CE scheme.

For those actually on the schemes the requirements were also seen as increasingly restrictive, as a youth service manager suggested:

...we used to have them [participants] for three years.... now they're chipping away at that, you have them now for a year, and then you have to renew it every year. Now by the end of the year, we have this person who is beginning to grow, they are beginning to learn to read, and they're only barely getting their leg on the ladder and they're gone.

3.3.2.3 Health

In discussions about experiences relating to health issues and health services, a common problem was lack of accessible community-based services. In some cases, even where services were accessible, they were regarded as inhospitable and in one case perceived as unhygienic: 'there's the community healthcare clinic just down the road. It's a mess...it's not comfortable, it's not homely like...and it's dirty...'

Concerns were often expressed – as already indicated above – about the mental health of parents. Where individuals took steps to deal with such problems the professional response was sometimes seen as overly 'medicalised'.

Then the mental health services...for adults [are] very poor. People suffering from chronic depression, anxiety. Very little choice. Go to the doctor. Get medication. Go to the local psychiatric clinic. People are very well-meaning but again they are working with huge volumes, you know... It's a medical system, you know, and it's hard for people. Again very under-resourced, very inadequate, you know, there's no doubt about it... So we are actually thinking of maybe setting up our own counselling service that would, you know, kind of just deal with crisis.
[Springboard coordinator]

For children, the lack of adequate services for psychological assessment was a matter of serious concern.

A big issue is the difficulty in getting psychological services and assessments for children. It is a huge burden on families with a child who needs psychological support and it often means that a parent's working arrangements have to change and therefore the family income suffers. And the child then also faces other issues – difficulties in school, with friends, feeling isolated.

Speech and language therapy was another specific area raised in several focus group discussions and interviews. A staff member in a School Completion Programme made the following observation:

There is not speech and language therapy services in this area at all at the moment, because of the embargo in the HSE and that has severely affected the young children, particularly the junior school children. But also all of the children, including Traveller girls of all ages. And yet Health, and we've approached them on numerous occasions, refuse to assess the children through the school and we are paying a serious amount of money every year for private therapists to come in and to try and subsidise that.

The same worker continued:

And the irony of that is that [the Department of] Education are ultimately paying for something that should be a health service. So then, as a result of that then, my schools are missing out on funding that should be going towards their educational needs, because I'm trying to subsidise for health.

Exactly the same experience was echoed in another location. This time the respondent, herself a lone parent, was directly affected.

There's none in this area [health services]. Then the amount of time you're on the waiting list because even [my son] is on it now since last October and the Speech Therapist that he'd be going to...said to me, ah he's going to be on this for another few months. So the school are renting them in themselves, out of their own money.

3.3.2.4 Social work

It appeared to be the case in most focus groups and interviews that relationships with social workers were not well developed or functioning smoothly. The general perception was that social work services were badly under-resourced and that the workers themselves were under enormous pressure. A staff member in a Springboard project commented:

We wouldn't have a good relationship with the social work department... that would be very strained, it would be quite difficult you know... We wouldn't receive referrals from them... I suppose sometimes in terms of children's needs they have to get to the worst kind of situation before there is any intervention. They don't kind of work in an integrated way with agencies because they are very, chronically under-resourced so that would be kind of a block and a disadvantage and wouldn't kind of be in the best interest really in terms of children's situation so it can be a bit frustrating sometimes.

3.3.2.5 Education

It was shown above that in relation to speech and language therapy the education system was seen by some respondents as fulfilling a compensatory role. In other respects education was thought to be failing in its own responsibilities to children. Literacy problems were cited as one example, not just among 'unsuccessful' students but among students who were managing to stay within the system, even until Leaving Certificate. One CDP coordinator commented:

We also have to ask with the whole literacy issue, we have to ask the question, how come at eighteen years of age [young people] are coming out of school with literacy problems. I think that is a crucial question.

When a colleague of this respondent suggested that parental difficulties with literacy were perhaps an important factor, she replied:

I do think there is a question to be asked of schools as well and the Department of Education on that, it's not just parents. Because why did the system fail them, and we need to break that... how did they come through the Leaving Cert and yet they have literacy problems.

Not surprisingly the costs associated with education were a problem for parents. The Back to School allowance was welcome but was not seen as sufficient to cover the costs of uniforms and books. 'Donations' to schools were increasingly a requirement. This was particularly an issue among lone parents, as the following two responses illustrate.

Like this 'free education', who made that up? ... They're asking for money every week. You've to pay fees for them to get into the school ... most of the time now it's called a donation, no less than thirty euro like.

Expense, everything is just expensive now. Even the primary schools now, even recently like, [my son] comes home every odd week and he needs money for this, for that. Then you buy the books, you buy the uniform, I definitely need two uniforms for him anyway and then you have to hand in money when he's going into school as well and then you get a letter saying they have to do music, so it's extra, fifty-odd euro you have hand in like. It's money, money all the time.

A further difficulty for people affected by poverty, at least in some areas, was the 'bottleneck' of provision, meaning that after reaching a certain level – perhaps a FETAC certificate at a given level on the National Qualifications Framework – options for progression were not available locally, which was likely to provide particular difficulties for mature students and those with family responsibilities. A school principal remarked:

What we are doing a lot of the time is creating opportunities for education and we are getting it so far and we are getting the people [to complete the programme] ... fine, that's grand, and the next move is, moving to [colleges in other towns] and that's not happening. There is a bottleneck there and as for education and training, we're not doing it.

3.3.2.6 Facilities and services for children and young people

The lack of adequate play facilities for younger children, and leisure and recreation facilities for young people in general, was a matter about which many respondents felt strongly.

We only have a playground now [recently], which has made a big difference but to be honest I think it's crap. But they think it's better than nothing. So I suppose it's like anywhere all over the country, we don't seem to have got it about playgrounds. We think it's fantastic if there is a swing at the end of the road so I think that's essential and the children love it.

One respondent compared her experience with what she had previously been accustomed to in Northern Ireland:

In [a nearby town] there is a playground and it is just shocking and horrendous. You have to pay to get into it. The [name of organisation] run it. You've to pay because it's attached to an indoor area and then there is an outdoor play area. So it's the only playground in town, so you have to pay to get into it, so it's shocking... When we moved down here from Belfast I was mesmerised, I kept driving around saying, where's the swings, because around every corner in the North [there are public playgrounds]. [CDP family support worker]

It was shown in an earlier section that where youth services were well developed the respondents in this study – both young people and adults – often expressed a high degree of satisfaction with what they had to offer young people. However, they did not exist at all in some areas. In Mayo, for example, there was a considerable difference between what was available in the west and east of the county:

...this is just a bone of contention that I have in the east, because I work in the east of the county, there is no dedicated youth services... Claremorris, Kiltimagh, Swinford Town, Ballyhaunis, there is nothing and it's a huge issue. [CDP family support worker]

Similar comments were made by respondents in County Carlow:

Like in Carlow, what's it called, a youth café, they have like pool tables and there's like a room where you can go sit down and you can go get some food. And then like ...Bagenalstown, compared to Carlow it's just like really bad because like there is nowhere to go in Bagenalstown, at least people in Carlow have stuff to do like, they can go shopping or whatever. You can't do that in Bagenalstown, there really should be more stuff here in Bagenalstown.

Among young people themselves the relative absence of non-commercial leisure facilities other than sporting ones was a cause for complaint:

There's lots of sports in the town, but not for people who don't do sports. We don't have like centres, like a big centre where you'd have lots of different things to do. Everyone would be getting involved like, there would be stuff for every sort of people.

Where sports facilities did exist, the level of service or availability sometimes left a lot to be desired:

Even the swimming pool, that's only open three months of the year and that's it... The end of May 'til August, 'til they go back to school, like that's it.

A particular need expressed by some workers in urban disadvantaged areas, even where youth services were already relatively well developed, was for a greatly enhanced level of outreach services for young people who are not attracted by centre-based or 'structured' programmes and activities.

There should be at least twenty, what I would call street workers or outreach workers or more. To be out there walking...

Apart from the provision of facilities and services, respondents also highlighted the absence of opportunities for children and young people to make their voices heard and to participate in decision-making. Young people themselves sometimes took this view. Two young people in the same focus group made the following remarks:

Like really like, properly, but like you just need those little things, you need people to just hear your opinion of stuff, it's not all about them.

I think older people need to change their attitude towards us. Just because we're younger and stuff doesn't mean we don't know anything.

But the same opinion was also often given by some of the adult respondents.

I think they are not listened to. They are totally neglected. We are talking about the decision level. The people with the decisions, who have powerful decisions. Here are the majority of the country, they do not listen to what the kids want, they cannot listen to the kid himself telling you what he wants, you are going to have to find out, there is always the middle part, to find out what the kids want, you know.

3.3.2.7 Need for additional family support

A consistent theme in the focus groups and interviews was the need for more integrated and targeted support at the level of the family or household rather than of individuals (whatever their age), and for such support to be available 'routinely' rather than on a crisis basis. A CDP coordinator commented:

One of the things that is missing, in terms of all these policies... is family support services, appropriate services, not quite intervention, not [just when] we're at the awful stage of where the child is gone off the rails, it needs to be there all the time.

It was suggested that health services such as the district nurse or 'baby nurse' service could provide the basis for more extensive family support, including support with parenting but more generally, as the same worker put it, 'building up confidence at a home level with the children'. A school principal agreed:

A more united services approach to the family would help. We don't have that... health [services] don't or won't cross the boundaries... I think a district nurse going into a house sees straight off what kind of establishment they are walking into from day one. You know... if you go into a house that is in utter chaos, you have a sense of whether there is a structure among the chaos or not, you know straight away. If you go into a house like I did, where the mother is asleep on the floor on a mattress and the kids are going around, among dogs as well I might add...

This point was also echoed by a youth service manager:

The district nurse is the first port of call there because ... they have a right of passage from the mother coming from the hospital and it's there it should start.

Young lone parents living in the same area agreed that the 'baby nurse' provision should be extended:

... not just so much a baby nurse but a health nurse for all the kids up to eight or nine even, just to see they are going to school and getting on ok.

These young women also thought that if such a service was routinely available it would avoid the danger of stigmatising some families, 'because you can't just pick on one house that you know, it should be seen to be getting done in every house'. It would also help to pick up on situations where children are being neglected but no one is prepared to intervene.

You see some families and you know the kids aren't being looked after. Now you wouldn't go and report them, and you don't know what's going on in someone's house, but there are some kids that you see on the road and you know, they're

probably... I mean they're out till ten o'clock at night...and they're only five and six.

Staff of a CDP in another part of the country also saw the need for integrated, universal services for families with children and suggested that the 'primary care' model could serve as the basis for this:

I think [it could be based on] the development of the primary care teams, you know when they really are working together and talk about having some kind of common assessment framework for someone... their first point of contact with someone in the health system, be it social or be it medical or whatever, that whoever they meet, they do a common assessment on them.

3.3.2.8 Lack of coordination and integration

In relation to all areas of services and supports there was a general sense among respondents that while at a local level organisations and agencies were doing their best to work in partnership, there was insufficient coordination and integration at a higher administrative and policy level. The example was already given of schools at local level compensating for the lack of provision of speech and language therapy within the health service. As a worker in a School Completion Programme said:

The problem is... that there is [no] connection there between the policy makers, the department themselves. A good example that we've come across, it's always one and we get on our hobby horse about it, all the time, is the link between education and health. The fact is that there is very, very little linkage between the two departments.

The lack of a coordinated approach meant that regulations and requirements regarding funding from different sources were not designed to optimise the use of public funds at local level, or to ensure the most efficient and effective approaches. The same worker commented:

I support [healthy eating] one hundred per cent, I absolutely think it's a vital support that we need to have in this area. But the irony of it is, I am getting massive amounts of money to buy food for children and yet they can't get money to meet their educational needs... I don't get money to employ a project worker... I can buy the children Marks & Spencers grapes to eat at lunchtime, even though they are about eight euro a punnet, because I have the money to be able to do that... If all the departments could make contact and work together and see that while there is a need for healthy food ... we're missing out on very important people resources.

In some cases, because the funding requirements were perceived to be unreasonable and not sufficiently attuned to local needs and circumstances, workers simply 'used their imagination' in developing responses. For example, there might be no services for young people available locally and the funding available at community level might not include youth work.

Do you want me to tell you the truth...as far as the funders are concerned [a particular staff member] is doing outreach community development work, I can't mention youth work.

A broader point was that there was insufficient long-term thinking and planning in the provision of all services relating to poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage.

Longevity is the key. You need to have funding that is going to be with you over a long period of time...so that you actually can reap the benefits...insofar as being able to prove that it actually does work, or maybe [show that] it doesn't work... Putting funding a couple of years into something and not being able to see if it has been successful, based on evidence, that can be very frustrating... [We were] talking there about the Early Start pilot programme, [planning is dominated by] this whole concept of pilot, pilot, pilot.

3.4 Groups most affected by poverty

The case study findings regarding the groups worst affected by poverty were generally in line with the findings of research summarised in earlier sections of this report, but with some differences of emphasis or detail. While the points made in the foregoing sections apply in general to people experiencing poverty, the focus groups and interviews generated some additional observations that relate to specific groups. They also confirmed that the respondents themselves are well aware that poverty is systematically related to social class and, because of that, has an enormously disproportionate effect on working class neighbourhoods and communities. This section begins with some comments on that issue before addressing the experience of a number of groups whose perspectives featured significantly in the research project, including lone parents, Travellers, rural dwellers and asylum seekers.

3.4.1 Working class neighbourhoods and communities

The view was expressed strongly by many respondents that while problems related to poverty are often defined on the basis of categories or groups within the population – lone parents, large families, unemployed households and so on – there is a more fundamental pattern: the prospect of being in disadvantaged circumstances (for example lacking qualifications or not having a job), and therefore the greater likelihood of being poor, is part of the overall inequality confronting working class neighbourhoods and communities, and working class people in general. This is of course in keeping with the findings of social science research. One community worker explicitly challenged the validity of an approach to studying poverty which emphasises various 'at risk' groups while ignoring or downplaying class inequalities, and his views were strongly supported by other respondents:

[The focus on groups 'at risk of poverty'] places the emphasis on the individual or the family, that their poverty is their problem, right. I fundamentally disagree with it... it's [seen as] groups of Travellers that have a problem, groups of new communities that have a problem, that it's their poverty... This is to do with the way we set ourselves up as a society and how we distribute our resources... [W]hat we are talking about here are particular communities and [poverty's] location within them, right. It is about the relationship between groups... and class is central to this question, it's absolutely central, it's not any of your stuff on the sheet [about risk groups] and it's not in any of the [other] questions here, class is the single most important indicator of poverty.

3.4.2 Lone parents

Many of the problems identified in section 3.3 above were felt especially keenly by the lone parents participating in this study and those who worked with them, and this bears out the findings of other research on child poverty. For example, the impact of regulations and requirements regarding different entitlements was particularly likely to be raised by respondents who were parenting alone. The relationship between the Community Employment Scheme and the Lone Parents Allowance was one source of contention.

...and then they say it's not supposed to affect your Lone Parents, but I lose sixty euro out of my Lone Parents because of that, because I'm on a CE Scheme and yet if you're on a CE Scheme it's not classed as a job, it's classed as Community Employment, you're training, you're not in a job, but yet you're losing all these, like what you're entitled to.

Several respondents also raised the difficulty of dealing with a reduction in rent allowance entitlement when taking up work opportunities, although this was not seen as a sufficient reason in itself for not working.

Yeah, like if you don't work you get 100% of your rent allowance. If you work, say you get a job this year, you still get 75% of your rent allowance, you know what I mean. Then next year, if you're still in the same job next year, you get 50% and then if you're in it three years you get 25%. It goes down a quarter every year. There's no point in thinking, ah if I get a rent allowance I can't work, that just sets you back then and you're never going to get out and get a job. At some stage in your life you're going to have to pay rent anyway.

An additional difficulty cited by several lone parents was the attitude they perceived on the part of some other community members and officials that they 'had it too easy'.

...you know people think, ah yeah, you have everything, you get a house you get money and all, [but] it's nothing like that.

3.4.3 Travellers

For the Travellers taking part in this study a common complaint was that the children and young people in their families were consistently faced with prejudice and discrimination when they attempted to participate in leisure facilities.

There's any amount of them [facilities], but you're not let into them if you're a Traveller. This is one of the worst towns in Mayo for discrimination. The children can't get into the [name] snooker hall, they want to know who you are.

This was seen as inevitably having an impact on the children's self-esteem as well as that of their parents.

Ann Oh the children notice it big time. They can't even get into a picture hall, that's one sure thing like.

Marie Absolutely it affects children, has to affect them. [They] see their other school mates inside and they're not allowed in.

Ann It brings down your self esteem, it brings down everything about you, you're like a doormat.

This was related to a more general issue of a lack of confidence among young Travellers, at least when it came to dealing with settled people, and a lowering of their expectations as to what they could achieve.

Mary I suppose too, and when you think about it, an awful lot of the youth in the Travelling community like, people often came to me and say, your young ones could be this [or] that, your sons could, your brother's children could, you know what I mean, Mary, could be doctors, could be [anything], if you kept them [in school]... but when you're put down like that, you say to yourself...

Ann They don't have confidence in doing anything, that's what it is.

It was suggested that the absence of any significant positive attention to Traveller culture in the school syllabus was an important contributory factor in prolonging such difficulties.

On the educational side anyways I think that in the schools they should promote more about the Traveller culture, what they don't do. To get the settled children to know what you're about rather than looking at you as if you had two heads, do you know what I'm saying? When my child comes back to me and says I heard a poem today but there was no Travellers in it. You know Travellers are never mentioned in the school in the curriculum.

This point applied more broadly, to health and other social services as well as education.

Like what we have here now, and if you go into a surgery you won't see a lot of posters on Travellers' health, if you go into the schools you won't see any posters at all about Travellers. That's why society itself never really, how do you say, put out Travellers...

The perception by Travellers that they were negatively perceived by settled people was confirmed on at least some occasions in discussions with settled people, including settled children. Children in one focus group were asked if they knew any Travellers and the following exchange ensued:

Joe Yeah but they cause trouble don't they?

Anna Do you think it might be harder for them to take part in school and stuff like that?

Joe Yeah because they'd be in trouble.

Anna Why do you think they'd be in trouble?

Joe You see they do a lot of bad things when they're home and I suppose they'd be the same when they're in school.

Anna And why do you think they do a lot of bad things?

Joe I don't know, because they're in bad humour.

Anna Do you think they all do bad things?

Joe Yeah.

Both the researchers and the other children in the focus group discussion corrected this view (friends responded with 'No they don't', 'Not all of them', and similar comments) but the comments quoted give some idea of the kind of casually negative attitudes with which Travellers continue to be confronted.

On the other hand, settled teenagers in another area were themselves very conscious of the ways in which discriminatory attitudes towards Travellers can be seen to operate in the education system. It was suggested that 'the schools are the ones who make a big deal of it' because of the segregated provision which sometimes exists.

...when you're say three or four or something, you'll play with like a black kid or a Traveller, like you'll play with anybody, you know what I mean, another kid like. But like the schools are the ones who make a big deal out of it. They take them off and they separate them like, for what reason.

In the school we were in like every single Traveller, they had to go to this one teacher, but like there might have been nothing wrong with them, but they still had to go like. They might have been the same as you or me like, but they had to go.

Even when successful, young Travellers could be subjected to a form of discriminatory treatment.

There was a girl who graduated with me and she was the first Traveller girl in that school to complete her Leaving Cert and she was like given an award and all at the end of the year... They called her up in front of the whole year, they called her up in front of hundreds of students and just said, this is the first Traveller girl to do her Leaving Cert here and she was mortified. Because she was the same as one of us like, we didn't see her any different.

3.4.4 Rural dwellers

People living in rural areas were a further group identified as being particularly badly affected by poverty and other forms of social exclusion, and/or as being affected in ways which were often not taken into account when policies and services were being developed. A CDP worker commented as follows:

I don't believe...that the rural context is taken into account at all. You know how you hear poverty-proofing and this proofing, how do you, is there any kind of proof that you can do, any policies that have been rolled out that you have to take into account the rural aspect of that policy.

A colleague agreed:

And even to go a step further with it like, when you talk about rural, like say in Dublin they might talk about rural as being County Mayo, but they might, you know when they are doing it, it might be based on the town, but then there is the

other thing, the smaller villages and then there is the isolated family miles away from anything and that doesn't I think get translated.

In a different part of the country and in a focus group comprising lone parents, the practical difficulties associated with travel, transport and costs were highlighted:

No, like to go food shopping I'd have to hop on the bus but maybe five, six bags, when you have a child as well and trying to get a lift is impossible.

Another participant in this group had a car, but this was not regarded as essential by the people assessing her welfare entitlements.

Even like I have a car of my own, like I was living at home when he was born so I had the lone parent woman come out to assess me or whatever. My car was parked in the yard and she turned around and she asked who owned the car in the yard and I said it was mine... and she said to me like, would you not get rid of your car and your sister [could] bring you wherever you want to go. It's the only bit of independence I had like and to turn around and say that, to basically, I wouldn't have to waste my money on a car like, you know. It was very discriminating I thought like, to then expect my sister to be sitting around for me to bring me here, bring me there.

Professional workers confirmed that access to independent transport can be a 'lifeline' for rural dwellers, and also spoke of issues relating to the stigma of being seen to receive 'charity' in a rural area.

A car is an issue. Also, if you don't have a car and you don't have a good transport system into bigger towns, you can't avail of places like Aldi or Lidl, so you're paying premium prices for all your groceries, so you can't even save, so the poorest people can't avail of the cheapest prices. So they pay top whack for everything. I go into houses before their pay day, they actually have no money in their pocket, they have no cash whatsoever, ok. So sometimes you'd contact St. Vincent de Paul, some people don't like that because it's seen as, well, while they are brilliant with the services, I don't think they like people from the local area coming in to see that they are living in such poverty and have to ask for like a voucher for the local shop. Sometimes they would rather do without. It's only in real dire straits that they would accept maybe a voucher for extra coal or something. While they are grateful for it, it's demeaning.

This latter point was taken up by another worker:

There is a fine line between providing a universal service and more targeted service, particularly in rural areas because of stigmatisation. If you are associated with being seen with a worker that works with problems, well families often won't come forward, so we would be trying to avoid having that kind of label, that we work with families only who have problems. So we try to have some universal services, you know to run things through ground activities in the community development projects. So that then if somebody has problems they are able to meet with their worker.

Finally, water charges were identified as a particular burden which rural but not urban dwellers have to contend with.

Just getting back to the poverty, just things that contribute to that too, is that when you live out in the rural area you belong to a group water scheme, whereas

if you live in a town or a city, you don't have to pay water charges. You have to pay for your water in rural areas, no matter what your income is, you have to pay the same.

3.4.5 Asylum seekers

This subsection summarises the experiences of respondents living in a hostel for asylum seekers, drawing on a focus group discussion with six female respondents. Unlike other parts of the case studies it will make little use of verbatim quotations because not all members of this group were comfortable with their contributions being recorded.

3.4.5.1 Conditions

There were more than 300 residents in the hostel in question, most accommodated in the main building but some also living in detached houses in the same grounds, with up to 15 people living in each of the houses. Meals were provided for the residents. Like all asylum seekers, adult residents received €19.10 per week from the State which they had to use to supplement the food they were given in the hostel for themselves or their children. It also went to pay for medical costs not covered by the medical card, and additional personal hygiene supplies. Residents spoke about having to buy such basics as toilet paper, disinfectant and washing up liquid out of their €19.10.

There was a strong feeling within the group that there was no personal choice for residents in how they lived, what they ate, where they sent their children to school and so on. 'Life is very regimented' and 'we are treated like children' were among the comments made. The residents had to sign in and out and many of the women in the focus group said that it was like a prison. Different hostels and centres for asylum seekers use different systems and regulations, and the lack of standards in this regard was itself perceived as a problem both by residents and by professionals who worked with them at community level.

3.4.5.2 Food

The standard of food in the hostel was remarked on by all the respondents. In particular, the food for children was perceived to be lacking in nutritional value with 'chips and nuggets' and similar meals being the predominant fare. The babyfood supplied was often high in sugars, and women who were pregnant or who had young babies had to spend their allowance on buying some more nutritional food to supplement the hostel diet. As the hostel was in a small town and the residents could not afford public transport, the cost of shopping for basics in local shops could be quite expensive.

3.4.5.3 Childcare

There was a small crèche in the hostel but because of the high number of residents, each child could only get three hours a week, and there was a waiting list. Many of the women said they would prefer to get a grant towards childcare costs and be able to avail of local crèche facilities in the town. They thought this would also aid the process of integration and lessen the potential for discrimination against their children at a later stage. If childcare were available, this would also enable the adults to participate in local activities or to volunteer in local projects. As things stood, there

was little integration into the local community, for adults or children. Respondents described it as feeling like being 'in a ghetto'.

3.4.5.4 Education

The Back to School clothing and books allowance was not considered sufficient to cover the real costs of uniforms and books for the children. In addition to the basics, children needed an extra jumper, sports gear and a bag. Breakfast clubs were not available in the schools attended by the children. Generally, the residents thought that their children had a difficult time at school and could not integrate well as they didn't usually have the same leisure items or consumer goods as their classmates and could not participate in most extra curricular activities as they cost money (all additional expenses for the young people had to be justified to the social worker). This presented real barriers to integration. Within the hostel itself, there were very few, if any, recreation facilities for children.

The hostel environment was not seen as conducive to children and young people studying or doing their homework, and this too was having an impact on the children's experience of schooling.

3.4.5.5 Health

Those living in direct provision were entitled to medical-card costs such as GP visits and prescription drugs. However, all additional costs (such as non-prescription medicines for the children) had to be paid for out of the allowance of €19.10.

Some of the women said that because of the cramped conditions in both the houses and the hostel, there was a real danger of infections spreading and they needed to buy household disinfectant and cleaners to ensure their own space was clean and hygienic.

3.4.5.6 Children and poverty

In general, the respondents did not feel optimistic for the future of their children. The longer they spent in direct provision, the more difficult they felt it would be for their children to integrate into the wider community. One woman remarked that 'by the time we get our papers, the damage is done to the children'. Some families can spend up to six years in the asylum-seeking process and the children may never have had any sense of independence and little exposure to the community for a large proportion of their lives.

Overall, the feeling among respondents was that they were marginalised and ghettoised, disempowered and isolated. One observed ironically: 'I did not come here because I was living in poverty, but now I am.'

The perceptions and experiences of these women was borne out by professionals working locally. When asked which groups might be most at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Ireland today, the coordinator of a CDP responded as follows:

At the moment for me, it would be children of asylum seekers. I think they, in all of Ireland, I think they are the most vulnerable and at risk.

A colleague agreed:

It's horrendous, I actually think it's horrendous how the families have to live, it's horrendous. I just can't believe that this nation has allowed that to happen. They are so removed from every... if you're talking about poverty and how far removed people are from the access to the most basic kind of stuff, of normal everyday life, it's like they live on a different planet.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings from four case studies of communities in different parts of Ireland, in which local residents (young people and adults) and people working at local level in a professional or voluntary capacity expressed their views on policy and provision relating to child poverty. The case studies were conducted shortly before the onset of the economic crisis in 2008 (certainly before its extent and depth became clear) and the findings should be interpreted accordingly. Respondents were asked to identify areas or aspects of policy and provision which worked well or made a positive difference, as well as difficulties, problems or gaps that needed to be addressed.

In relation to positive areas or aspects, the main findings were:

- some respondents thought that there was good information about services and entitlements, especially from Citizen's Information Services;
- most thought that the increases in child income supports in recent years had made a positive difference;
- the Money Advice and Budgeting Service was seen as a very valuable support;
- for many people the Community Employment Scheme and other employment and training initiatives provided a 'stepping stone' which helped them to 'break the cycle' of poverty;
- in some areas there had been very positive experiences of improvements in housing and in the local environment;
- a range of community-based services for children, young people and families were warmly praised by local residents and were generally regarded as providing services and supports without which their lives would be extremely difficult.

The main problems and gaps identified were:

- persistent material deprivation for significant numbers of people, with ongoing difficulties 'making ends meet' or paying bills, living in inadequate housing or being homeless, and experiencing severe related health problems (mental and/or physical);
- the low self-image and self-esteem affecting people of all ages who experienced poverty;
- difficulties relating to the availability, accessibility and cost of childcare;
- 'traps' and disincentives whereby taking up training or employment opportunities might lead to being financially worse off;

- insufficient or inadequate accessible healthcare at local level and particular difficulties relating to areas such as mental health services, psychological assessment, speech and language therapy;
- literacy problems, education costs and difficulties of access and progression in education and training;
- lack of adequate and appropriate play and leisure facilities for children and young people, including cultural, sporting and youth work opportunities;
- the need for additional support for families and households as well as individuals;
- insufficient coordination and integration at policy and administrative level, although many good examples of partnership working at local level were identified by both professionals and local residents.

As regards the groups most affected by poverty, the findings of this study were, not surprisingly, in line with other Irish and European research. In the participating case study sites, particular attention was drawn to lone parents, Travellers, rural dwellers and asylum seekers. It was also emphasised by some respondents that working class neighbourhoods and communities were more likely to experience poverty and that this class dimension is the central explanatory factor rather than other differences between individuals, families and households.

Part 4 – Assessment of the Irish Institutional and Policy Framework for Preventing and Reducing Child Poverty and Social Exclusion

In Part 4 we present an assessment of Ireland's overall approach to preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion. In the assessment we used the framework and questions developed in Part 2 of the report. However, given resource constraints, it was not possible to undertake a full assessment of all five pillars identified in the framework. Thus, in view of the importance of ensuring an effective overall approach to the issue of child poverty and social exclusion, we chose to focus most of our assessment on the first two pillars: the effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements and the quality of the overall strategic approach. We also made a 'broad brush' assessment of the third pillar, effectiveness of key policy areas. However, more detailed research than was possible in this project would have been required to fully examine the effectiveness of each individual policy area and the extent to which they were mutually reinforcing. In this Part we did not make a separate assessment of the pillar on ensuring effective delivery as this had been addressed (at least from the perspective of people at local level) in the analysis of local case studies in Part 3. No assessment has been made of the final pillar on effective monitoring and reporting.

Our assessment was made, first by identifying the main institutional arrangements in place and the key policy documents outlining Ireland's approaches to preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion.⁴⁹ These were then compared to best practice identified from the EU's Social Inclusion Process (see Part 2). The assessment was informed by insights gained from the interviews, focus groups and observations at local level (see Part 3), by findings from a number of recent Irish studies (e.g. Daly 2007 and Kilkelly 2007), and by reports from a wide range of organisations active in the area of child poverty and children's rights (e.g. Barnardos, Children's Rights Alliance and One Parent Exchange Network). We also undertook seven in-depth interviews with strategically placed senior actors in the field of child poverty and social exclusion to test and refine our initial conclusions. Four interviews were with people involved in policy formulation and implementation in the statutory sector and three were with people involved in senior management and direction of agencies in key non-governmental organisations. So as to preserve anonymity and confidentiality (which we considered vital to having frank discussions about matters which are sometimes sensitive), we decided not to use significant verbatim quotation from these interviews. Nonetheless, the insights gleaned from these interviews were very helpful in informing our interpretation of the findings from the other strands of this research and in helping us to refine our assessment of the Irish institutional and policy framework. (See Appendix 2 for a list of those interviewed.)

⁴⁹ Ireland's increased focus in recent years on children in general and child poverty in particular is reflected in a number of key policy documents: *Programme for Government 2007–2012*; *Towards 2016* (Ireland's social partnership agreement); *National Development Plan 2007–2013*; *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016*; *National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010*; and *National Children's Strategy 2000–2010*.

4.1 Effectiveness of political, institutional and governance arrangements

The importance of having effective and comprehensive political, institutional and governance arrangements for preventing and tackling the poverty and social exclusion of children is highlighted from the analysis of the EU experience in Part 2. There are six aspects to this: political leadership, child poverty mainstreaming, effective policy coordination, mobilisation of actors, involvement of children, and adequate and timely data and analysis. Ireland's performance in relation to each of these is assessed below.

4.1.1 Political leadership

The importance of strong political leadership on issues affecting children is a key finding from the EU research. Such leadership has become much more evident in Ireland since the decision in 2005 to appoint a Minister for Children and to establish the Office of the Minister for Children (OMC) within the Department of Health and Children. (The remit of the Minister has since been extended to include Youth Affairs and the Office is now the OMCYA.) The significance of this appointment is increased as, although a junior minister post, the Minister attends cabinet meetings, thus ensuring that children's issues are kept at the centre of government policy making.

On the issue of poverty and social exclusion in general, the existence of a National Action Plan on Social Inclusion and of a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development is evidence that there is a fairly high political priority and significant leadership given to issues of poverty and social exclusion in Irish policy making. The Committee, chaired by the Taoiseach and composed of the relevant Ministers, gives overall strategic direction to the development of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion and ensures that their implementation is regularly monitored and promoted at the highest level.

The *Programme for Government 2007–2012* (Government of Ireland 2007b) devotes a section to Children, and within that a specific subsection on Tackling Childhood Disadvantage and many measures that will contribute to addressing child poverty and social exclusion. However, it is striking that there are no specific references to child poverty or social exclusion and no clear overall or systematic strategy for addressing this issue. Indeed, in the document as a whole the word poverty is used only three times (in relation to fuel poverty, poverty proofing and cross-border innovation funding), whereas disadvantage is used 18 times, though only once specifically referring to 'disadvantaged children' – more often 'disadvantaged' is used to refer to measures targeting disadvantaged areas or communities or people coming from those areas.

The issue of child poverty also features prominently in a number of key policy documents mapping out Ireland's future policy direction (see Box 4.1). Particularly relevant in this regard are: *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006b), Ireland's social partnership agreement; the *National Development Plan 2007–2013* (Government of Ireland 2007a) and the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016* (Office for Social Inclusion 2007). Then, more specifically, there is the *National Children's Strategy* (Government of Ireland 2000).

Ireland's model of social partnership, which seeks to build consensus on the key issues facing Irish society, provides a key context for the development of policies in relation to poverty and social inclusion in general and in relation to children in

particular. *Towards 2016*, Ireland's ten-year social partnership agreement, is based on a lifecycle framework to address key social challenges which individuals face at each stage of life and thus includes a specific focus on children.

Box 4.1: Social Partnership's vision for Irish children until 2016

The parties to this agreement share a vision of an Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.

Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is committed to its implementation in our laws and policies.

To achieve this vision, the Government and social partners will work together over the next ten years towards the following long-term goals for children in Ireland:

- Every child should grow up in a family with access to sufficient resources, supports and services, to nurture and care for the child, and foster the child's development and full and equal participation in society;
- Every family should be able to access childcare services which are appropriate to the circumstances and needs of their children;
- Every child should leave primary school literate and numerate;
- Every student should complete a senior cycle or equivalent programme, (including ICT) appropriate to their capacity and interests;
- Every child should have access to world-class health, personal social services and suitable accommodation;
- Every child should have access to quality play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood, and;
- Every child and young person will have access to appropriate participation in local and national decision-making.

Towards 2016 (Government of Ireland 2006b, p. 41)

The issue of child poverty is specifically named in *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006b) as a key concern. For instance, under income support in the section on children, a number of actions are listed with the aim 'to make further progress towards the objective of eliminating child poverty' (p. 45). There are many references to supporting children in disadvantaged areas and the plan stresses that the Office for Social Inclusion, as the Government Office with overarching responsibility for tackling poverty, will 'work closely with the OMC (Office of the Minister for Children) in promoting the social inclusion agenda in relation to children and their families and in identifying and driving strategic responses in this area' (p. 48).

The *National Development Plan 2007–2013* (Government of Ireland 2007a) contains for the first time a specific chapter on social inclusion which, in line with the social partnership agreement (*Towards 2016*), follows the lifecycle approach. In the NDP the Government identified a number of high-level social inclusion goals to achieve the overall objective of reducing consistent poverty. There are three specific goals in relation to children:

- ensure that targeted pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan.
- reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. The target is to halve the proportion from the current 27%–30% to less than 15% by 2016;
- work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20–24 completing upper second-level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013.

Building on and complementing these high-level goals, the chapter identifies a number of major objectives in relation to children. These are to:

- address the shortages in supply of childcare places by creating an additional 50,000 places by 2010, with subsequent targets to be set after the 2010 Mid-Term Review of the Plan;
- provide for the protection and care of children at risk;
- provide support for recreational facilities for children;
- help children with special needs in the education system to reach their full potential;
- provide those from disadvantaged backgrounds with the education, skills and training necessary for employment and active participation in society.

The chapter also provides details of some €12.3 billion expenditure towards tackling poverty and social exclusion among children over the period of the plan.

The *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016* (NAPSI) is also built around the lifecycle approach and has a specific focus on children. It acknowledges the challenge of children living in consistent poverty and sets four high-level goals, three in relation to education (which match goals set out in the *National Development Plan* as described above) and one in relation to income support. These are:

- ensure that targeted pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan.
- reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. The target is to halve the proportion from the current 27%–30% to less than 15% by 2016;
- work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20–24 completing upper second-level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013;
- maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33%–35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate over the course of this Plan and review child income supports aimed at assisting children in families on low income.

In addition to education and income it also covers a wide range of other social inclusion dimensions. There are targets in relation to affordable childcare, health (including mental health), food poverty and obesity, drug misuse, child protection, homelessness and youth justice. However, the plan lacks any overall specific quantified objective in relation to the eradication of child poverty. It reads more like an accumulation of a range of rather disparate measures rather than a dynamic driver of efforts to end child poverty. Our interviews with a range of different officials and

NGOs reinforced our perception that the NAPSI does not reflect a very strong and urgent political dynamic in relation to child poverty

The other key document that demonstrates a high-level political commitment to the needs of children is the *National Children's Strategy* for the period 2000–2010. The Strategy acknowledges that child poverty is among the main areas of children's concerns and needs which must be addressed and states that 'Children in poverty, homeless youth and children in crisis will continue to be a priority' (Government of Ireland 2000, p. 121). The approach is much broader than a strategy to prevent and reduce child poverty. However, many of the measures in the Strategy will undoubtedly contribute to this goal. Indeed, the issue of poverty is addressed quite systematically throughout the different sections of the Strategy.

Overall it can be concluded that the issue of children's well-being in general is now being given quite a high degree of political priority in Irish policy making. This is reflected in the key policy documents that set the direction for policy development until 2016. However, in relation to child poverty and the social exclusion of children specifically, a stronger political acknowledgement of the continuing seriousness of the problem and a more focused political approach could be helpful.

4.1.2 Child poverty mainstreaming

European experience shows that an important key to making progress is putting in place effective arrangements for mainstreaming a concern with the social inclusion of children into all areas of national (and local) policy-making and into budgetary decision-making. It is clear that over the last decade Ireland has made significant progress in mainstreaming the needs of children across different policy areas. In particular, the creation of the Office of the Minister for Children has greatly increased a concern with children's issues within the policy system. It brings together the key areas of policy for children's services (other than health and school-age education services) in one structure. Mainstreaming is further reinforced by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs being given specific statutory delegated functions in each of the three departments involved — Health and Children, Education and Science, and Justice, Equality and Law Reform. However, other key departments, such as the Department of Social and Family Affairs, remain outside this coordination. The adoption of a lifecycle approach to Irish policy making in *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006b) is also contributing to putting the issue of children on the agenda of a broad range of departments.

The work of the Office for Social Inclusion and the introduction of Social Impact Assessments have also contributed significantly to mainstreaming a concern with poverty and social exclusion across the policy system. This is further enhanced by the designation of officials in a range of departments with responsibility for social inclusion issues. However, this does not appear to have led to eradication of child poverty being made a policy objective per se in all relevant government departments. Nor do all departments proof policies for their potential impact on child poverty and their contribution to the social inclusion of children.

In terms of the budgetary process, there has been a significant increase in expenditure on child income support. However, it is not apparent that there has been a systematic process for prioritising spending on children at risk of poverty and social exclusion in all relevant policy areas.

4.1.3 *Effective policy coordination*

Another lesson from the EU process is the importance of having effective arrangements for coordinating policies and action on the inclusion of children horizontally (i.e. across departments and agencies – both at national and local levels) and vertically (i.e. between levels of governance). In this regard it is important to acknowledge that there has been significant progress over the last decade in introducing institutional reform in children's policy and services in order to ensure better coordination and integration. The creation of the Office of the Minister of Children and the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) has brought a more coordinated approach to the development, implementation and monitoring of policies for children and, to a certain extent, to policies to address child poverty and social exclusion.

The National Children's Office (NCO) was established as part of the National Children's Strategy, and was subsequently incorporated within the Office of the Minister for Children, which, as already mentioned, was established in 2005 and headed up by a Minister of State for Children. The new Office was designed to bring together (in addition to the former NCO functions) the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (formerly in the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform), the Early Years Education functions of the Department of Education and Science, and the Youth Justice Service of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (established in 2007). The last two – the 'early years' and youth justice initiatives – formally remained the responsibility of the Ministers for Education and Justice respectively, but were to be 'co-located' within the 'strategic environment' of the Office of the Minister for Children. Then in 2008 it was announced that the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education and Science was also to be integrated within this office and the name expanded to Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). This meant that the OMCYA was now responsible for the implementation of the Youth Work Act 2001 as well as the Children Act 2001. It was also responsible for the National Children's Strategy and the National Childcare Investment Programme.

Coordination is reflected in the existence of the National Children's Strategy and the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. Coordination is further ensured by a number of institutional arrangements. First, there is the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, Drugs and Rural Development. The OMCYA submits an annual progress report to this Cabinet Committee about measures taken by Government departments to implement relevant actions of the National Children's Strategy. Second, at national level, there is an Implementation Group for the National Children's Strategy, chaired by the OMCYA and involving the relevant Government departments, the Health Service Executive (HSE), representatives of local authorities, the education sector and other key agencies as required. The Implementation Group links with the Expert Advisory Group on Children, being established by the HSE. Third, there is the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion (SOGSI), which maintains a broad overview of social inclusion issues, brings emerging issues to the attention of the Cabinet and ensures coordination at senior official level (Assistant Secretary) on issues of social inclusion. In addition there are the NDP Monitoring Committee and the Partnership Steering Group, which have an ongoing oversight role in relation to implementation of the lifecycle framework, providing an opportunity for engagement between the social partners in relation to progress under the NAP/inclusion, NDP and other relevant strategies within the lifecycle framework.

There have also been important developments to improve coordination between different levels of governance. In relation to coordination of children's services at local level, *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006b) contains a commitment to

establish a multi-agency children's committee within each City/County Development Boards (CDB). At the time of writing, these committees were being piloted in 4 local authorities before being extended more widely. These committees are chaired by the HSE, which is considered best placed to drive this initiative to achieve coordinated and integrated services. More broadly, the work of the Local Government Anti-Poverty Learning Network and the Local Government Social Inclusion Steering Group (LGSISG) supports the linkages between national and local levels on social inclusion issues and the work of social inclusion units at local authority level. The NDP 2007–2013 and the NAPSI also recognise the importance of improved linkages and integration of existing structures. Both plans include commitments to support the work of the CDBs, which, together with the Social Inclusion Measures Groups (SIMGs), are key structures in ensuring better coordination and delivery of policies at local level.

All in all, there is now in place a set of quite elaborate structures for coordinating policies and action in relation to children and, to some extent, child poverty and social exclusion. However, from the perspective of child poverty some significant problems remain to be addressed. While our interviews with key actors suggest that the work of the OMCYA is beginning to have some impact in relation to improving coordination of children's services, there is no specific focus on child poverty. The respective roles of the OMCYA and OSI in relation to child poverty and social exclusion seem somewhat unclear, and the coordination and cooperation between both offices on this issue appear rather passive and minimalist. Our interviews with key actors suggest that the impact of the OSI in driving the child poverty agenda forward across the policy system is quite weak. The OSI appears to lack the status, resources and drive to achieve really effective coordination on the issue of child poverty on a consistent basis. Coordination seems to be limited to bringing together the work of different departments and agencies in documents such as the NAPSI (2007–2016) and NAP/inclusion. However, this does not seem to add any significant value. The OSI does not seem to be very successful in dynamically bringing together departments and agencies either in preparing a comprehensive strategy which ensures that efforts are mutually reinforcing or in solving particular problems in a collective manner. In our interviews we were continually told about the 'silo' approach by departments and agencies (i.e. departments and agencies concentrating on doing their own thing).

Efforts are also being made to improve coordination of services on the ground. As the case studies in Part 3 illustrate, there is still often a lack of integrated use of resources or of long-term planning of services, despite the best efforts of professionals at local level. As part of its efforts to promote integration and coordination, the Office of the Minister for Children (2007a) developed and published *Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* with accompanying documents outlining 'reflective questions' for 'front-line' service managers and practitioners, for HSE senior managers and for policy makers (Office of the Minister for Children 2007b, 2007c, 2007d). It also took the initiative of establishing Children's Services Committees within each county/city development board area; as already mentioned, four committees were set up in the first instance, with the intention that they will be established throughout the country in due course. However, at the time of writing their impact was still to be demonstrated and the challenge is enormous. It took two years for the first four committees to get to the stage of having strategies, and these were in areas selected because there was already quite good cooperation and commitment. There must be some doubts whether this latest effort to solve the problem of the fragmentation of services in Ireland, and the very 'siloed' approach by many agencies, has a strong enough statutory basis to make a real impact. In particular, it is not clear if the Children's Services Committees, as they are rolled out

to all City/County Development Boards, will have sufficient authority to 'knock heads together' at local level and to involve all the relevant NGO actors working in partnership with statutory agencies. As one senior policy maker commented to us, trying to achieve effective policy coordination at local level may be 'whistling in the dark' until we get effective local government structures. Other constraints are the rather negative experiences recorded in the case studies in Part 3 in relation to social workers, and also the comments of several of the key people we interviewed, who raised serious questions about the capacity and resources of the HSE to provide an effective service to all children and families at risk and to integrate their efforts with other agencies at local level.

On the specific issue of child poverty, it is surprising that the work of the Children's Services Committees on the one hand and efforts to establish local government anti-poverty strategies and social inclusion units on the other have gone ahead quite separately. Neither of the government offices behind these initiatives, OSI and OMYCA, appears to have given much thought to how they can reinforce each other.

4.1.4 Mobilisation of actors

The importance of ensuring effective arrangements for mobilising and involving all actors concerned with the well-being of children in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies (e.g. social services, NGOs, parents, academics) is another important lesson from EU experience. In this regard Ireland's social partnership arrangements provide an important method for involving key actors in the development of policies, particularly in the area of social inclusion. In particular the Social Inclusion Forum, which is jointly organised by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and the OSI, provides an opportunity for members of the public and representatives of the community and voluntary sector to inform and comment on the implementation of the Government's social inclusion policies. More particularly the preparation of both the NPSI and the NCS involved very widespread consultations with and involvement of relevant actors. The structures described in the preceding section provide a means of ongoing participation in implementation at local level. The *Towards 2016* Partnership Steering Group also provides an ongoing mechanism for the community and voluntary pillar to be involved in the management and review of progress of the ten-year agreement. However, the preparation of the 2008–2010 National Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, which includes Ireland's National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, appears to have had only a limited and not very systematic and widespread involvement of organisations concerned with children, even though child poverty is one of its key priority themes.

4.1.5 Involving children

As we have seen in Part 2, an increasingly strong finding of the EU process has been to stress the importance of involving the views of children, particularly those experiencing poverty and social exclusion, in the development and implementation of policies. As we outline below, important developments have been initiated in this regard in Ireland in the last decade but there are also still some significant weaknesses.

The Ombudsman for Children is playing an important role in promoting the idea of consulting children and ensuring their participation in the development of policies that affect them. Initiatives such as the selection of youth advisers to the Ombudsman and the Big Ballot, involving consultations with some 69,000 children in primary and post-primary schools, Youthreach centres and Traveller training centres, have been

examples of the value of such participation and the sort of processes that are necessary to achieve it. However, as officials in the Ombudsman's office stress, participation and consultation are not just a matter for the Ombudsman for Children – 'everyone should do it'. Thus the Ombudsman plays an important role in promoting the idea and advising departments and agencies on how to do it.

Under the auspices of the OMCYA there is a growing emphasis on promoting the participation of children and young people in civic society. This is in line with Goal 1 of the National Children's Strategy, which states that 'children will have a voice in matters which affect them and their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity'. The OMCYA takes a lead role in ensuring that children and young people have a voice in the design, delivery and monitoring of services and policies that affect their lives, at national and local level. In this regard the OMCYA has worked particularly to ensure the establishment or consolidation of four key structures: local youth councils or Comhairlí na nÓg; the national youth parliament, Dáil na nÓg; student councils; and the OMCYA Children and Young People's Forum. However, important and encouraging though these initiatives are, such types of structures tend to involve articulate children with greater capacity and opportunity to participate and thus children from disadvantaged backgrounds and growing up in poverty tend to be under-represented. So there is also a need for other initiatives that aim especially to reach children from more disadvantaged backgrounds. It is not surprising therefore that there is little evidence of the OMCYA's consultation initiatives leading to a specific focus on the issue of poverty and social exclusion. To address this, one possibility would be to give the Children and Young People's Forum a specific role in the ongoing monitoring of the NAPSI and NAP/inclusion. Another idea might be to put the issue of child poverty on the agenda of Dáil na nÓg.

In spite of the progress made by the Ombudsman and the OMCYA there is little evidence that the voices of children have been taken into account in developing or implementing the NAPSI. This is in spite of the fact that the NAPSI makes children one of its key issues. The OSI has not sought any advice from the Ombudsman on how to develop appropriate consultation procedures and there does not appear to have been any contact between the OSI and the Ombudsman on these matters. This remains an area in urgent need of development. The case studies in Part 3 also highlight the lack of opportunities for children to participate in decisions that affect them, while also confirming the benefit of such participation for children and young people (and the concomitant benefits for their communities) when they are provided with appropriate opportunities.

In our interviews with key informants it was stressed that consulting with children needs to be handled very carefully so that it does not become tokenistic. As Jillian Turnhout, chief executive of the Children's Rights Alliance (CRA), said to us, it is very important to be clear why it is being done and how it is being done. An important model from which others could learn when developing policies to tackle child poverty and social exclusion is that of the CRA's support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in preparing a report (*Our Voices, Our Realities*) to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Children's Rights Alliance, 2006b) and presenting it to the Committee, and the way the Committee listened to those children.

4.1.6 Ensuring adequate and timely data and analysis

One of the most significant lessons from the EU approach is the need to ensure timely and good quality data and analysis if effective policies are to be developed and if their impact is to be monitored. In our assessment of Ireland's approach one of the

most encouraging aspects is the systematic efforts being made to build a better understanding of the situation of children in Ireland. The work of the research division of the OMCYA is particularly important in this regard (see Box 4.2 below).

Box 4.2: Research Division of OMCYA

The main goal of the Research Division of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) is to facilitate the achievement of a better understanding of how children grow up in Ireland, including both their individual and shared needs.

There are four key objectives for achieving this goal:

1. To build up a more coherent understanding of children's development and needs among those working with children;
2. To develop an evidence-based approach to decision-making at all levels down to the point of service delivery;
3. To improve the commissioning, production and dissemination of research and information;
4. To improve evaluation and monitoring of children's service.

Specific measures being taken under this Goal include:

- commissioning and overseeing a national longitudinal study of children;
- developing a children's research programme;
- capacity building in children's research;
- improving information systems about children's lives;
- developing a national set of child well-being indicators; and
- compiling a State of the Nation's Children report.

Source: website of Department of Children and Youth Affairs (last accessed June 2011)

The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland, *Growing Up in Ireland*, is an especially important development. The aim of the study is to examine the factors that contribute to or undermine the well-being of children in contemporary Irish families, and, through this, contribute to the setting of effective and responsive policies relating to children and to the design of services for children and their families. The study will monitor the development of 18,000 children – a birth cohort of 10,000 and a 9-year-old cohort of 8,000 children – yielding important information about each significant transition throughout their young lives. This is and will be an invaluable new source of data on the poverty and social exclusion of children.⁵⁰

Another important development is the production by the OMCYA of a State of the Nation's Children report (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs 2008). This provides a very detailed analysis of data in relation to children, based on a set of national indicators of child well-being developed after an extensive approach which put Ireland at the forefront of current European and international thinking in this area (see UNICEF 2007).

⁵⁰ For further information about the study and published reports see www.growingup.ie. See Williams et al. (2009) for the report on the lives of 9-year-olds.

Some gaps remain. For instance, more qualitative data would be useful on why some children and families cope better than others with growing up in poverty. There is a need for more sharing of data between agencies at local level to assess risks more effectively. More detailed information is needed on the particular situation of different groups of children at high risk (see 4.2.1 below). The ways in which different aspects of disadvantage interact and reinforce merit more study. However, overall, the efforts of the OMCYA to develop a comprehensive data strategy for children are very positive and should lead to many of the gaps being addressed over time. This needs to be closely aligned with the efforts of the OSI to improve research and analysis on social inclusion issues.

4.2 Quality of overall strategic approach

Another important issue that arises from the review of EU experience is the comprehensiveness and quality of the overall strategic approach to preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion. In this regard six elements were highlighted: an evidence-based approach; a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach; a focus on children's rights; a balance between universal and targeted policies; clearly established overall objectives and targets; and specific objectives and targets in relation to different policy domains, key at-risk groups and governance. Ireland's performance in relation to each of these aspects is assessed below.

4.2.1 An evidence-based approach

The EU learning strongly highlights the importance of developing a strategy based on an in-depth analysis of the key factors affecting children's well-being (material deprivation, housing, health, exposure to risk and risk behaviour, social participation and family environment, education, and local environment). Our research indicates that overall Ireland's approach to the development of policies for children is quite strongly based on an in-depth analysis of available data. This is evident in two recent official reports: *A Social Portrait of Children in Ireland* (Dunne et al. 2007), commissioned from the ESRI by the Office for Social Inclusion, and *State of the Nation's Children* (2008) prepared by the Office of the Minister for Children. Both reports demonstrate a commitment to a multidimensional and comprehensive analysis of the situation of children. *State of the Nation's Children* (2008) is based on work undertaken by the Office of the Minister for Children to develop a national set of child well-being indicators for Ireland (Hanafin and Brooks 2005) and on a holistic understanding of children's lives. The commitment to develop a strategic approach based on high-quality data and analysis is further strengthened by the development of the National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (see section 4.1 above). However, there remain some very important data gaps, as Ursula Kilkelly emphasises in a report for the Ombudsman for Children:

The connection between the lack of data, and the lack of awareness about children's rights issues among children, parents and those working with and for children, is clear. Lack of data leads to the absence of an evidence base and frustrates a child-focus to matters of policy and practice. In this regard, serious problems currently exist with the lack of data on separated children, trafficking, children in the care and young justice systems and other vulnerable children, and research is urgently required to establish this evidence base, especially in areas like immigration where a child-focused policy is absent. (Kilkelly 2007, p. 167)

4.2.2 *A comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach*

The EU experience highlights the need to develop a comprehensive and multidimensional strategic approach to preventing and reducing child poverty and social exclusion which involves and integrates a broad range of different policy areas. As the main Irish policy document specifically setting out a strategy to address poverty and social exclusion of children the NAPSI 2007–2016 (Office for Social Inclusion 2007) adopts a reasonably comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach, with specific sections on income support, services (early childhood development and care, health, nutrition, education, Traveller children, youth homelessness, and sport and leisure) and a series of innovative measures (covering child participation, Community Training Centres, Youth Justice, Youth Risk from Drug Misuse). However, the High Level Goals set in the NAPSI in relation to children are limited to just education (three goals covering pre-school education, literacy and percentage completing upper second-level education) and child income support. Apart from homelessness, housing and environmental issues affecting children are not specifically addressed. The section of the NAPSI on children acknowledges that ‘research in Ireland and internationally confirms that poverty rates for children in jobless families are substantially higher than in those where one or both parents work. Therefore, policies that strongly support parents into employment will have a major impact on child poverty’ (p. 31), but does not elaborate on those policies in this section. However, elsewhere in the NAPSI (i.e. the section on People of Working Age) the critical issue of the employment of parents of children at risk of poverty is indirectly addressed. There is a specific section on lone parents and this emphasises giving priority consideration to ‘extending the National Employment Action Plan process to include lone parents and other parents on low income while funding from the Community Services programme, which targets lone parents among others, is to be increased’ (p. 46). However, in a strategic approach to child poverty there needs to be a stronger integration of employment policies for parents with other policy areas.

Overall it is not very evident from the NAPSI that systematic consideration has been given to the integration of policies and programmes across the different providers and levels of provision in order to achieve a really multi-dimensional and integrated approach. The plan seems to be more a collection of policies from different policy areas rather than a systematic and thought-out strategy to prevent and eradicate child poverty and the social exclusion of children.

4.2.3 *Children’s rights*

The importance of underpinning efforts to tackle child poverty and social exclusion with a strong focus on the rights of the child as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is a strong theme in the EU approach. Historically, a rights-based approach to social inclusion policies has not been a strong feature of Irish policy-making. However, particularly in the context of children, a rights-based approach is beginning to gain more attention. As Mary Daly comments in her analysis of Irish policies on child poverty, ‘Ireland’s anti-poverty strategy around children is located within a general approach that emphasises children’s political rights and participation’ (Daly 2007, p. 4) She goes on to conclude:

Judging from the latest documents (the NSSPSI, NAP inclusion and *Towards 2016*), elements of a social rights approach as regards children can be said to be being put in place. For example, the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion, although it does not explicitly use the language of social rights and does not go so far as to give children specific guarantees, places children in a societal context

and sets out a series of long-term goals in regard to their welfare. These are specifically: growing up in a family with access to sufficient resources, supports and services, leaving primary school literate and numerate, completing a senior educational cycle, having access to world-class health, personal social services and accommodation; as well as quality play, sport, recreation and cultural activities and appropriate participation in local and national decision making. (Daly 2007, p. 10)

On the other hand, in terms of child poverty and social exclusion, the only specific reference in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016* to children's rights is in the vision statement in the section on children where it acknowledges that 'Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is committed to its implementation in our laws and policies' (Office for Social Inclusion 2008, p. 30). Furthermore, while there are many measures included in the plan that are relevant to children's rights, there is no evidence of a systematic children's rights approach. Nor is there any evidence of an effort to link the reporting and monitoring processes around the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the NAPSI process.

A key step forward in developing a rights-based approach to policies in relation to children was the adoption of the National Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland 2000), already referred to above. As the then Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, commented in his foreword to the Strategy: 'Rooted in the positive vision of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it represents a different way of doing business, which will, if we all work together, help us become a society which fully values and respects its children.' The strategy acknowledges that:

Children deserve to be highly valued for the unique contribution they make through just being children. Respect for children as a global ideal has been affirmed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Ireland ratified in 1992. The publication of this Strategy is a major initiative to progress the implementation of the Convention in Ireland. (Government of Ireland 2000, p. 6)

The strategy recognises children as individual actors and treats them as a group with interests that need to be reflected in the public policy agenda. It emphasises that they should have a stronger voice in matters that affect them. This has led to the consolidation or establishment of structures to enhance the participation of children in governance issues, such as those mentioned above: Comhairlí na nÓg (local youth councils), Dáil na nÓg (national youth parliament), student councils and the OMCYA Children and Young People's Forum.

Undoubtedly, awareness of children's rights has also been enhanced by the regular monitoring and reporting process that is required under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child process. The preparation of Ireland's national reports on implementation of the Convention to the UN Committee and the Committee's subsequent recommendations have increased awareness of children's rights in policy-making circles. However, this reporting process has also highlighted that although progress has been made in many areas, there is much still to do to strengthen a rights-based approach and make it more explicit. This is very evident from the Children's Rights Alliance's second shadow report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Children's Rights Alliance 2006a). Many of its criticisms are reflected in the concluding observations of the Committee (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2006). This highlights areas in which Ireland has made progress but also many areas where considerable progress is still needed. In the context of this research it is notable that the committee specifically raised concerns about the

persistent high level of child poverty and made recommendations in this regard (see Box 4.3).

Box 4.3: Recommendations of UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in relation to child poverty in Ireland (2006)

56. The Committee recognizes that the favorable economic development has contributed to the reduction of the overall poverty level. The Committee remains however concerned that a number of children in particularly vulnerable situations are living in households where the income remains significantly lower than the national median income.
57. The Committee recommends that the State party:
- (a) Effectively implement its National Anti-Poverty Strategy and strengthen its support to families living in economic hardship in order to ensure that poverty is reduced and children are protected against the negative impact of economic hardship on their development;
 - (b) Introduce a supplement to the existing universal child benefit payments as an additional and targeted allowance to assist the families which experience highest levels of poverty;
 - (c) Implement fully existing policies and strategies and increase budgetary allocations for and subsidization of services, including childcare, healthcare and housing, for families with children who are particularly vulnerable; and
 - (d) Increase investments in social and affordable housing for low-income families.

(UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2006, pp 12-13)

Another important development helping to enhance a focus on children's rights was the establishment of the Ombudsman for Children in 2002. This has increased pressure on policy makers to think about children's rights and what is best for young people. However, the issue of child poverty has not, to date, been a major feature of the work of the Ombudsman and a more forceful assertion of the links between child poverty and the denial of children's rights would be helpful. In this regard one research report for the Ombudsman by Ursula Kilkelly emphasised the importance of child poverty as a barrier to children's rights and urged the Ombudsman to make it one of her priorities to 'highlight, from a rights-based perspective, the complex problems faced by particularly vulnerable groups, including those identified throughout the report, and children living in poverty and at risk of abuse and neglect' (Kilkelly 2007, p. 179).

Our interviews with the Ombudsman for Children's office and the director of the OSI revealed that there had been no input by the Ombudsman into the preparation or monitoring of the NAPSI in spite of its focus on children. This highlights the need to develop closer cooperation between those working on children's rights and those working on child poverty issues.

Undoubtedly, strengthening children's rights in the Irish Constitution would be an important step toward ensuring that children's rights inform policy-making processes more consistently. This is something that the UN Committee called for in its 1998 and 2006 observations on Ireland's implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this regard, on 3 November 2006, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, announced the Government's intention to hold a referendum to strengthen the protection of children's rights in the Constitution, and a Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children was subsequently established. The

publication early in 2010 of a proposed wording which had secured unanimous agreement within the Joint Committee has made the holding of such a referendum appear much more likely. This would be a very welcome development. Many of the people interviewed for this research emphasised that recognising the rights of children in the Constitution would have an impact over time on thinking in this area. For instance, Fergus Finlay of Barnardos said that it would lead to a recognition of the importance and fragility of childhood and would increase the pressure on public policy to have regard to children. Jillian Turnhout of the Children's Rights Alliance emphasised that over time it could lead to a cultural change in relation to attitudes to children. The courts would be able to take the best interests of the child into account, and it would impact on the attitudes of civil servants.

4.2.4 Balancing universal and targeted approaches

The EU research highlighted that the most successful countries in preventing and reducing child poverty and social exclusion find an effective balance between universal and targeted policies. They tend to adopt predominantly universal approaches to the needs of children with some additional targeting when necessary. They also ensure a careful balance between prevention and alleviation. Ireland has a mixture of universal and targeted approaches but the approach often seems somewhat ad hoc and not always consistent.

In responding to the EU Social Protection Committee's 2007 Questionnaire on Poverty and Social Exclusion of Children in the EU Member States and specifically to the request to 'describe in particular the balance struck in your Member State between a universal approach covering all children and their households and a targeted approach focusing on the needs of all children identified as particularly at risk of poverty and social exclusion', the reply stated that 'Ireland has a mixture of both universal and targeted approaches aimed at addressing child poverty'. It then went on to describe the overall policy framework and key policy documents. However, it did not provide any analysis of the balance or any statement of the overall philosophy that guides it. This is probably not surprising as it is difficult to identify a clear and consistent philosophy behind Ireland's choice of universal and targeted policies. Mary Daly, in her 2007 analysis of Ireland's policies on child poverty, says:

Ireland tends to move between generalist and targeted approaches. Both have prevailed historically but the thrust of policy in recent years has been towards increasing the support for all families with children regardless of their income level. While this is welcome, one can question whether it is a sufficient response to the relatively high level of child poverty that prevails in Ireland (whether measured by a consistent poverty or income poverty definition). The income targets for low-income families with children for example are rather limited and there is insufficient targeting of the childcare places and other services at poor children. (Daly 2007, p. 4)

She goes on to suggest that 'there are three "balances" that need to be reconsidered in Ireland: between giving benefits to all children as against specific "needy" children, between child-specific as against family-specific measures, between measures to combat income poverty and measures directed more broadly towards reducing inequality for example and improving access to services' (Daly 2007, p. 4).

4.2.5 Clarity of overall objectives and targets

A fundamental principle emerging from the EU research is that effective strategies involve Member States setting clear and appropriate objectives for preventing and reducing child poverty and appropriate overall quantified outcome targets for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion which are benchmarked against the best performing EU Member States. As will be seen below, Ireland has made some progress in this regard but there are still weaknesses in the Irish approach.

A clear and ambitious vision for all children has been set out in both *Towards 2016* and the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016* (see Box 4.2 above). However, when one examines the NAPS I 2007–2016 more closely, while one discovers a small number of high level goals and a lot of specific goals for different policy areas, there are no clear overall objective for preventing and reducing child poverty.

Box 4.4: 'Vision for Children in Ireland'

The vision as set out in *Towards 2016* for children in Ireland is a society where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.

Ireland has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and is committed to its implementation in our laws and policies.

To achieve this vision, the Government and social partners have pledged to work together over the next ten years towards the following long-term goals for children in Ireland:

- Every child should grow up in a family with access to sufficient resources, supports and services, to nurture and care for the child, and foster the child's development and full and equal participation in society;
- Every family should be able to access childcare services which are appropriate to the circumstances and needs of their children;
- Every child should leave primary school literate and numerate;
- Every student should complete a senior cycle or equivalent programme, (including ICT) appropriate to their capacity and interests;
- Every child should have access to world-class health, personal social services and suitable accommodation;
- Every child should have access to quality play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood; and
- Every child and young person will have access to appropriate participation in local and national decision-making.

(Office for Social Inclusion 2007, p. 30)

The lack of a clear overall objective in relation to child poverty is also reflected in the lack of an overall target to reduce child poverty or any commitment to move towards the standards of the best performing EU countries. There is an overall anti-poverty target set in the NAPS I which is 'to reduce the number of those experiencing consistent poverty to between 2% and 4% by 2012, with the aim of eliminating consistent poverty by 2016, under the revised definition' (Office for Social Inclusion

2007, p. 13). Of course this figure contains within it children, but given the still quite high level of child poverty in Ireland a specific target in relation to children would reinforce the political commitment to address child poverty.

In addition, while the use of the consistent poverty measure to set a target is well justified, the failure to also set a relative income poverty target is surprising. The NAPS I devotes some space to emphasising the ‘limitations’ of the EU’s relative income poverty measure (60% of median income). It argues that ‘it takes no account of overall living standards’, though in fact the EU Social Inclusion process has emphasised that the value of the at-risk-of-poverty threshold should always accompany the indicator of those at risk of poverty, i.e. what it means in monetary terms – purchasing power in terms of Euros.⁵¹ The NAPS I also suggests that the “at risk of poverty” indicator is not suited to making comparisons between countries at different stages of economic development’ but fails to go on to acknowledge how relevant it is given Ireland’s relatively weak performance when compared to other EU Member States with a similarly high level of economic development. Given the strong evidence of a correlation between high levels of income inequality and other aspects of poverty and social exclusion (e.g. poor health – see Farrell et al. 2008), and given the relatively high disparities Ireland’s children face compared to other wealthy EU countries, it still remains surprising that Ireland does not also set a target in this area, particularly in relation to children at risk of poverty.

In spite of being part of the EU Social Inclusion Process, there is no effort to set EU benchmarks with a view to Ireland moving towards the performance of the best performing EU Member States. In this regard the indicators that have been agreed by Member States (including Ireland) for measuring progress on tackling poverty and social inclusion, and which could have provided the basis for setting targets, are not used (Social Protection Committee 2006b, 2008a).

4.2.6 Setting specific objectives and targets

As well as overall objectives and targets the EU experience suggests that it is important for countries to underpin these with specific objectives and targets covering specific policy domains, most vulnerable groups, and governance issues. Our research shows that Ireland’s performance in this regard is mixed.

The NAPS I contains four ‘high level goals’ covering two key policy domains, three in the area of education and one in income support (see Box 4.5 below).

These high level goals set in the NAPS I are important, and goals 2–4 include concrete targets. However, there is no clear statement of the overall objective they aim to achieve in each area and how this will contribute to achieving the overall goal for reducing child poverty. Taken together the three education goals can certainly contribute to a significant reduction in educational disadvantage and early school leaving but this is not spelled out as an objective and no overall quantified outcome target is set. For instance, the agreed EU indicator covering the dimension of educational outcome and human capital formation which measures early school

⁵¹ The EU process also emphasises the importance of measuring the poverty gap, which assesses how poor people falling below a poverty threshold actually are, i.e. the intensity of poverty. The poverty gap measures the distance between the (median equivalised) income of people living below the poverty threshold and the value of that poverty threshold in terms of purchasing power.

leaving could have been used.⁵² Similarly, on income support, while there is a clear commitment on the value of child income support, it does not spell out what the overall objective is in terms of ensuring that all children have an income sufficient to lift them out of poverty or set a target in this regard. Again, the EU commonly agreed indicators could be relevant here.

Box 4.5: Four High Level Goals

Goal 1: Education

Ensure that targeted pre-school education is provided to children from urban primary school communities covered by the Delivering Equality of Opportunity;

Goal 2: Education

Reduce the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties in primary schools serving disadvantaged communities. The target is to halve the proportion from the current 27%–30% to less than 15% by 2016;

Goal 3: Education

Work to ensure that the proportion of the population aged 20–24 completing upper second-level education or equivalent will exceed 90% by 2013;

Goal 4: Income Support

Maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33%–35% of the minimum adult social welfare payment rate over the course of this Plan and review child income supports aimed at assisting children in families on low income.

(Office for Social Inclusion 2007, p. 14)

4.3 Assessment of key policy areas⁵³

Part 1 of this report, in comparing Ireland with other EU Member States, has highlighted particular policy areas where more attention is needed (e.g. increasing income from employment and reducing the number of jobless households; increasing lone parents' links with the labour market; maintaining social transfers to families with children; and enhancing enabling services and supporting those children at high risk such as children with a disability, Traveller children and immigrant children). Part 3 of the report has highlighted policy areas which are seen as helpful to those directly experiencing poverty and social exclusion and has also highlighted important gaps in support. Part 2 of this report highlights the findings from the EU Social Inclusion Process that, within an overall comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach, it is important to ensure the appropriateness and effectiveness of the measures in three key policy domains: income, access to key services (i.e. housing, education, healthcare, childcare, child protection), and opportunities to participate in sport, recreation and leisure activities and in cultural life. While it is beyond the scope of this

⁵² Share of persons aged 18 to 24 who have only lower secondary education (their highest level of education or training attained is 0, 1 or 2 according to the 1997 International Standard Classification of Education – ISCED 97) and have not received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (Social Protection Committee 2006b).

⁵³ This assessment predates the 2010 Budget Measures Policy Changes announced in December 2010.

research project to give a detailed analysis of each of these areas, in the following sections we give an overall assessment of policies in relation to adequate income and access to key services.

4.3.1 Policies to ensure an adequate income⁵⁴

4.3.1.1 Income from social transfers

In Part 1 we reported that social transfers in Ireland have played an increasing role in recent years in reducing child poverty levels. Indeed, Ireland is one of the EU Member States where they have a high impact in this regard.

The most significant measure taken in recent years to support families with children has been the very substantial real increase in Child Benefit rates. Qualified Child Increases are made to persons in receipt of a social welfare payment in respect of their dependent children under the age of 18 (or 22 if the child is in full-time education). The Early Childcare Supplement was introduced in 2006 and is intended to help parents of children under the age of six to meet their childcare needs. The Supplement is a direct, non-taxable payment made at the end of each quarter for each child under 6 years of age for whom Child Benefit is paid. The Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance provides a one-off payment to eligible families to assist with the extra costs when their children start school each autumn. The allowance is intended as a contribution towards meeting the full cost of school clothing and footwear. The rate of payment increased by 50% in 2007. The One-Parent Family Payment is a means-tested payment made to men and women who are bringing up a child without the support of a partner. Payment is made up of a personal rate and extra amounts for qualified children. Recipients may also qualify for extra benefits including Fuel Allowance and Family Income Supplement. The upper earnings limit for the existing One Parent Family Payment was increased in the 2007 Budget to €400 per week in accordance with a recommendation contained in the Government discussion paper *Proposals for Supporting Lone Parents* (Government of Ireland 2006a). A new social assistance payment for lone parents and parents on low income, informed by this discussion paper, was being developed by the Department of Social and Family Affairs at the time of writing this report.

The extent and value of state supports has undoubtedly increased significantly in recent years, particularly as a result of the very significant increases in child benefit (Child Benefit payment rates increased over an eight-year period by between 248% and 280% and cost €2.4 billion in 2008), the introduction of the Early Childcare Supplement since 2006, and improvements in the Family Income Supplement (FIS) (though take-up of FIS still remains a problem). The increased investments help to explain the fall since 2006 in the at-risk-of poverty and consistent poverty figures for children. On the other hand, as we have seen in Part 1, in spite of these improvements child poverty levels still remain relatively high when compared to the best performing Member States. An important additional effect of the increases in social transfers has been to ensure that Ireland has a depth or intensity of poverty

⁵⁴ Ireland has quite a complex set of income supports in respect of children, which combine both general and targeted payments and schemes. The main payments are Child Benefit, Qualified Child Increases (sometimes also referred to as 'payments' or 'allowances'), Early Childcare Supplement, Family Income Supplement, Early Childcare Supplement, Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance, One Parent Family Payment and the National Minimum Wage.

that is below the EU average, though, as we have seen, this also lags behind the best performing Member States.

It is possible that the improvements in income support for children outlined above could be at risk as a result of Ireland's severe economic and financial crisis. Already in two Budgets in 2009, the amount of Early Childcare Supplement and the age up to which it is paid were severely reduced, and since January 2010 it has been replaced by a pre-school Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme for all children between the ages of 3 years and 3 months and 4 years and 6 months. The ECCE scheme is in itself seen as a positive development by many commentators (see CORI Justice 2009; Children's Rights Alliance 2009). However, it will cost less and cover fewer children than the Early Childcare Supplement. Also in an emergency Supplementary Budget in March 2009, the Government announced its intention to either tax or means-test the universal child benefit in future. This is a major change in policy direction. Analysing the changes, the Justice Desk of the Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI Justice 2009) concluded that 'this series of proposals is moving policy in the wrong direction at the very time when many families' incomes are under serious threat'. The Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) has also strongly criticised the proposals on child benefit on the grounds that 'the universality of Child Benefit is a way of demonstrating the value the State places on children and families. Taxing it would be an unacceptable move, which would hit the poorest families hardest, and would save little money after administrative costs are considered' (Children's Rights Alliance 2009a, p. 3).

The main problem with existing income support policies is that, while there have been significant improvements, on their own they are not sufficient to lift children in the poorest families out of poverty. This is borne out by the experiences of many of the people interviewed for the case studies in Part 3. One professional working at local level appeared to speak for many when she remarked that 'there is absolutely no doubt ... that people who are surviving on lone parents or any welfare payments only [are in very difficult circumstances] ... you know it's not possible for a family to survive on those kinds of income'. The Government has recognised this and in *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006b) promised to progress, as a priority, further work aimed at assisting children in families on low incomes, including reviewing child income supports which avoid employment disincentives. This work is to be informed by a study by the National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) (2007) on new ways to target child income support. The *Programme for Government* (Government of Ireland 2007b) commits to the amalgamation of Qualified Child Allowances and Family Income Supplements in order to develop a second tier of income support targeted at the poorest families. However, the Children's Rights Alliance (2009b, p. 20) points out that 'there is no indication that a second tier payment will be introduced'. The CRA argues that existing mechanisms for targeting payments at poor families – the Family Income Supplement (FIS) and the Qualified Child Increase (QCI) – need reform. The FIS payment is complicated to access, while the QCI – paid to families that are dependent on social welfare for their income – is paid at a low rate, and can make little real difference to the life chances of children in poor families. Moreover, moving between the two payments is difficult, creating problems for parents shifting between welfare and work. They argue that a second-tier, employment-neutral payment would allow movement between welfare and work, and improve access to the payment by joining up the tax and social welfare systems. They suggest that 'the primary and overriding objective of such a payment should be to combat child poverty, and ensure that all children in low income families have adequate resources regardless of their parents' employment status' (Children's Rights Alliance 2009b, p. 21).

Overall, keeping up improvements that have been made in income support for children is very important for maintaining the progress that has been made in recent years in reducing child poverty and helping families to cope with the economic and financial crisis. In the medium term, making the sort of improvements outlined above is necessary for further progress. However, looking at the very high proportion of the income of poor families with children that comes from welfare, and given the very high correlation with joblessness, it is equally important to seek to develop policies to help more parents, especially lone parents, into decent work and also to increase investment in key public services for children.

4.3.1.2 Income from work

Active labour market policies and flexible working arrangements

A key learning point from the EU process is the importance of ensuring that employment policies are focused sufficiently on parents of families with children, with a particular focus on jobless households, lone parents, parents with 3+ children and groups at high risk (e.g. Roma and immigrant families). This is confirmed by the experience of many of those interviewed for the case studies in Part 3, particularly lone parents and Travellers, who highlight a series of barriers and disincentives to participating in active labour market initiatives (see section 3.4).

This is an issue that is recognised in Irish policy-making, even if the results so far have not been sufficient. Ireland's National Strategy Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010 (NSRSPSI) recognises that the most vulnerable include those who are jobless or in low-income employment, mainly due to family responsibilities or disabilities, and the long-term unemployed; and acknowledges that many of these households have children. Thus facilitating access to quality work and learning opportunities with appropriate incentives is a major Government priority. This involves (i) active engagement with the unemployed/inactive to achieve increased employment participation, and (ii) improving access to learning opportunities. Priority is being given in Ireland's labour market schemes to the long-term unemployed, those unemployed aged 15–24, 'non-progression ready' unemployed, and other groups including lone parents, Travellers, people with disabilities and others that are marginalised from the labour market. The main such labour market schemes are: the National Employment Service and the Local Employment Services; the National Employment Action Plan (including the Prevention and Activation and Expanding the Workforce Programmes); High Supports, Bridging/Foundation and Pathways to Employment processes; and other training and employment programmes. In the area of lifelong learning and access to quality work and learning opportunities, policy measures focus on: low-skilled workers through enhancing opportunities to access education and training; adults from disadvantaged communities, including those in rural areas with particular emphasis on basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills; providing guidance/counselling services to those on literacy programmes, language learning, the Back to Education Initiative and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme; and expanding the Back to Education Initiative to build on the adult literacy services, community education, Youthreach, Senior Traveller Training Programmes, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme and Post Leaving Certificate courses (Office for Social Inclusion 2008).

The NSRSPSI also notes that women disproportionately face barriers to labour market participation, especially lone mothers and mothers of larger families, and that

the labour market participation of lone mothers is similar to those who are married but their quality of employment is on average poorer, and a higher proportion are unemployed and have low education and skill levels. Under the Social and Economic Participation Programme, the Department of Social and Family Affairs is in the process of developing a wider activation agenda. This approach involves treating all people of working age in a similar way, whether they are unemployed, lone parents, people with a disability or in some other category. The aim is 'to facilitate progression regardless of the circumstances that led the person to require income maintenance'. It also builds on the Department's existing experience and income maintenance relationship with the people concerned, in cooperation with other relevant service providers such as FÁS, Vocational Education Committees, the Health Service Executive and other local agencies.

Legislative measures which provide for more family-friendly workplaces include statutory entitlements to maternity leave, adoptive leave, carer's leave and parental leave along with all the other employment rights legislation, including payment of wages. While not explicitly targeting jobless households, single-parent households and larger families, these categories of families would also benefit. Provision is also made allowing employees to take *force majeure* leave with pay for urgent family reasons owing to illness or injury of a family or household member. There is also significant emphasis on a voluntary approach based on cooperation of the Social Partners at enterprise, national and EU level, to advance the work-life balance agenda. There is a National Framework Committee for Work Life Balance Policies, which has been established under the Social Partnership agreements. The Committee, under *Towards 2016*, is charged with supporting and facilitating the development of family-friendly policies at the level of the enterprise rather than to focus on any specific type of employee.

Given the rapid rise in unemployment with the onset of the economic and financial crisis and the downward pressure on wages, there is a serious risk that those parents who were already finding it difficult to access decent quality jobs will be further disadvantaged in the labour market. Thus it will be essential that policy efforts to try and increase the access of parents, especially lone parents, to the labour market are maintained and increased.

Adequate childcare arrangements

One of the key factors identified by the EU process that enables greater participation of parents of children who are at risk of poverty in the labour market is the availability of affordable and easily accessible high-quality childcare. The case studies in Part 3 also highlighted this as the most commonly identified difficulty facing parents in disadvantaged communities (see 3.3.2.1). It seems safe to say that the limited availability and high cost of childcare is the single biggest barrier to enabling parents to access the labour market in Ireland. A UNICEF Report Card (UNICEF 2008) shows that Ireland comes bottom of a league table of early childhood education and care in 25 economically advanced countries. Ireland achieves only one out of the ten internationally applicable benchmarks for early childhood care and education – a set of minimum standards for protecting the rights of children in their most vulnerable and formative years – proposed by UNICEF. Ireland has a history of under-investment and weak policies in Early Childhood Care and Education. National investment in this area is less than 0.2% of GDP compared to the EU average of 0.5% (OECD 2008). The OECD heavily criticised Ireland's record on early childhood care and education in 2001 (OECD 2001) and repeated many of its criticisms in 2006 (OECD 2006). The OECD has shown that for families on average or lower earnings

childcare costs are higher in Ireland than anywhere else in the OECD. As well as cost and availability there is a need to improve quality of provision. At the time of writing, implementation of *Síolta* – the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education – is voluntary, and not yet linked to funding provided by the National Childcare Investment Programme (NCIP).

There is a recognition by the Government of the need to address Ireland's childcare gap and in recent years increased investment is evident but progress has been slow and fragmented. *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006) outlines the agreement between Government and the social partners to continue to work together over a ten-year period to develop an infrastructure that will provide quality, affordable childcare and to work towards increasing the supply of childcare places (of all types) by 100,000 by 2016. Policy actions include new childcare places, training in childcare, a national quality framework, a national standardised inspection framework, provision of after-school facilities, targeting the needs of disadvantaged children, and improving maternity leave entitlements. The main approach had been to provide payments directly to parents, through the Early Childcare Supplement, rather than invest in a quality early childhood care and education infrastructure and universal pre-school services. The Children's Rights Alliance (2009b, p. 11) concluded: 'Effectively, the Government has chosen to pay more for an inferior system. Furthermore, there is still no specific regulation which outlines the qualifications, competencies or skills required to work in childcare services.'

The decision in the supplementary 2009 Budget to replace the Early Childcare Supplement with a pre-school Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) for all children between the ages of 3 years and 3 months and 4 years and 6 months represents a shift in direction which has been generally welcomed (see the section on income support above). However, even with the €170 million allocated to the ECCE in the Supplementary Budget, Ireland's investment will still fall well below the OECD average, with considerably less than 0.2% of GDP spent on pre-primary education. There have also been efforts to increase the availability of childcare places through the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme, introduced in 2008. However, this has had a mixed response from stakeholders. Concerns about the Scheme include two undesirable side-effects: it creates a poverty trap by making childcare too expensive to justify for those on a low wage, and it segregates children by socio-economic status. Part 3 of this report (section 3.3.2.1) indicates that the Scheme has had a generally negative impact from the point of view of people affected by and responding to child poverty at local level.

The importance of resolving Ireland's childcare crisis as a key part of addressing child poverty is well illustrated by a recent study of lone parents and employment (One Family 2008, p. 8) which concluded that 'unless childcare needs are met, "unsuitable hours" and "lack of access to flexible employment" are likely to remain key barriers to sustainable employment. 70 per cent agree that childcare problems mean that they will not be able to get a decent job until their children grow up.'

Ensuring adequate income from work

The EU evidence highlights the importance of putting in place effective policies to ensure that income from work is sufficient to lift families with children out of poverty through policies such as minimum wages, retention of benefits when moving into employment, reducing employment traps, pro-family/child tax arrangements, reducing costs (transport, childcare) and reducing insecure employment.

In Ireland the main measures in place to ensure adequate levels of income for parents who work are Family Income Supplement (FIS) and the National Minimum Wage (NMW). Of these the FIS is the more important as it is directly targeted at low-wage families with children. FIS is a weekly tax-free payment for families, including one-parent families, at work on low pay. This preserves the incentive to remain in employment in circumstances where the employee might only be marginally better off than if he or she were claiming other social welfare payments. At the time of writing there were some 21,000 people in receipt of FIS. Income thresholds had recently been re-focused to include additional gains for larger families. Some 23,200 persons claimed the supplement in 2006.

A major problem with FIS has been the consistently low take-up. In their 2004 Budget submission Comhairle, the Government's citizens information service, estimated take-up to be as low as 35% (Comhairle 2004). The Department of Social and Family Affairs is currently undertaking research into how best to increase uptake of the Family Income Supplement (FIS).

The National Minimum Wage (NMW) was introduced in Ireland in 2000. The rate set for the minimum wage was intended to ensure that vulnerable sectors of the workforce, mainly women and young people, were not exploited and that employment and competitiveness were maintained. Workers on the minimum wage are not required to pay tax or pay related social insurance.

Research undertaken by the National Economic and Social Council (2007) and the ESRI (Callan et al. 2006) has made a case for a new payment to reduce child poverty, targeted specifically at families on low incomes, regardless of parents' employment status. Indeed, the *Programme for Government* (Government of Ireland 2007b) commits to the amalgamation of Qualified Child Increases and Family Income Supplements in order to develop a second tier of income support targeted at the poorest families. In the current adverse economic and financial crisis this seems unlikely, although organisations like the Children's Rights Alliance (2009) continue to press for the introduction of an employment-neutral payment targeted at low-income families with children.

The need to give more attention to increasing income from employment is one of the key findings of a recent study on lone parents and employment (One Family 2008). This concludes that if activation is to be successful in reducing poverty in one-parent families it must ensure that greater employment results in greater income; such an outcome is also required if increased labour-force participation is to improve rather than disimprove family well-being. The report suggests that addressing the issue of low pay means ensuring access to adequate childcare, removing the rent supplement poverty trap and supporting greater access to education, training and qualifications.

4.3.2 Access to services

The learning from the EU Social Inclusion Process emphasises that access to services, particularly housing, education, healthcare, childcare and transport is central to any consideration of the adequacy of policy and provision relating to child poverty and social exclusion. Indeed, some commentators would place more emphasis on access to services than household incomes. Sweeney has also identified this as a key challenge in Ireland:

Where low household incomes mean children live in crowded and poorly heated homes, are exposed to severe health and safety risks in their neighbourhoods, attend schools characterised by high levels of absenteeism and staff turnover, receive prompt medical attention only by attending hospital accident and emergency services, and so on, the primary response should not be to boost household incomes so that families can escape those homes, neighbourhoods, schools etc. The real challenge is to improve the standards of housing, neighbourhoods, schools and health services available to families on low incomes while they are on low incomes. (Sweeney 2002 pp 61-62)

In our research it has not been possible to examine each of these important areas in detail. However, an overall assessment is made of these key areas.

4.3.2.1 Education

The EU process particularly highlights the importance of having effective policies to prevent and tackle educational disadvantage. Key areas frequently highlighted are promoting early education, tackling school drop-out, ensuring inclusive schools, and reducing costs and financial barriers to participation in education. The case studies in Part 3 also highlight a series of similar barriers that low-income families face in ensuring equal access for their children to education. It is thus encouraging that improving education provision is a key part of the Government's strategy on child poverty, with 3 out of the 4 targets set in the NPSI focusing on education. A 2007 study concluded that 'there is quite a lot of activity and significant resources being devoted to "educational disadvantage" and it is a budget heading that has been growing over the years' (Daly 2007, p. 16). A key element of the policy approach, particularly for disadvantaged children, is DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools. DEIS provides an integrated programme of support to schools identified as disadvantaged. The plan is one of a number of interventions to address educational disadvantage, which include second-chance education and training, increased participation by under-represented groups in further and higher education, and the development of provisions for pupils with special educational needs. The School Completion Programme directly targets those in danger of dropping out of the education system. The Home School Community Liaison (HSCCL) Scheme is concerned with maximising active involvement of children in the learning process, in particular those who might be at risk of failure. The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) is the national agency for encouraging and supporting regular school attendance and has a key role in following up on children who are not attending school regularly, and where there is a concern about the child's educational welfare.

An area of growing importance had been ensuring the education of the children of refugees and migrant workers. They are entitled to avail of primary and post-primary education regardless of their legal status. The admissions policy of a school cannot discriminate on grounds of nationality or legal status and extra teachers have been provided for language supports. Guidelines have been developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to support teachers and schools in developing a more inclusive learning environment and in providing students with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in a multicultural world. However, the experience of asylum seekers in particular, as reported in the case study section of this research, is one in which enormous obstacles remain, including the many indirect costs associated with education and the difficulties for children and young people of doing homework in hostel conditions (see section 3.4.5 above).

In terms of children with a disability the Government has committed to developing special educational needs services in the framework of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 which provides a legislative basis for assessment, for individual educational plans and for the delivery of services on foot of these plans. The National Council for Special Education is responsible for improving the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities, with particular emphasis on children. In relation to Traveller children the NAPSI recognises that they have specific vulnerabilities in relation to education and that additional measures are required. It states that between 2007 and 2011 segregated provision at primary and post-primary level will be phased out to ensure that Travellers are integrated into mainstream schools by 2009; pre-schools for Travellers will be integrated over a longer period with current and new pre-school provision, so that young Travellers may experience an inclusive integrated education from an early age. Part 3 of this report confirms the difficulties faced by young Travellers in the education system, including stigma and prejudice and a lack of culturally appropriate teaching resources and methods.

In fact, *Towards 2016* and NAPSI proposed many additional actions to achieve the objectives that have been set on tackling educational disadvantage. These included: tackling literacy and numeracy in primary schools; a reduction in the ratio of children to classroom teacher at primary level to 27:1 in 2007/8 (20:1 in junior classes and 24:1 in senior classes in disadvantaged urban primary schools) and resources for special needs pupils; an integrated approach to support, attendance and retention in schools, including an additional 100 posts by 2009 (for the National Educational Welfare Board and the National Educational Psychological Service) to address absenteeism, early school leaving, behavioural problems and special needs; fostering an inclusive school environment through admission policies; future provision of schools to recognise the diverse nature of pupil enrolment, including the provision of an extra 550 language support teachers by 2009 and support for the integration of international children at primary and second level; and an additional 1,000 places for Youthreach by 2009 and recognition through a national framework of qualifications. Other initiatives relate to curricula developments, special needs services, services for Traveller children, Community Training Centres, school transport, technology enhancements, anti-racism proposals and resources for youth work. However, the Children's Rights Alliance has documented how many of these commitments have been or are now being abandoned in the light of the economic and financial crisis (Children's Rights Alliance 2009b).

Barnardos (2006) has suggested that, apart from the failure to follow through on commitments, the Irish approach to educational disadvantage needs to be expanded and altered. In their view, educational disadvantage policy in Ireland should move beyond the DEIS strategy, which is largely school based, to an approach that focuses on educational equality, which would integrate the school-based responses with a whole-child approach to educational and social inclusion. Barnardos also recommends that an effective tracking system be put in place to ensure that all children make the transition from primary to secondary school (see Daly 2007).

4.3.2.2 Health services

The EU experience highlights the importance of ensuring that all children have access to good quality healthcare. Given the complexity of the Irish health system it

is difficult to assess how effective it is in meeting the needs of all children.⁵⁵ However, a number of criticisms have been made of Irish healthcare provision especially in relation to children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Although expenditure has increased and Ireland spends 7.3% of GDP on public healthcare this is still insufficient when compared to France and Germany who spend 9.7% and 10.9% respectively; and the USA spends 14.6%. The two-tier system of healthcare favours children in better off families and overall healthcare services for children remain unsatisfactory and uncoordinated (CRA 2009b).

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) has expressed concern about the lack of a comprehensive legal framework in regard to health services and the absence of statutory guidelines safeguarding the quality of and access to healthcare services as stipulated in article 24 of the Convention, in particular for children in vulnerable situations. It recommended that Ireland adopt all-inclusive legislation that addresses the health needs of children and establish statutory guidelines for the quality of these services. It underlined the need to pay special attention to the needs of refugee and asylum-seeking children, and to children belonging to the Traveller community by implementing the existing National Strategy for Traveller Health. The Committee also raised the matter of the mental health of children. Barnardos have called for the extension of the full medical card to all families whose total income is equivalent to that which would make them eligible to pay tax at the standard rate (currently 20%). They also suggest that a targeted programme of investment is needed to ensure that health services are available, accessible and appropriate for children requiring them.

The case studies documented in Part 3 of this report also raise a number of related issues, such as the lack of access to community based services, the lack of psychological assessment services and the absence of speech and language therapy. On several occasions respondents reported situations where schools were compensating for deficiencies in health services by employing additional basic supports (including speech and language therapists) themselves; thereby depleting their own educational funds (see 3.3.2.3 above).

The Combat Poverty Agency (2005) recommended increased funding for primary healthcare as one area likely to make the greatest impact among less well-off families with children who are struggling to make ends meet and are unlikely to be able to afford the financial pressures arising from ill health. Initiatives targeted at the community level, like GPs in disadvantaged areas, need additional funding. Other recommendations include greater coverage of the medical card for vulnerable families, and undertaking preventive and other health-improving initiatives. Encouragingly, *Towards 2016* made a commitment to plan and implement a programme of re-organisation and re-alignment of existing resources in order to deliver a person-centred primary care service through multi-disciplinary teams and networks, serving defined populations. The target is to have 300 primary care teams in operation by 2008, 400 by 2009 and 500 by 2011. The Children's Rights Alliance (CRA) points out that to date progress has been slow. However, the introduction of a new financing programme for Primary Care Teams in Budget 2009 is a step towards meeting the existing 2011 target.

⁵⁵ The Irish health system combines public and private institutions and funders. It is primarily tax-financed and is available to all inhabitants, subject to rules on residency and ability to pay. For those on low income, there exists a means-tested Medical Card Scheme which includes children based on their parents' income and number of dependent children. It includes a range of free services such as GP services, medicines, in-patient public hospital services, outpatient services, dental, optic and aural services and infant care services (see Daly 2007).

Towards 2016 also commits to delivering a significant number of child and adolescent community mental health teams (CMHTs) within the context of a 7–10-year target of 1 CMHT per 100,000 of the population by 2008, subject to sufficient resources being made available, and two CMHTs per 100,000 of the population by 2013. However, a recent assessment by CRA shows that progress in implementing this by the Health Services Executive is very slow.

Another potentially important development highlighted by Mary Daly is the commitment made in *Towards 2016* to develop integrated services and interventions for children at local level:

The objective of this initiative is to secure better developmental outcomes for disadvantaged children through more effective integration of existing services and interventions at local level. In addition, the agreement overall puts emphasis on services at community level. Among its commitments for example is the plan to develop 500 community care teams by 2011, to provide access to services with particular attention to the needs of medical card holders. (Daly 2007, p. 20)

4.3.2.3 Housing

The EU Social Inclusion Process's thematic year on housing exclusion and homelessness in 2009 served to highlight the importance of ensuring that families with children are assured decent housing and environment conditions. Among other policy areas it highlighted the importance of access to social housing, assistance with housing costs, security of tenure and policies to tackle/prevent homelessness. The case studies in this report also highlighted a very mixed reaction to public housing provision, with positive experiences of social housing in some areas but serious shortages in others.

In Ireland, increasing the provision of affordable and/or social housing for low-income families with children is a key issue. The Combat Poverty Agency has argued that net housing costs for families with children can be burdensome, and that those on low incomes in the private rental sector are particularly vulnerable. However, Ireland has a relatively small proportion of social housing compared to European neighbours. Meeting supply targets for social and affordable housing is necessary to allow potential homeowners on modest incomes to acquire a property that is fit and appropriate for their means. In response, in *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006b, p. 27), the Government and the Social Partners acknowledged the view taken in the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) Report on housing in Ireland that an additional 73,000 new social housing units should be provided between 2004 and 2012. However, the Children's Rights Alliance has commented that although new houses are being built it is not enough to keep pace with the sale and demolition of existing social housing, and has calculated that the actual net increase in social housing units between 2004 and 2007 was a maximum of 4,200 units per year, just 46% of the NESC target. The collapse of house prices and the rise in vacant houses during the current economic crisis may create new opportunities to expand social housing stock. However, at the same time rising unemployment may lead to more people being unable to afford to buy their own house and therefore higher demand for social housing.

The problem of youth homelessness has been tackled since 2001 through a Youth Homelessness Strategy. *Towards 2016* commits to implementing this Strategy, with the objective of reducing and if possible eliminating youth homelessness through

preventive strategies. The Strategy is currently being reviewed by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, in conjunction with the HSE. The Children's Rights Alliance has commented that further progress was indicated for 2009, but it is not yet clear what, if any, progress has been made. Although the link has been established between children leaving State care and youth detention facilities and youth homelessness, there are still insufficient aftercare services to support children leaving care in their transition to independent living or returning to their families (CRA 2009b).

4.3.3 Other areas

It has not been possible in this report to assess a number of other important areas such as child protection services, transport, social services, sport and recreation, and non-formal education or youth work services. However, valuable comments and insights on these areas, as perceived by people at local level in our case-study sites, are included in Part 3 of the report. The key role played at local level by youth services, family support centres and other community projects is a consistent theme of the local case studies. At the same time, the lack of adequate social work services and the very limited provision of play and leisure facilities are also recurrent themes.

Part 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This final part of the report summarises the most important conclusions from Parts 1–4. It then makes a series of recommendations to address some of the weaknesses and gaps in the Irish approach to preventing and tackling child poverty and social exclusion. These were identified through our comparison of Ireland’s approach with the best of European practice and through the insights we gained from our interviews and focus groups with those living and working in disadvantaged local communities.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 Our research in Part 1 of the report has shown that, at the time of writing this report, Ireland had improved its position in relation to the European norm and had made significant progress in reducing child poverty and social exclusion. However, compared to the best performing European Member States and in particular compared to those Member States with similar levels of economic development, Ireland, in spite of improvements, still had unacceptably high levels of child poverty and social exclusion whether measured by relative income poverty measures or by consistent poverty measures. This serious picture is reinforced by qualitative evidence and experience from the ground as outlined in Part 3. The research has highlighted the particular need to address issues of joblessness and low work intensity, the high levels of child poverty faced by lone parent families and the high risk of poverty faced by Traveller children and children from an immigrant background. A key issue in this regard is the high risk of discrimination, prejudice and stigmatisation that is experienced by some children from lone parent backgrounds, Traveller children and children seeking asylum. As well as threatening their fundamental rights this can undermine self-confidence and self esteem and hinder their personal development.

5.2.2 From our analysis in Part 2 of the lessons emerging from the EU’s Social Inclusion Process between 2000 and 2009 it has been possible to identify the key elements that are essential to ensure effective policies to prevent and tackle child poverty and social exclusion. First, it is important to put in place effective institutional and governance arrangements, the key elements of which are: strong political leadership, child inclusion mainstreaming, effective horizontal and vertical policy coordination, the mobilisation of all actors, consultation of children, and extensive and timely data collection and analysis. Second, it is essential to have an effective strategic approach, the main characteristics of which are that it should be multi-dimensional and comprehensive, evidence based, focused on the rights of the child, balanced (i.e. combine a universal and targeted approach and prevention and alleviation), set clear overall objectives and targets, and set specific objectives and targets for each policy domain and key disadvantaged groups. Third, it is important to have a policy framework which combines policies to ensure an adequate income (both from work and from social transfers), policies to ensure access to high-quality enabling services (e.g. housing, education, health, childcare and transport), effective child protection policies and services, and policies which enable children to

participate fully in sporting, recreational and cultural activities. Fourth, it is essential to ensure effective delivery of policies and services at local level through effective links between local and national levels, a coordinated and integrated approach at local level, flexible services tailored to individual needs, the participation of all relevant actors in partnership arrangements, and a community development approach which empowers people. Fifth, it is vital to put in place effective arrangements for monitoring and reporting on progress on a regular basis so as to ensure accountability and to foster a culture of continuous improvement. This research project has demonstrated that the learning from the EU experience is highly relevant to Ireland's efforts to prevent and tackle child poverty and social exclusion and should be systematically taken into account.

5.2.3 From our assessment in Part 4 it is clear that in recent years there has been an increased focus on and significant developments in relation to the well-being of children, including the lifecycle approach adopted in *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland 2006b), the vision outlined in the *National Children's Strategy* (Government of Ireland 2000), the appointment of a Minister for Children and the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children (later expanded into the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, itself also a positive development in principle), the emphasis on children in the NAPSI 2007–2016 (Office for Social Inclusion 2007), the appointment of the Ombudsman for Children, the establishment of the Children Acts Advisory Board, the national longitudinal study and other efforts to improve data and analysis on the well-being of children. Nonetheless, preventing and eradicating child poverty and social exclusion is still not a sufficiently visible or high-level political goal. In spite of all the evidence of the extent and severity of the issue, there is a reluctance to acknowledge and address the issue specifically. Clear and quantified objectives for the eradication of child poverty and the social exclusion of children are missing (see in particular section 4.2.5).

5.2.4 Again, while important progress had been made, our assessment in Part 4 shows that, when compared to best practice in the European Union, Ireland still does not have a fully coherent, joined up and integrated strategy to prevent and eradicate child poverty (see in particular section 4.2.2). The evidence from the ground in Part 3 reinforces the impression that the approach is still too piecemeal, disjointed and reactive, and the goal of eradicating child poverty and the social exclusion of children is not adequately mainstreamed across all relevant policy domains. In our view, the focus on children in the NAPSI 2007–2016, while welcome, does not constitute a fully coherent and joined-up approach to the issue of child poverty. It appears to be a collection of different policies and lacks a coherent overall objective. The fact that poverty is an integral part of the inequality experienced by working-class communities and neighbourhoods is not sufficiently acknowledged and is therefore not adequately addressed.

5.2.5 As we identified in Part 4, the institutional arrangements at national level for coordinating efforts to eradicate child poverty and the social exclusion of children, while strengthened in recent years, are still not sufficient (see in particular section 4.1.3). The existence of the Cabinet Committee and the Senior Officials Group on Social Inclusion ensure some coherence, but this has not been sufficient to bring about an integrated approach to the issue of child poverty. In particular we consider that there is insufficient coordination between the efforts of the Office for Social Inclusion and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. Furthermore, in spite of the (largely separate) efforts of these offices to address the key issues, the Irish approach is dominated by a 'silo' mentality in which the main government departments and agencies concentrate on doing their own thing. The OSI appears to have lacked the resources, authority and status to drive forward, coordinate and

monitor efforts across the whole Irish public sector to effectively prevent and tackle poverty and social exclusion in general and child poverty and social exclusion in particular.⁵⁶ The OMCYA, while making a very important contribution, especially in relation to improving standards of delivery, is too narrowly focused on three departments (health, justice and education) and is not sufficiently focused on poverty and social exclusion to ensure an overall strategic approach to these issues.

5.2.6 As is evident from our analysis in section 4.2.3, the link between tackling child poverty and the social exclusion of children and promoting the rights of children remains surprisingly weak. There is an insufficient linkage between Ireland's efforts to tackle poverty and social exclusion and its efforts to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this regard the lack of contact between the Office for Social Inclusion and the Ombudsman for Children in relation to the development and monitoring of the NAPSI is a serious gap. Furthermore, in spite of the important steps taken by the Ombudsman for Children and by the OMCYA to promote the participation of children, there does not appear to have been any consideration given to how best to consult with children or involve them in the ongoing implementation and monitoring of those aspects of the NAPSI that deal with child and family poverty. Strengthening recognition of the rights of the child in the Constitution remains an important challenge to be addressed. Progress in this area would over time lead to greater synergies between efforts to promote the social inclusion of children and the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this regard the recent agreement by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Constitutional Amendment on Children on a wording to be put before the people in a referendum is a very welcome development.

5.2.7 The evidence from local case studies in Part 3 suggests that there is often a wide gap between positive institutional and policy developments at national level and actual delivery on the ground. There is a plethora of agencies involved (both statutory and NGO), and there are many examples of good practice and interesting and imaginative local initiatives. There are also very high levels of personal commitment to improving the situation of children. However, the approach to delivery remains piecemeal and often chaotic with, in many areas, a lack of effective integration and coordination of services on the ground, a lack of a sufficiently tailored approach to the needs of individual children, a lack of a holistic approach, inadequate emphasis on early intervention, insufficient focus on accountability and thus inadequate emphasis on and monitoring of outcomes for children. In spite of important initiatives by the OMCYA, such as the development of *The Agenda for Children's Services* (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs 2007a) and the introduction of children's services committees and the Children Acts Advisory Board, it is doubtful whether, without a more radical reform of the delivery of services and a greater statutory role for local authorities in overall coordination, such initiatives can have sufficient impact. Surprisingly, in relation to child poverty and social exclusion there seems to be no systematic coordination between efforts to encourage local authority anti-poverty strategies and the efforts to establish children's services committees (see section 4.1.3).

The case studies in the four disadvantaged communities highlighted the key role that is often played by local projects such as community and youth projects, family resource centres and local advice and information centres in supporting children and their families and acting as a point of contact and integration for other services.

⁵⁶ This conclusion was reached prior to the merger of the OSI and the Combat Poverty Agency to form a new division within the Department of Social and Family Affairs. It is too soon to judge whether this will have addressed these weaknesses.

However, there is often too high a dependence on the commitment and individual initiative of workers in such projects and a lack of consistent and long-term support for their efforts.

5.2.9 The HSE's role in delivering childcare services and providing social work support to children and families at risk appears to be under-resourced and underdeveloped. There is a need to enhance the efforts of the HSE on the ground in disadvantaged communities so that their role becomes less a reactive response to children in crisis situations and more a proactive and preventive approach to supporting the welfare of children and their families.

5.2.10 In recent years significant advances have been made in increasing the income of families with children (for example, significant increases in child benefit). However, as the local case studies have shown, more needs to be done; and yet in the current economic climate even the advances that have been made are now in jeopardy. While the current debate on how best to introduce a second-tier means-tested child income support is important, a more urgent priority is to ensure that the total household income of all families with children is adequate. While there is an increasing effort to support lone parents into work, overall there is not a sufficiently focused and strategic approach to increasing the income from work of lone parents and parents of larger families. In particular, a sufficiently coordinated and strategic approach is lacking which would integrate efforts to promote active inclusion through a combination of active employment measures, adequate income support and access to high-quality and developmental public services. In spite of many individual policy initiatives, overall there appears to be insufficient attention given to integrating efforts to ensure that good quality work is available to these particular groups as a priority, that training and activation measures are in place appropriate to their needs, that affordable and high-quality childcare is readily available, that reliable and affordable public transport is available, that working arrangements are sufficiently flexible and family-friendly, that developmental services (e.g. housing, education, health services, and family and social services) are linked to employment and income support services (see Part 3 and section 4.3.1).

5.2.11 Initiatives in recent years by the Department of Education to tackle educational disadvantage are important, as is the fact that three out of the four high-levels goals in the NAPSI 2007–2016 focus on aspects of educational disadvantage (see section 4.3.2.1). However, educational disadvantage is an issue that is wider than schools. At present a sufficiently coordinated and integrated response is lacking, involving a wide range of actors and agencies.

The limited provision of early childcare and childhood education has been a serious barrier to breaking the cycle of child poverty and the intergenerational inheritance of poverty (see section 4.3.1.2). This is particularly significant for children from a disadvantaged background and puts at risk their personal development and their 'well-becoming' in the future. This is especially important given the European Commission finding that 'pre-primary education has the highest returns in terms of the achievement and social adaptation of children' and its recommendation that 'Member States should invest more in pre-primary education as an effective means to establish the basis for further learning, preventing school drop-out, increasing equity of outcomes and overall skill levels' (European Commission 2006b, p. 5).

5.2.12 The EU experience on tackling child poverty is highly relevant to the Irish situation. However, there appears to be a degree of complacency about Ireland's performance on child poverty when compared to other EU Member States. Irish anti-poverty initiatives do not seem to give much attention to the lessons from the EU

experience or aspire to achieve the standards of the best performing European countries. There is no evidence that Ireland's efforts to tackle child poverty and the social exclusion of children have taken into account the Spring 2006 request of the European Council of Heads of State and Government that Member States 'take necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background (Council of the European Union 2006). Nor is there any evidence that the report of the SPC Task-Force on child poverty and well-being (Social Protection Committee 2008a) and the recommendations endorsed by the SPC have been taken into account in Ireland's efforts.

5.3 Recommendations

In our concluding section we make fourteen recommendations which are specifically designed to address the weaknesses in the Irish approach that have been identified in the course of this research project and which are summarised in section 5.2 above. In particular they address the limitations identified in relation to institutional and governance arrangements, policy design, the delivery of policies and services, and the European dimension.

Institutional and governance arrangements

5.3.1 The eradication of child poverty should become a more central objective of Government policy. To this end and in the line with the EU's SPC Task-Force Report (Social Protection Committee 2008a) the Government should establish clear, quantified medium and long-term outcome targets for the reduction of child poverty and social exclusion which are based on an in-depth analysis of the situation.

5.3.2 The current focus on children in the NAPSI 2007–2016 should be developed into a better integrated and more comprehensive strategy aimed at the prevention and eradication of child poverty and the social exclusion of children. Clear, quantified objectives should be set for each relevant policy domain which will contribute to the achievement of the overall targets set by the Government (see 5.3.1). In developing, implementing and monitoring this strategy there should be widespread consultation and involvement of all organisations working with and on behalf of children. In particular, the Office for Social Inclusion (OSI) should seek the advice of the Ombudsman for Children on how to develop appropriate ways of consulting with children experiencing poverty and social exclusion so that their voice is heard in the development and implementation of the strategy. Initiatives to address issues of discrimination and prejudice should be better integrated into the overall strategy.

5.3.3 The weaknesses identified in relation to the institutional infrastructure at national level, in particular in relation to the coordination and mainstreaming of efforts to eradicate child poverty and the social exclusion of children, should be addressed. In this regard consideration should be given to enhancing the role of the OSI and to establishing a joint committee between the OSI (now encompassing the Combat Poverty Agency) and the OMCYA, with senior representation from all relevant departments and agencies. This committee would be charged with specific responsibility for the development, implementation and monitoring of the overall strategy (see 5.3.2 above).

5.3.4 In order to address the weak links that have been identified between the child poverty and children's rights agendas, clear links should be established between the reporting process in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the NAPSI strategy on the eradication of the poverty and social exclusion of children. The Office of the Ombudsman for Children should consider giving a higher priority to drawing out lessons about poverty and social exclusion from its work with children and to advising on policies to combat and prevent child poverty and the social exclusion of children and to involve children in the development and implementation of policies.

Policy design

5.3.5 In view of the strong evidence of the high risk faced by lone parents and parents living in jobless households, as part of the overall strategy (see 5.3.2) a more comprehensive approach should be developed to increasing access to work and to making work pay for lone parents and parents of large families. This will mean developing stronger links between training and activation measures, flexible working and family friendly policies, measures to combat low pay, in-work income support measures, child income support measures, provision of affordable childcare and transport, and availability of good quality affordable housing. The aim of policy should be to ensure that the household income level of all families with children, where one or more parent is working, is sufficient to lift the family above the 60% median income relative poverty line.

5.3.6 Given the evidence in this report that increases in income-support levels for families with children in recent Budgets have had an impact on reducing the level of child poverty, these improvements should be maintained and, as resources become available, further built on. This is essential, even allowing for the constraints arising from the current economic and financial crisis. For families where parents cannot access work (either temporarily or permanently), the policy aim should be to ensure that the combined income of a household from adult and child welfare payments is sufficient to lift families to at least the 60% median income relative poverty line.

5.3.7 The historically fragmented and piecemeal approach to early education and childcare provision highlighted in the research needs to be addressed urgently. As resources become available, the Government should give a high priority to increasing investment in early childhood education and childcare provision. The aim should be to establish a comprehensive, universal, high-quality, inclusive and affordable system that is available to all children and which avoids the segregation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁵⁷

Delivery

5.3.8 In view of the weaknesses in local coordination and delivery of services, the establishment of children's services committees covering every county should be accelerated and these should fully involve NGO as well as statutory providers of services to children and their families. In the longer term consideration should be given to structural changes aimed at establishing a stronger statutory basis for

⁵⁷ The announcement in the Supplementary Budget of April 2009 that from January 2010 the Government will provide one year free pre-school to every child, in the year prior to commencing primary school, appears to be an important step forward to a more universal approach in this area. However, it has happened too recently to be assessed as part of this research project.

coordinating the delivery of services to children and families at local level (possibly by giving a statutory remit in this regard to the children's services committees or to local authorities). The statutory responsibility imposed on Vocational Education Committees under the terms of the Youth Work Act 2001 to ensure the provision and coordination of youth work programmes and services within their areas was a very positive development and one that came after many years of consultation throughout the youth work sector. The relevant section of the Act should be fully implemented and the youth work responsibilities of the VECs also coordinated with other services for children and young people.

5.3.9 Given the inadequacies that this research has identified in many local services and the lack of high quality recreational and leisure opportunities for children growing up in many disadvantaged communities, an audit should be undertaken in each disadvantaged community to identify gaps in provision, and a systematic plan should be drawn up to fill these gaps within a specified time frame. This could be done under the auspices of the children's services committees (see 5.3.8 above).

5.3.10 Given the key role played by community and youth projects in supporting and initiating responses to the needs of children and young people in disadvantaged communities and in ensuring that the voice of these children and families is heard in policy making, there should be a systematic effort by the Government to ensure that there is a network of such projects in all disadvantaged communities. This should be undertaken as part of the follow-up to the National Youth Work Development Plan 2003–2007 and/or as part of the renewal of the National Children's and Young People's Strategy. More broadly, the beneficial outcomes for children and young people of participation in youth work should be recognised by placing the funding of youth work programmes and services on a more secure footing.

5.3.11 In view of the weaknesses identified in the HSE's role at local level in ensuring the care and protection of children, in providing proactive social work support to children and families at risk and in linking with and helping to coordinate all local services for children, this should be a much higher priority within the HSE's overall remit and should be better resourced.

5.3.12 In order to strengthen accountability and to introduce a culture of continuous improvement, the work being undertaken by the OMCYA and non-governmental organisations like Barnardos in this regard should be built on to ensure that all agencies providing services to children have a system of regular monitoring and transparent reporting on the outcomes for children and their families.

5.3.13 In order to ensure early intervention and more coordinated responses at local level, and drawing on existing examples of good practice, systems should be developed to facilitate better use and sharing of administrative data and information between agencies at local level to ensure the early identification of children and families at high risk and to enable the development of tailored and comprehensive programmes of support.

European dimension

5.3.14 The Lisbon Treaty's new social clause for the first time puts the struggle against poverty and social exclusion and the promotion of children's rights at the heart of the EU's objectives. Given that these issues are likely to assume higher importance in the coming years in the light of the EU's *Europe 2020 Strategy* and in particular in view of the new European target for the reduction of poverty and social

exclusion, and given the richness of learning that is available from other Member States, particularly those who are more successful than Ireland in preventing child poverty and social exclusion (see Part 2 of this report), the Government should:

- increase the attention it gives to the EU dimension of the struggle against child poverty and social exclusion and further enhance its active participation in the EU's social inclusion processes, including the new European Platform Against Poverty;
- ensure that tackling child poverty and social exclusion is given a high priority in its national efforts to contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 objectives and that this is reflected in its National Reform Programme;
- ensure that a key legacy of the 2010 European Year to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion involves concrete progress being made on strengthening the political/institutional arrangements and the policy framework for tackling child poverty and social exclusion in line with recommendations in this report;
- avail of the opportunities provided by the fact that social inclusion is one of the key fields of action in the Renewed Framework for European Cooperation in the Youth Field (2010–2018).

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Child Poverty in Ireland in a Comparative Perspective

Part I of the report of the EU's Social Protection Committee (SPC) on *Child poverty and child well-being in the EU* consists of an analysis of child poverty and social exclusion in the EU (Social Protection Committee 2008a). This provides an analysis of children at risk of poverty, assesses the relative impact of different determinants of child poverty risk and social exclusion and looks at other aspects of living conditions that have an impact on both the current well-being and future life chances of children: lack of a secure and stable family environment, material deprivation (including housing) and educational outcome. As part of our research project we have examined the data from the SPC report in relation to Ireland in more detail than was the case in the original SPC report. In particular our aim has been to highlight both Ireland's overall performance in relation to child poverty and exclusion when compared to other Member States⁵⁸ and to draw attention to particular areas where Ireland lags behind and, thus, where additional policy attention may be needed. This Annex brings together the findings from this work. While most of the data used for Ireland is from the income year 2005 and while more recent 2007 and 2008 EU-SILC data have shown some improvements in Ireland's position, the overall comparisons remain interesting and informative.

Extent of poverty

Child poverty is a significant challenge for the EU as a whole and especially in Ireland. In 2005 19% of children aged 0–17 in the EU-27 live under the poverty threshold and were at risk of poverty. In most EU countries children are at a greater risk of poverty than the rest of the population except for the Nordic countries, Slovenia, Cyprus and Greece where the child poverty rate is lower or equivalent to that of the population as a whole. That challenge is particularly high in Ireland. Ireland has a 4% higher rate (23%) of children at risk of poverty than the EU as a whole and ranks 20th out of the EU-25 Member States compared to between 9% and 12% for the four best performing Member States (Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Slovenia) and between 13% and 15% for the five next best performing countries (Cyprus, Germany, France, Austria and the Netherlands). In Ireland children have a 3% higher risk than the population as a whole.

Of course the standards of living of poor children vary greatly across the EU as illustrated by the thresholds under which a household with 2 adults and 2 children is considered at risk of poverty. When corrected for the differences in the cost of living (values in PPS) the variation in the national thresholds is approximately one to six between the three lowest and the three highest values. In 2005 Ireland, as one of the richest EU countries, is among the group of countries with a high risk of poverty threshold, ranking 8th. Of the 12 EU-25 with a high PPS (around 1500 or above) in addition to Ireland only the UK has a risk of poverty rate above the EU average.

⁵⁸ In most cases EU data refer to EU-25 except where indicated to the contrary

Intensity of poverty

In 2005, across the EU as a whole the intensity of poverty (as measured by the poverty gap)⁵⁹ is nearly the same for children (23%) as for the overall population (22%). However, there are very wide variations. In a number of countries the intensity of child poverty is lower than for the overall population (Finland, Austria, France, Cyprus, Slovenia, Sweden, Germany and the UK). However, for a third of countries the intensity of poverty is 3 to 6 points higher for children than for the overall population and the poverty gap ranges from 20% to more than 30%. Ireland is one of these countries with the intensity being 3% higher for children than adults, at 23% compared to 20%. Ireland is at the EU average (23%) and ranks 16th in terms of the poverty gap for children. However, Ireland lags well behind the best performing countries (Finland, Austria, France, Cyprus and Sweden) who range between 11% and 17%.

Lone parent and large families

It is clear from the EU research that one of the main factors influencing the income situation of children is the size and composition of the household they belong to. In the EU half of poor children live in the 2 types of households that are most at risk of poverty: 23% live in lone-parent households and 27% in large families. These 2 types of family suffer a considerably higher poverty risk than the rest of households with children. In Ireland 15% of children live in lone parent households (above the EU-25 average of 13%) and 32% in large families (compared to EU-25 average 21%). 34% of poor children live in lone parent families (compared to EU-25 average 23%) and 37% live in large families (compared to EU-25 average 27%).

There is a very wide range of poverty risk for children who live in single parent families, ranging from around 20% in the Nordic countries to 50% in Ireland, with only Lithuania (57%) and Malta (54%) being higher. The EU-25 average is 34%. Strikingly many of the countries with a high proportion of lone parents have relatively low poverty rates. So Ireland has not only quite a high proportion of lone parent families but Irish lone parent families also have a very high risk of poverty.

The risk of poverty for children in large families is also very varied, ranging from 9–15% in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Cyprus and Germany up to over 40% in Portugal, Lithuania and Poland. Ireland, at 27%, is slightly above the EU-25 average of 25% but lags far behind the best performing countries.

Age level of parents

In the EU, children whose parents are below 30 years of age have a significantly higher risk of poverty than those living with older parents (26% when mother is below 30, 19% between 30–39 and 16% between 40 and 49%). However, the risk of poverty of children of young mothers also varies widely, from 15–16% in five Member States to between 31% and 35% in Ireland, Italy, Poland and the UK. Thus Ireland (33%) is one of those countries where children of young mothers face a particularly high risk. Ireland (17%) only has an average proportion of children living with young parents. However, the share of children with a young lone mother is highest in Ireland (almost 1 in 4), with only the UK also above 20%, compared to an EU average of 12% and the four best performing countries with 5% or less.

⁵⁹ The poverty gap measures the distance between the median equivalised income of people living below the poverty threshold and the value of that poverty threshold; it is expressed as a value of that threshold.

Educational level of parents

The educational level of parents emerges in the EU research as another key determinant of children's current and future situation. The percentage of children living with low skilled parents (no parent achieved secondary education) ranges from less than 10% in nearly half the countries to 30% or more in the Southern States and Ireland. The EU-25 average is 16%. Among poor children 7–10% live with low skilled families in Slovakia and Germany while the figure is 60% or more in Ireland, Italy, Spain, Malta and Portugal. The EU average is 33%. Thus Ireland has a particular problem of children growing up in families with low skilled parents.

Ireland also has a much higher proportion of children in lone parent families with low skills (55%) and in larger families with low skills (25%) than the EU-25 averages (22% and 13% respectively).

Main sources of income

In the EU 54.9% of the gross income for poor households comes from work but in Ireland the proportion is only 33.4%, the lowest in the EU. On the other hand in the EU-25 only 15.8% of gross income comes from family allowances, whereas Ireland has the highest proportion (37.1%).

Joblessness and work intensity

The EU research shows clearly that joblessness represents the main risk of poverty for households with children though there is also evidence that in-work poverty also remains an important cause of low income among children. In 2007 9.7% of the EU-27 children lived in jobless households, ranging from 4% or less in Cyprus, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Greece to 16.2% in the UK. Ireland at 11.3% was above the EU average of 9.7%.

The at-risk-of poverty rate for households with dependent children was 63% for jobless households in the EU and in Ireland this rose to 74%, with the four best performing Member States (Luxembourg, Sweden, Denmark and Austria) ranging from 36% to 52%.

Joblessness particularly affects lone parent families with, in 2006, 47.3% of children living in a jobless, lone parent household. However, this pattern varies significantly across countries. In Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom half or more than half of children in a jobless household lived with a lone parent.

In the EU as a whole the majority of children (52%) have either one or two parents at work and half of children live in a household in which all adults are working full-time. However, in some countries (Ireland, Italy, Malta and Poland) the proportion falls to 40% or less. In Ireland it is 39%.

If one looks at the work intensity of households Ireland is the EU-25 Member State with the highest percentage of children living in households in 2005 where no adult is working (15% compared to an EU-25 average of 6% and in 7 Member States 3% or less) and the second lowest percentage of children in households with all adults working full time (39% compared to an EU-25 average of 52%).

Work intensity

The EU evidence is that having both parents working seems to protect children from the risk of poverty. If both parents are in full-time work the poverty risk for children is 7% on average in the EU. In Ireland the risk is 5%. In a number of countries, including Ireland, the poverty risk of children with one parent working full-time and the other part-time is equally low. On the other hand there are some countries where the risk of poverty of children with one parent working part time is 2 to 4 times higher than the risk when both parents work full-time.

In the EU as a whole if their parent works full-time children of lone-parent families face a relatively low risk of poverty (15% against 19% for all children). This risk falls to between 2% and 15% in Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Ireland (4%), France, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden and the UK. On the other hand children living with a lone parent who works part-time face a much higher risk of poverty – 30% on average in the EU and 36% in Ireland. The same is true for a couple with 3+ children working part-time only where the risk of poverty on average in the EU is 47% (82% when jobless) whereas in Ireland it is 72% (cf 82% for jobless).

The EU evidence is that low-skilled women are over-represented among lone parents and are thus often in poor quality part-time employment, so their children are especially at risk. In the EU on average 16% of all children are in low skilled households whereas this rises to 22% for children in lone parent households. In Ireland 30% of all children are in low skilled households whereas for children in lone parent households this rises to 55%.

In Ireland where there is just one parent working full time in a couple with 3+ children the risk of poverty rate for children is only 20% compared to 33% for the EU-25 . If one parent is working full time and one part time the poverty rate for children in Ireland (11%) is close to the EU average (10%).

In-work poverty

In the EU as a whole there is a significant issue of in-work poverty affecting children. 13% of children living in households at work (i.e. work intensity greater than 0.5) are under the poverty threshold, with a range of 7% or less in Nordic countries up to more than 20% in Poland, Portugal and Spain. In Ireland the figure is relatively low at 10% but still well behind the best performing Member States.

Mothers' employment

The EU research shows that in most of the countries identified among the best relative performers with regards to child poverty mothers' employment rates are above 65% except in Germany and in the best performing are above 80%. Ireland at 59% lags well behind. However, it is also clear that across the EU while the activation of both parents is necessary to alleviate child poverty, this is not sufficient as there are a number of countries with high poverty levels and with both parents working. The level of in-work income and the extent of income transfers in favour of children are also important.

Impact of social transfers

The importance of social transfers in reducing levels of child poverty is very evident from the EU research. With the exceptions of Cyprus and to a lesser extent Slovenia,

in 2005 the EU Member States with the lowest child poverty rates are those who spend most on social benefits (excluding pensions). On average in the EU social transfers other than pensions reduce the risk of poverty for children by 44%. This ranges from by 60% or over in Denmark, Finland and Sweden, between 53% and 57% in Slovenia, Germany, France, Austria, Hungary and the United Kingdom to by 21% or less in Lithuania, Spain and Greece. Ireland is close to the EU average at by 44%.

The research shows that in 2004, benefit spending on family/children (in % of all social benefits), adjusted by the proportion of children aged 0-17 in the total population, was highest in Estonia, Ireland, Hungary and Luxembourg and Ireland is also one of the countries where the orientation of social protection expenditure towards children has increased the most. Ireland is also one of the countries who target the highest proportion (28%) of its spending on families specifically on poor children compared to the EU average (18%).

Childcare costs

The EU research draws attention to the important role played by childcare costs in determining if parents can afford to work. It draws attention to the OECD's 2007 edition of *Benefits and Wages* (OECD 2007, chapter 4), which analyses the impact of childcare costs on the income gain to be expected from taking up work for a lone parent and a second earner in a family with 2 children. This shows that, for low wage earners, childcare costs significantly add to the effective tax burden on gross earnings both for a second earner and a lone parent taking up work. The burden for lone parents is highest in Ireland, Slovakia and the United Kingdom.

Overall outcomes in relation to child poverty risk and its main determinants

In the EC research countries are assessed according to their relative performance in child poverty outcomes into 6 levels (1 being the best and 6 the worst).

In relation to child poverty outcomes Ireland is at level 4.⁶⁰ In relation to children living in jobless households Ireland is at the bottom level, level 6. More positively, in relation to children living in households confronted with in-work poverty Ireland is at level 3. Finally, in relation to the impact of social transfers on child poverty Ireland is at level 3.

The key conclusion of the EU research is that child poverty outcomes result from complex interactions between the key factors of joblessness, in-work poverty and the impact of transfers. The countries that achieve the best results are those that perform well on all fronts, notably by combining strategies aimed at facilitating access to employment, enabling services (childcare etc.) with income supports.

Deprivation

The EU research recognises that an analysis based purely on a relative income based measure of poverty doesn't properly reflect differences in living conditions across countries. Thus it also includes an analysis of deprivation indicators in order

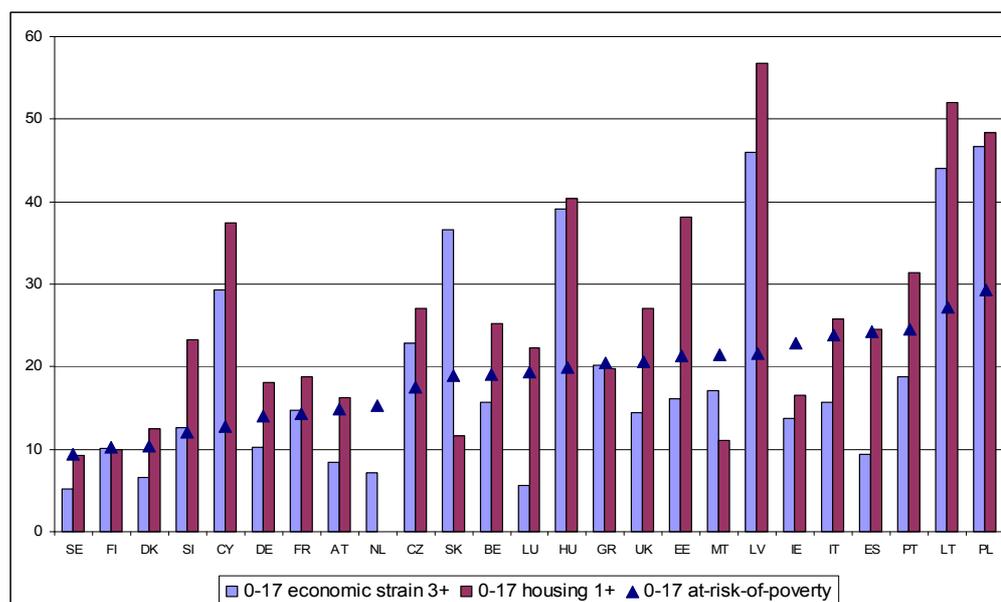
⁶⁰ This is based on a score summarising the relative situation of children in a country with regard to: a) the poverty risk for the overall population in that country, b) the average child poverty risk for the EU as a whole, and c) the average intensity of poverty risk for children (poverty gap) at EU level.

to provide a way of better reflecting the actual living conditions of households.⁶¹ The analysis is built on the basis of the deprivation items currently available in EU-SILC and looks at the situation of children separately through the characteristics of the households in which they live. The EU-SILC items are grouped into 2 dimensions: economic strain and enforced lack of durables and poor housing conditions.

Levels of economic deprivation appear quite low in Denmark, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Sweden, with around 10 and 15% of the population suffering from at least two problems of economic strain. On the other hand the share is much higher – above 40% – in the Czech Republic, Portugal, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia. Ireland comes somewhere in the middle with 17%.

In the strain dimension, children are generally at higher risk than the total population (except in Greece and Latvia), indicating that the presence of children in the household can increase financial constraints. Not only have children higher probability of deprivation, but they often also have higher probability of cumulating these deprivations. Ireland has an overall level of 17% of the population suffering from at least two problems of economic strain. It has, though, a significantly higher level for children of 24%. This puts Ireland (just) into the top third of best performing EU-25 countries. On housing strain Ireland performs slightly better.

Figure A1: At-risk-of-poverty rate (%), and summary measures of deprivation in 3+ items economic strain + durables, and 1+ item of poor housing condition, EU-25, 2005

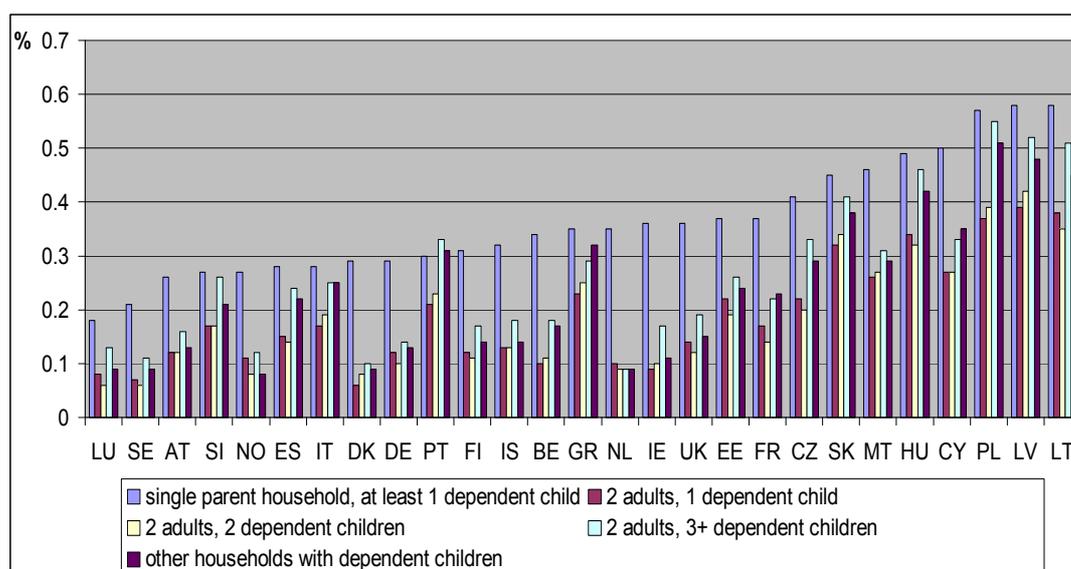


Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC survey year 2005.

⁶¹ Material deprivation measures are built using information on the share of the population that is deprived from a number of goods and services that can be considered as necessary to enjoy a decent standard of living in the country where they live. A number of member states use such measures for monitoring their anti-poverty policies (Ireland, France, Hungary, Poland and the United Kingdom).

The EU research presents a mean deprivation index⁶² in the economic strain dimension that shows clearly that lone parent households are more deprived than other household types in all countries. It is clear that Ireland is one of those countries where the gap is particularly wide. The research also shows that large families suffer from higher deprivation in most countries and again Ireland is notable in this regard (see Figure A2).

Figure A2: Mean deprivation index in economic strain + enforced lack of durables dimension, by household type, SILC 2005



Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC survey year 2005.

Consistent poverty

The EU research also looks at consistent poverty by cumulating the proportion of people facing relative monetary poverty and deprivation (in the economic strain dimension⁶³) (see Table A1 below). For the children population, this indicator ranges from 3% (DK, SE) to 25% (Lithuania, Poland). Ireland's level is 12% which, while putting it well ahead of most new Member States (except Cyprus and Slovenia) only ranks it 11th in the EU-25 and much well behind the three best performing countries where the rate is between 3% and 6%.

⁶² The mean deprivation index as defined in Guio et al. is obtained by averaging the deprivation shares in each dimension.

⁶³ Interestingly the EU research focuses on the economic strain dimension only, as it is considered to be closest to the set of items chosen to construct consistent poverty measures in Ireland.

Table A1: Proportion of the population ‘poor’, lacking at least 2 items in the strain dimension, and suffering from both problems, total population and children

	BE		CZ		DK		DE		EE		IE		GR		ES		FR	
	All	0-17																
Poverty	14.85	19.06	10.36	17.58	11.83	10.44	13.06	14.03	18.32	21.3	19.7	22.82	19.61	20.4	19.74	24.21	12.99	14.34
Strain 2+	21.58	27.2	37.39	40.76	12.64	15.84	18.95	23.6	38.4	38.4	17.12	24.25	42.35	38.72	28.63	29.06	27.27	31.31
Both	8.47	13.28	8.13	13.78	3.68	4.63	6.86	8.09	13.27	15.75	8	11.82	13.06	13.09	9.96	12.31	7.56	9.55

	IT		CY		LV		LT		LU		HU		MT		NL		AT	
	All	0-17																
Poverty	18.97	23.81	16.17	12.82	19.22	21.52	20.54	27.2	13.04	19.33	13.41	19.86	14.89	21.51	10.79	15.29	12.29	14.87
Strain 2+	28.04	31.15	48.63	47.19	71.47	69.45	67.59	66.59	10.42	13.75	57.23	60.48	40.87	46.01	15.41	16.65	18.11	21.83
Both	11.31	15.32	12.79	10.07	17.76	19.56	18.5	24.83	5.21	9.06	10.94	16.8	9.47	13.81	4.09	6.41	5.17	6.81

	PL		PT		SI		SK		FI		SE		UK		IS		NO	
	All	0-17	All	0-17														
Poverty	20.55	29.32	20.33	24.48	12.17	12.07	13.33	18.9	11.71	10.24	9.27	9.39	17.55	20.58	9.65	9.91	11.48	9.34
Strain 2+	65.72	66.3	42.52	44.59	32.13	31	57.51	59.47	20.24	25.26	10.83	13.76	22.51	31.38	20.14	23.87	13.7	17.3
Both	17.8	25.39	13.49	16.08	7.73	7.18	9.37	13.75	5.68	6.09	2.43	3.24	8.01	13.27	3.61	3.98	3.67	4.42

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC survey year 2005

Deprived: lacking at least two of the 5 items in the economic strain dimension; Poor: having an equivalised income below 60% of the national median equivalised income; Consistently poor: being deprived *and* poor.

Educational disadvantage

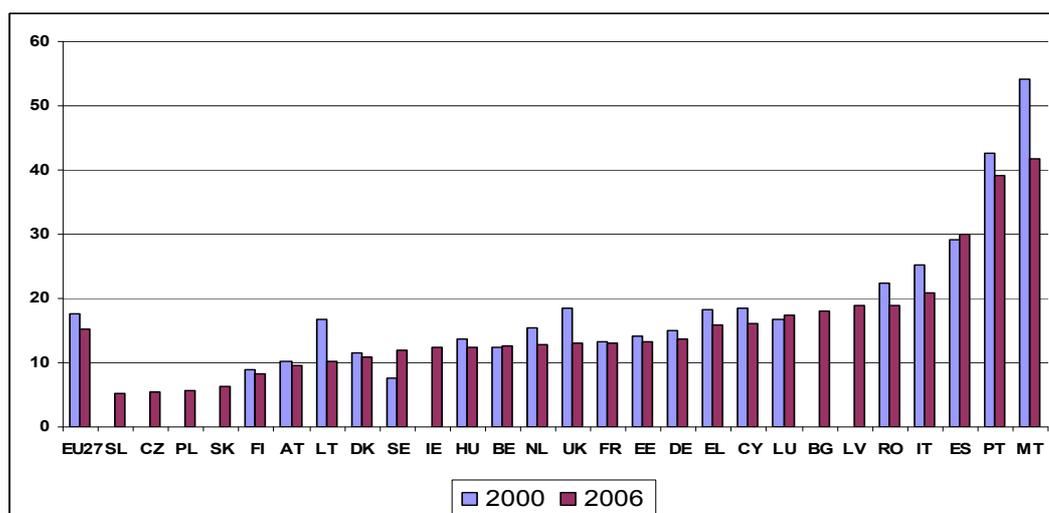
The EU report draws on the recent Commission report on Member States’ ‘progress towards the Lisbon objectives in Education and training – Indicators and benchmarks, 2007’,⁶⁴ and particularly on the chapter on equity in education and training to highlight key comparative data relating to educational disadvantage.

Early school leaving

The report points out that young people who leave school too early and with only lower secondary education are at a disadvantage in the labour market. Their personal and social development is in danger of being curtailed and they are at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion than other young people who continue their education and training. Overall in 2006, 15% of young people aged between 18 and 24 in the EU-27 had left the education system with only lower secondary education and were not in further education and training. However, this rate varies greatly across the EU, from around 5% in Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia to 20% or more in Southern countries. Ireland is one of the middle ranking EU-27 countries at 12% (see Figure A3 below).

⁶⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/progressreport_en.html

Figure A3: Early school leavers, 2000 and 2006 (% of the 18-24 with only lower secondary education and not in education or training)



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey – Quarter 2 results. In DK, LU, IS, NO, EE, LV, LT, CY, MT and SI, the high degree of variation of results over time is partly influenced by a low sample size. CY students living abroad are not taken into account in the calculation of the rate.

Educational performance

The report highlights evidence based on the OECD PISA survey indicators of literacy and achievement in mathematics and draws attention to a number of key factors that influence the pupils' performance and in particular the strong and positive correlation between the parents' own educational attainment and the performance of the 15-year-old pupils in mathematics, reading and science. PISA results can also illustrate the impact that specific family structures can have on the performance of pupils. For instance, the 2000 and 2003 results show that children growing up in lone parent households perform relatively lower than children from other families. In this regard the report particularly highlights Ireland along with Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Other aspects highlighted are the impact of parent's occupational status on pupil's performance and also that pupils from a migrant background perform relatively lower than their peers who were born in the country.

Intergenerational inheritance

The EU report highlights findings from a first analysis of the results from the 2005 EU-SILC module on the intergenerational transmission of disadvantages which is presented in the 2007 Social Situation Report. The EU-SILC module provides strong evidence that coming from a low-educational background represents a major obstacle to achieving a high level of education. This is particularly the case for tertiary education, since people whose fathers have attained tertiary education are more than twice as likely to attain it themselves as people whose fathers had only a low or medium level of education in Germany, Finland and the United Kingdom, and up to nine times as likely in Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. Ireland, at 3.5 times as likely, ranks close to the EU average of 3.6 and is the 11th best performing country. The report points out that these effects are also stronger in the cohorts aged 35–44 and 45–54 than in that aged 25–34, suggesting that the strength of the influence could be diminishing in many countries. Encouragingly this improvement is

particularly evident in Ireland where the ratio is 4.6, 3.6 and 2.1 respectively (compared to 4.4, 3.4 and 2.5 for the EU as a whole).

The report points out that educational underachievement translates into unequal occupational opportunities. In the EU as a whole children of skilled manual workers are up to three times less likely to become managers, professionals or technicians than the children of parents who were in such a job, and are about twice more likely to be employed as low skilled workers themselves, though the scale of these chances differs significantly between countries. In Ireland the ratio is the fourth lowest in the EU. On the other hand the probability for someone from an unskilled manual background becoming a manager, professional or technician is particularly low.

Table A2: Probability of having job as manager, professional or technician for women and men aged 25–65 by occupation of father

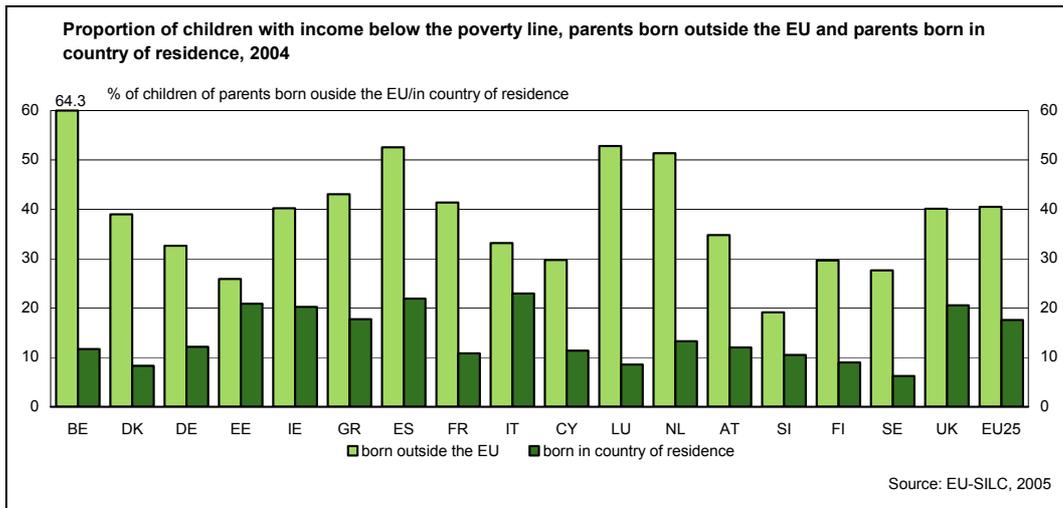
	Main occupation of father						Total	Odd ratio
	No father	Man+Prof +Tech	Clerks	Sales +Serv	Skilled manual	Unskilled manual		
PT	0.22	0.61	0.43	0.38	0.19	0.14	0.25	3.07
PL	0.21	0.63	0.39	0.31	0.28	0.16	0.29	2.71
ES	0.22	0.54	0.41	0.29	0.23	0.15	0.26	2.57
CY	0.18	0.61	0.50	0.36	0.25	0.19	0.29	2.46
HU	0.28	0.63	0.43	0.35	0.28	0.18	0.32	2.41
CZ	0.29	0.62	0.36	0.30	0.28	0.23	0.35	2.25
SI	0.29	0.63	0.38	0.40	0.31	0.18	0.33	2.24
LT	0.23	0.60	0.40	0.39	0.29	0.26	0.32	2.22
LU	0.35	0.67	0.56	0.35	0.30	0.26	0.42	2.12
GR	0.26	0.54	0.47	0.32	0.29	0.20	0.30	2.12
LV	0.23	0.55	0.39	0.34	0.29	0.24	0.31	2.07
IT	0.29	0.61	0.46	0.37	0.31	0.24	0.36	2.06
FR	0.25	0.62	0.49	0.37	0.32	0.23	0.39	2.05
AT	0.27	0.51	0.41	0.27	0.26	0.19	0.30	2.05
EU-25	0.31	0.62	0.50	0.38	0.33	0.23	0.38	1.99
SK	0.32	0.60	0.50	0.36	0.32	0.26	0.37	1.93
BE	0.21	0.57	0.43	0.39	0.28	0.24	0.38	1.93
EE	0.30	0.58	0.38	0.32	0.34	0.27	0.37	1.84
SE	0.34	0.60	0.47	0.54	0.28	0.32	0.39	1.84
DK	-	0.62	0.50	0.45	0.37	0.31	0.44	1.73
FI	0.38	0.65	0.53	0.59	0.41	0.30	0.44	1.70
IE	-	0.52	0.52	0.43	0.34	0.19	0.40	1.66
UK	-	0.61	0.54	0.38	0.30	0.27	0.42	1.62
NL	0.44	0.65	0.56	0.48	0.42	0.40	0.52	1.48
DE	0.41	0.65	0.56	0.50	0.44	0.40	0.51	1.46

Source: EU-SILC, 2005

Migrant children

Using EUI-SILC data in those countries with a significant number of migrant families the EU report shows that in all the countries reviewed, children living in a migrant household (defined as a household where at least 1 parent is born abroad) face a much higher risk of poverty than children whose parents were born in the host country. In most countries the risk of poverty rate they face reaches 30% or more and is two to five times higher than the risk faced by children whose parents were born in the country of residence. In Ireland the risk of poverty rises to 40% of children of parents born outside the EU compared to just over 20% for all children.

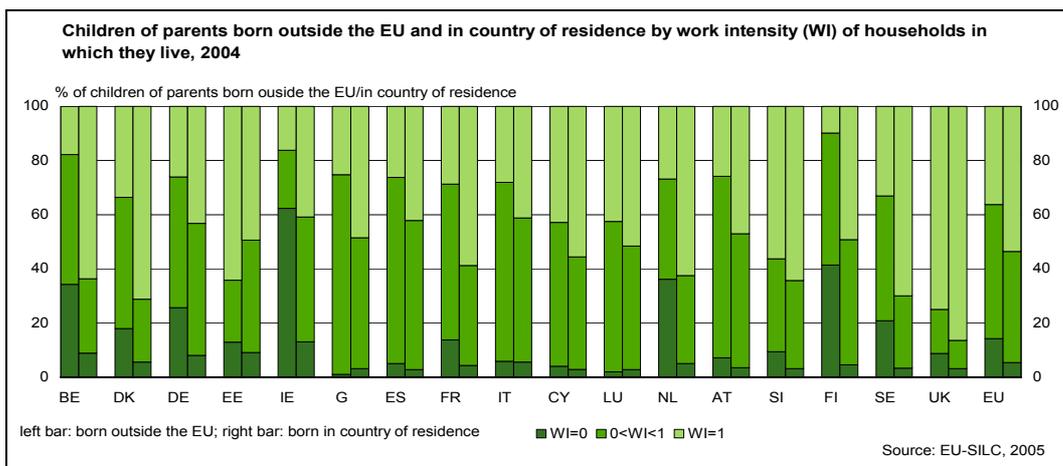
Figure A4



In Ireland 61% of children at risk of poverty whose parents were born outside the EU live in either lone parent or large families (20% in lone parent families and 41% in large families of 2 adults and 3+ children).

In 15 of the 17 Member States in which the number of people born outside the EU is large enough for the data to be meaningful – all except Greece and Luxembourg – the proportion of children living in jobless households was larger for those whose parents were born outside the EU than for those whose parents were born locally. Moreover, in all the countries apart from Estonia, the work intensity of the households in which they lived was less, on average, than those in which children of parents born locally lived. Ireland has by far the highest proportion of children of parents who are born outside the EU living in jobless households (over 60% – 4 to 5 times as high a proportion as for children whose parents were born in Ireland). Also, in Ireland the proportion of children living in migrant households at risk of poverty and who lived in jobless households reached 78%.

Figure A5



Appendix 2 – Key Informants, Meetings and Events

European

In the course of undertaking the European part of this research project the researchers met with a number of key organisations and individuals active in the EU Social Inclusion Process. We are most grateful for their assistance and advice.

Eurochild (Anne Williams)

Euronet (Mieke Schuurman)

European Anti Poverty Network (Fintan Farrell and Sian Jones)

European Commission (Isabelle Engsted-Maquet and Marie-Anne Paraskevas)

Eric Marlier (Centre d'Etudes de Populations, de Pauvreté et de Politiques Socio Economiques / International Network for Studies in echnology (CEPS/INSTEAD), Luxembourg and Chair of SPC Task Force on Child Poverty and Well-Being)

UNICEF Brussels (Margaret Wachenfeld)

Johan Vandenbussche and Muriel Rabau (SPF Sécurité Sociale, Belgium)

Also during the course of the research we attended a number of important European events which focused on the issue of child poverty and social exclusion and which have informed this research. These included:

Eurochild: Policy Forum 2008, Brussels, 19 June 2008.

European Anti Poverty Network: Social Inclusion Review Group Meeting on EU Perspectives on Child Poverty, Brussels, 11 May 2008.

European Foundation for Street Children: workshop on street children in Central and Eastern European Countries, Brussels, 5-6 May 2008.

European Forum on the Rights of the Child: 2nd meeting held in Brussels on 4 March 2008 which discussed the issues of child poverty and social exclusion, with special attention to Roma children.

European Parliament: hearing on Combating Child Poverty in the EU during the Employment and Social Affairs Committee meeting on 2 April 2008.

6th European Round Table Conference on poverty and social exclusion, Ponta Delgada (Azores), 17 October 2007.

7th European Round Table Conference on poverty and social exclusion, Stockholm, Sweden, 15-16 October 2009.

Seminar on Child poverty and well-being in the European Union, European Commission/Applica/Tarki, Brussels, 26 November 2009.

Irish interviews

As part of our assessment of the Irish institutional and policy process we undertook a number of interviews in September 2008 with key actors in the area of child poverty and social exclusion in Ireland. We are most grateful for their assistance and advice.

Fergus Finlay, Barnardos

Sylda Langford and Sinéad Hanafin, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Camille Loftus, One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN)

Bernard McDonald and Sophie Magenis, Office of the Ombudsman for Children

Gerry Mangan, Office for Social Inclusion

Finbarr O'Leary, Children Acts Advisory Board

Jillian Turnhout, Children's Rights Alliance

References

- Barnardos (2006), *School report 2006: Government must do better to make the grade*, Dublin.
- Bohn, I. (2005), *A lobby for children: Final report*, AWO Bezirksverband Ostwestfalen-Lippe e.V., Bielefeld.
- Bradshaw, J. and Bennett, F. (2007), *Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children: A study of national policies*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Bradshaw, J., Hoelscher, P. and Richardson, D. (2007), 'An index of child well-being in the European Union', in *Social Indicators Research*, Volume 80, No 1, pp 133–177.
- Burgess, R.G., Pole, C.J., Evans, K. and Priestley, C. (1994), 'Four studies in one or one study from four? Multi-site case study research', in A. Bryman and R.G. Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, Routledge, London, pp 129–145.
- Callan T., Coleman, K., Nolan, B. and Walsh, J.R. (2006), *Child poverty and child income support: Ireland in a comparative perspective*, ESRI, Dublin.
- Caritas Europa (2004), *Poverty has faces in Europe: The need for family-oriented policies*, 2nd Report on Poverty in Europe, Brussels.
- Central Statistics Office (2004), *Census 2002, Volume 8 – Irish Traveller community*, Dublin.
- Central Statistics Office (2009), *Survey on income and living conditions 2008 (SILC)*, Dublin.
- Children's Rights Alliance (2006a), *From Rhetoric to Rights*, Dublin.
- Children's Rights Alliance (2006b), *Our voices, our realities: A report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child by children living in Ireland*, Dublin.
- Children's Rights Alliance (2009a), *Analysis of the supplementary Budget 2009 and its impact on children*, Dublin.
- Children's Rights Alliance (2009b), *Report card 2009*, Dublin.
- Cocker, C. (2003), *The mental health of children in state care: A European study – final report*, NCH – The Bridge Child Care Development Service, London.
- Combat Poverty Agency (2005), *Policy statement on child poverty*, Dublin.
- Comhairle (2004), *Pre-budget submission: Budget 2005*, Dublin.
- CORI Justice (2009), *Analysis and critique of Budget 2009*, Dublin. Available at: www.corl.ie/justice2/Budget/117-2009/664-budget-2009-2-cori-justice-analysis-and-critique

Council for Employment, Income and Social Cohesion (CERC) (2004), *Fighting Child Poverty*, Report No 4, Paris. Available at:
<http://www.cerc.gouv.fr/rapports/rapport4/rapport4cerc.pdf>

Council of the European Union (2006), *Brussels European Council 23/24 March 2006, Presidency Conclusions*, Brussels. Available at:
www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/89013.pdf

D'Addato, A. (2009), 'Measuring and monitoring: a child-rights perspective', Paper delivered at the December 2009 Paris Peer Review meeting on 'Measuring the impact of active inclusion and other policies to combat poverty and social exclusion', Eurochild, Brussels. Available at:
http://www.eurochild.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/Eurochild_Reports/EUROCHILD_paper_peer_review_France.pdf

Daly, M. (2007), *Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children: A study of national policies*, Brussels, European Commission. Available at:
<http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/network-of-independent-experts/2007/first-semester-2007>

Department of Health and Children (2004), *Analysis of childcare interim dataset*, Dublin.

Dunne, A., Fahey, T., Maitre, B., Nolan, B., Smyth, E. and Whelan, C. (2007), *A Social Portrait of Children in Ireland*, Stationery Office, Dublin.

Edgar, B. (2005), *Policy measures to ensure access to decent housing for migrants and ethnic minorities*, European Commission, Brussels.

Eurochild (2006), *Position paper on the Guidelines for Preparing National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, Brussels.

Eurochild (2007), *Fact sheet on child poverty and social exclusion in the EU*, Brussels.

Eurochild (2008), Seminar Report, *Members' Exchange Seminar on Child and Youth Participation*, Brussels: Eurochild. Available at:
[http://www.eurochild.org/index.php?id=394&L=0&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=287&tx_ttnews\[js\]=1245799660&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=33&cHash=1a86c651f8](http://www.eurochild.org/index.php?id=394&L=0&tx_ttnews[backPid]=287&tx_ttnews[js]=1245799660&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=33&cHash=1a86c651f8)

Eurochild (2009a), *Ending child poverty within the EU? A review of the 2008–2010 National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, Brussels.

European Anti-Poverty Network (2006), *Report of the 5th European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty*, Brussels.

European Anti-Poverty Network (2007), EAPN explainer: Poverty and inequality in the EU, Brussels.

European Anti-Poverty Network (2009), *Small steps big changes: Building participation of people experiencing poverty*, Brussels.

European Cities Against Child Poverty (2009), *Improving life chances for children in poverty: lessons from across Europe*, Brussels. Available at:
<http://www.againstchildpoverty.com/newsandevents.php>

European Commission (2002), *Joint Report on Social Inclusion 2002*, Brussels.

European Commission (2004a), *Joint Report on Social Inclusion 2004*, Brussels.

European Commission (2004b), *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Brussels.

European Commission (2004c), *Social Inclusion in the New Member States: a synthesis of the Joint Memoranda on Social Inclusion*, Brussels.

European Commission (2005a), *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2005*, Brussels.

European Commission (2005b), *Report on Social Inclusion 2005: An analysis of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (2004–2006) submitted by the 10 New Member States*, Brussels.

European Commission (2006a), *Communication from the Commission: Towards an EU strategy on the rights of the child*, COM (2006), 367 final, July, Brussels.

European Commission (2006b), *Communication on efficiency and equity in European education and training systems* {SEC(2006)1096}, Brussels.

European Commission (2006), *Social Inclusion in Europe 2006*, Brussels.

European Commission (2007a), *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007*, Brussels

European Commission (2007b), *Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market* COM(2007)0620 final, Brussels.

European Commission (2008a), *Commission Staff Working Document, Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, SEC(2008)91, Brussels.

European Commission (2008b), *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008*, Brussels.

European Commission (2008c), *A renewed commitment to social Europe: Reinforcing the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, COM(2008)418 final, Brussels.

European Commission (2008d), *Renewed social agenda: Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st century Europe*, Brussels.

European Commission (2009), *Consultation on the Future 'EU 2020' Strategy*, Commission Working Document COM(2009)647 final, Brussels.

European Parliament (2009), *Report on promoting social inclusion and combating poverty, including child poverty, in the EU*, Brussels, October.

European Social Network (2005), *Promoting inclusion for unaccompanied young asylum seekers and immigrants: a duty of justice and care*, Brighton.

European Social Network (2007), *Child poverty and welfare in Europe: the message from Social Services*, Brighton.

European Social Network (2010), *Breaking the cycle of deprivation*, Brighton.

Eurostat (2010), *Combating poverty and social exclusion: A statistical portrait of the European Union*, Luxembourg.

Farrell, C., McAvoy, H., Wilde, J. and Combat Poverty Agency (2008), *Tackling health inequalities: An all-Ireland approach to social determinants*. Combat Poverty Agency / Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Dublin.

FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless) (2007), *Child homelessness in Europe: An overview of emerging trends*, Brussels.

Fernandes, R. (2007), *A child rights approach to child poverty*, Eurochild, Brussels.

Frazer, H. (2005), 'Setting the scene Europe-wide: The challenge of poverty and social exclusion', *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 40, No 4 (October), pp 371–384.

Frazer, H. (2006), *Lessons learned on child poverty: Why and how to tackle child poverty*, UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS/Baltics, Geneva.

Frazer, H (2008), *Yes to an Active Inclusion based on rights! Promoting EAPN Principles on Active Inclusion*, Report of EAPN seminar on Active Inclusion held in Paris on 13 June 2008, EAPN, Brussels. Available at: http://www.eapn.ie/documents/4435_EAPN%20%28Europe%29%20seminar%20report%20on%20active%20inclusion%20-%20June%202009.pdf

Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (2007), *Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children in the EU: Key lessons*, European Commission, Brussels.

Frazer, H. and Marlier, E. (2008), *'Feeding in' and 'feeding out': The extent of synergies between growth and jobs policies and social inclusion policies across the EU: Key lessons*, European Commission, Brussels.

Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) (2009), *Developing Indicators for the Protection, Respect and Promotion of the Rights of the Child in the European Union*, Vienna: FRA. Available at: http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/products/publications_reports/publicationsofchild-summary_en.htm

Gannon, B. and Nolan, B. (2005), *Disability and social Inclusion in Ireland*, National Disability Authority, Dublin.

Government of Ireland (2000), *The National Children's Strategy: Our Children – Their Lives*, Dublin.

Government of Ireland (2006a), *Government Discussion Paper: Proposals for supporting lone parents*, Family Affairs Unit, Department of Social and Family Affairs, Dublin.

- Government of Ireland (2006b), *Towards 2016: Ten-Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006–2015*, Dublin.
- Government of Ireland (2007a), *The National Development Plan 2007–2013: Transforming Ireland — A Better Quality of Life for All*, Dublin.
- Government of Ireland (2007b), *Programme for Government 2007–2012*, Dublin.
- Halleröd, B. (2007), *Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children: A study of national policies in Sweden*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Hanafin, S. and Brooks, A-M. (2005), *Report on the development of a national set of child well-being indicators in Ireland*, Office of the Minister for Children, Dublin.
- Hoelscher, P. (2004), *A thematic study using transnational comparisons to analyse and identify what combination of policy responses are most successful in preventing and reducing high levels of child poverty*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Home Start International (2002), *Tackling social exclusion in families with young children: Final report*, London.
- Kilkelly, U. (2007), *Barriers to the realisation of children's rights in Ireland*, Ombudsman for Children's Office, Dublin.
- Lace, T. (2007), *Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children: A study of national policies (Latvia)*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Layte, R., Maître, B., Nolan, B. and Whelan, C.T. (2006), *Day in, day out: Understanding the dynamics of child poverty*, Institute of Public Administration / Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin.
- Marlier, E., Atkinson, A., Cantillon, B. and Nolan, B. (2007), *The EU and social inclusion: Facing the challenges*, Policy Press, Bristol.
- Murphy, M. (2005), *Review of implementation of Traveller Health A National Strategy 2002–2005*, Department of Health and Children, Dublin.
- National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) (2007), *Ireland's child income supports: The case for a new form of targeting*, Research Series, No. 6, Dublin.
- Nederland, T., Mak, J., Stavenuiter, M., Swinnen, H. (2007), *Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children: A study of national policies (The Netherlands)*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Nicaise, I. and Morissens, A. (2007), *Trends, recent developments, 'Feeding in' and 'Feeding out': A study of national policies*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Nolan, B. and Maitre, B. (2009), *A Social Portrait of Communities in Ireland*, Office for Social Inclusion, Dublin.
- OECD (2001), *Starting strong: Early childhood education and care*, Paris.
- OECD (2006), *Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care*, Paris.

- OECD (2007), *Benefits and Wages – OECD indicators*. OECD, Paris.
- OECD (2008), *Education at a glance report: OECD indicators*, Paris.
- Office of the Minister for Children (2007a), *The agenda for children's services: A policy handbook*, Stationery Office, Dublin.
- Office of the Minister for Children (2007b), *The agenda for children's services: Reflective questions for front-line service managers and practitioners*, Stationery Office, Dublin.
- Office of the Minister for Children (2007c), *The agenda for children's services: Reflective questions for HSE senior managers*, Stationery Office, Dublin.
- Office of the Minister for Children (2007d), *The agenda for children's services: Reflective questions for policy-makers*, Stationery Office, Dublin.
- Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (2008), *State of the nation's children: Ireland 2008*, Stationery Office, Dublin.
- Office for Social Inclusion (2007), *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016*, Dublin.
- Office for Social Inclusion (2008), *National report for Ireland on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, 2008–2010*, Dublin.
- One Family (2008), *Lone parents and employment: What are the real issues?* Dublin.
- O'Kelly, K. and Litewska, I. (2006), *Better policies, better outcomes: Promoting mainstreaming social inclusion*, Combat Poverty Agency, Dublin.
- Portuguese Presidency of the EU (2007), *Key messages drawn by the Presidency after consultation with the European Commission: VI European Round Table on poverty and social exclusion*, Ponta Degada (Azores), 17 October 2007, as presented to the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting in Brussels on 30 November 2007.
- Ruxton, S. and Bennett, F. (2002), *Including Children? Developing a coherent approach to child poverty and social exclusion across Europe*, Brussels, Euronet,
- Save the Children Greece (2000), *Promoting the social inclusion of Roma populations*, ASOUN MAN project, Athens, Save the Children Fund.
- Social Protection Committee (2006a), *Guidelines for preparing National Reports on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Social Protection Committee (2006b), *Portfolio of overarching indicators and streamlined social inclusion, pensions and health portfolios*, European Commission, Brussels.
- Social Protection Committee (2008a), *Child poverty and well-being in the EU: current status and way forward*, European Commission, Brussels.

Social Protection Committee (2008b), *Guidance note for preparing National Strategy Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2008–2010*, European Commission, Brussels.

Spyrou, S., Thoma, N., Antoniou, L., Agathokleous, G., Taylor, F., Cohen, S., Crawford, K., Giullari, S., Walker, J., Mouriki, A., Michailidou M. and Gazon, E. (2007), *Integrating children's perspectives in policy making to combat poverty and social exclusion experienced by single parent families. Final report on the implementation of the action*. Cyprus European University Place, Nicosia. Available at: <http://www.casca.org.cy/UserFiles/File/very%20final%20report,%20TOC.pdf>

Sweeney, J. (2002), *Ending child poverty in rich countries: What works?*, Children's Rights Alliance, Dublin.

TARKI (2010), *Child poverty and child well-being in the European Union*. Report prepared for the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (Unite E.2) of the European Commission, Budapest. Available at: <http://www.tarki.hu/en/research/childpoverty/index.html>

Trifiletti, R. (2007), *Study on poverty and social exclusion among lone parent households*, European Commission, Brussels.

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006), *Concluding Observations: Ireland*, 29 September 2006, CRC/C/IRL/CO/2. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45c30bd80.html>

UNICEF (2007), *Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries*, Innocenti Report Card No 7, Florence.

UNICEF (2008), *A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries*, Innocenti Report Card No 8, Florence.

UK EU Presidency (2005), *Event summary document*, European Round Table Conference, UK Government, London.

Walther, A. and Pohl, A. (2006), *Thematic study on policy measures concerning disadvantaged youth*, European Commission, Brussels.

Williams, A. (2003), *Families under stress: Supporting services in Europe*, EFCW, Brussels.

Williams, J., Greene, S., Doyle, E., Harris, E., Layte, R., McCoy, S., McCrory, C., Murray, A., Nixon, E., O'Dowd, T., O'Moore, M., Quail, A., Smyth, E., Swords, L. and Thornton, M. (2009), *Growing up in Ireland, National Longitudinal Study of Children: The lives of 9-year-olds*, Stationery Office, Dublin.

Woods, R., Dobbs, L., Gordon, C., Moore, C. and Simpson, G. (2005), *Report of a thematic study using transnational comparisons to analyse and identify cultural policies and programmes that contribute to preventing and reducing poverty and social exclusion*, European Commission, Brussels.